

154 Unbecoming War

## **Unbecoming War: Becoming Witness and Scribe**

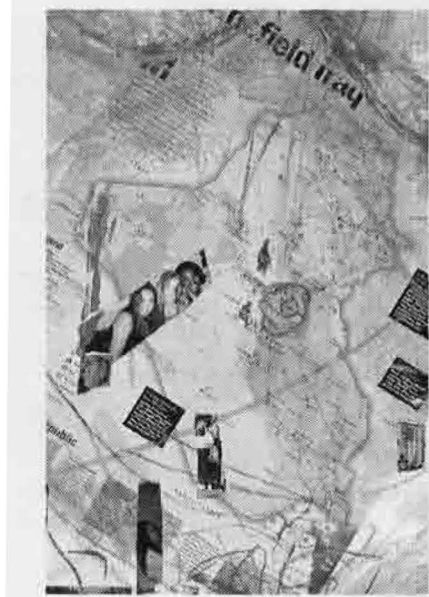
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**Debra Smith-Shank**





Wargoddess: Shock & Awe



War has its own aesthetic.

Invasion of Iraq was in the air. The words "Shock" and "Awe" were on the tongues of politicians, radio announcers, and people in the street were starting to take sides.

Anger and fear, shock and awe competed for my attention.

I agreed to make art for a group fundraising event at the NIU Gallery on West Superior Street in Chicago. Artists made their art during the day, and in the evening it was auctioned. We brought our own supplies to use on the paper the Galley provided; very good paper that could be cut to any size. My artwork needed to be larger than life.

Anger and fear competed with ideas for my art project. I gathered objects that symbolize memory. I collected pictures of my close and extended family, as I thought about the families in Iraq: The families that were facing the aesthetic of war.

Shock and awe competed with mourning which has its own aesthetic.

As I drew, cut, pasted, and painted, I mourned for my close family; my extended family; and family I never knew. Anger and fear competed with the tears I cried for all the mothers and daughters and sisters who never asked to be party to a terrorist act.

My artwork, called *Wargoddess: Shock&Awe*, positions me as a Witness and a Scribe.

I cut pictures of my family into small pieces and pasted these people I love without reservation around the goddess. I wrote and pasted words. I pasted the map of Iraq on her stomach and made

Baghdad her belly button. As I worked, I wondered whose side god[dess] is on and why anyone could possibly think that s/he took sides.

I wasn't satisfied, even with the last pasted image of my brother-in-law, Richard. [Richard looks like he might be part of the Taliban, but he's as American as apple pie.]

The fear is gone. The anger, rage, and passion painted my hands as red as fresh blood and I put my own handprints on this war.

The blood is on my hands. My family is dying and I am mourning and I am witness and scribe to this awful war. I have un-become an impartial observer of an event taking place thousands of miles away. I have brought the war home with me and it itches like the plague it is.

She was an object of conversation, but nobody bought my goddess. I wasn't surprised.

