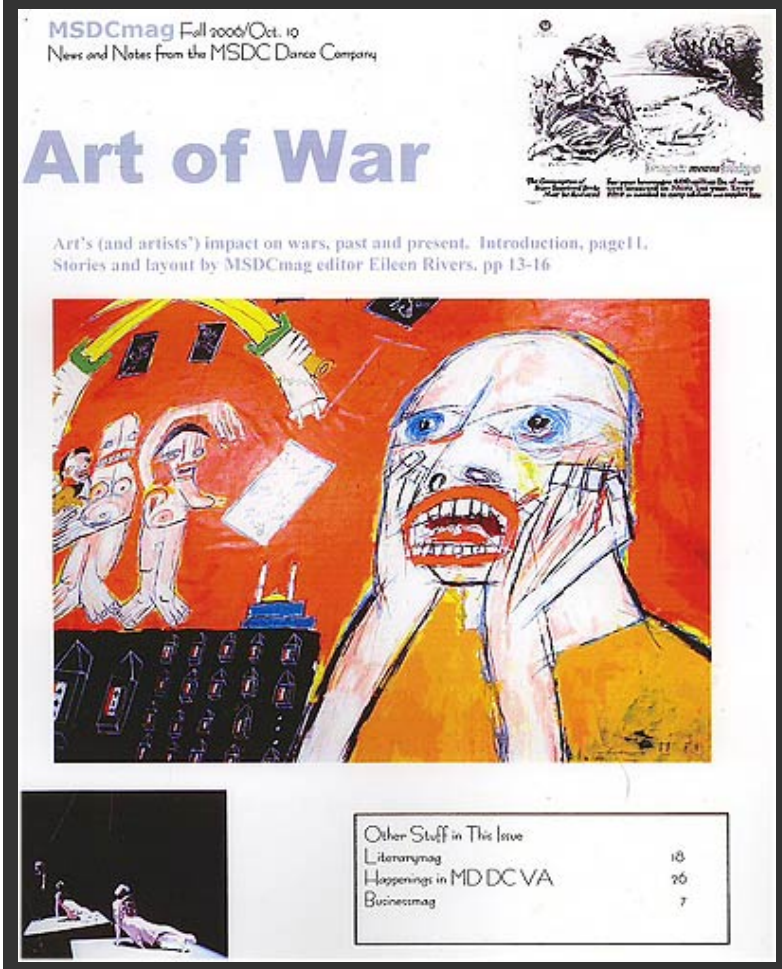
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Sesow in MSDC magazine

FALL 2006 edition
"Art of War"
2006



Modern War Images

The studio apartment on the sixth floor of an old building in the middle of D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood looks like an overused canvas. Red, yellow, blue and black slashes of acrylic and oil paint cover the main wall above artist Matt Sesow's table–relics from hours, sometimes days, spent creating works on canvases that rest against its surface.

The floor below is covered with scuff marks and black paint.

And on the far wall, above his computer and in front of a window that overlooks D.C. highrises, is a print of Sesow's "Collateral Damage," a five-foot-long commentary on the war in Iraq.

In the foreground is a startled onlooker, behind him are dismembered hands, carrying swords. Amputees stand in the stark red background with hundreds of coffins below them. The coffins are draped with Iraqi flags.

Sesow doesn't paint about war, he said, to be popular. He intention is to start a dialogue.

"There's not much about war being done because war isn't popular," Sesow said sitting in his studio apartment on a Wednesday afternoon. "I'm not afraid to put it out there. I'm not trying to be popular."

"Damage" was one of dozens of Sesow paintings exhibited at D.C.'s Studio One Eight in 2003. He was among three artists (Dana Ellyn and James Coleman also exhibited war-related pieces) included in the show, one of the city's few about the current conflict.

Since 2003, Sesow, 39, has painted hundreds of works about Iraq.

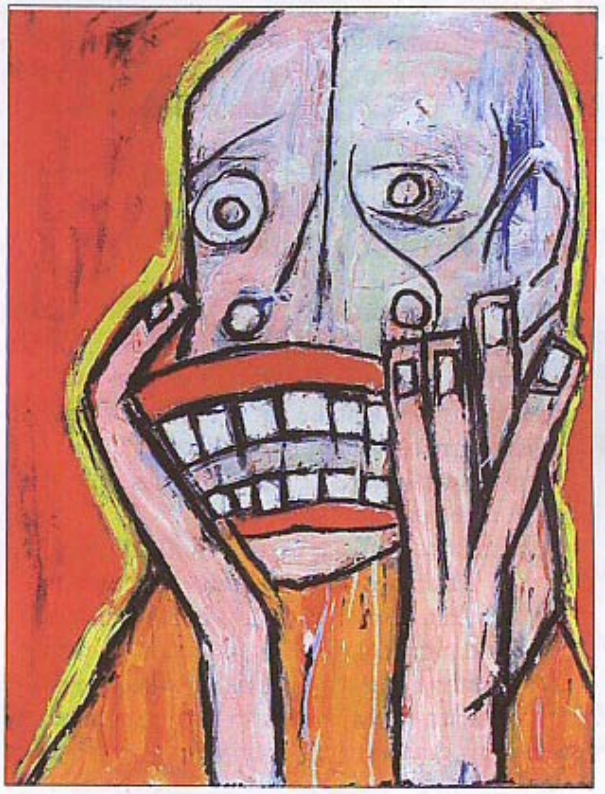
The war paintings, like all of his works, feature amputees, a condition to which Sesow can relate (he lost his left hand in a plane accident when he was 8).



The work gives Sesow a political, editorial and personal voice.

He created "Shock and Awe, 2006," above right, after reading a July 2 Washington Post article about bombings at a Baghdad market. "No Way Out," left, a mixed-media work on chipboard, depicts a struggle some might say epitomizes the political climate of indecision in Iraq.

Sesow is a self-described news hound. He reads several print and online newspapers daily and watches the BBC and Middle Eastern news networks. Hot-button issues are inspiration for his work.



The former IBM computer programer, and "self-teaching" artist, began painting full time about 10 years ago. He left the computer industry in search of a more intellectually and artistically challenging life.

"I wasn't sure this was something I could do in the beginning," Sesow said. "Everyone has 15 good paintings in them. The key is to keep going past that and challenge yourself."

Works like "Damage" he said, make the risk of leaving a steady job worth it.

"It goes beyond the headlines," Sesow said.

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