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NYC GALLERY EXHIBITION

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Lyons Wier • Ortt Gallery New York Presents:

## Mary Henderson

*Forces*

- Artist's Reception: Friday, October 10th, 6-9PM
- Exhibition Dates: October 10th – November 8th, 2008
- Gallery Hours: Tues. - Sat. 11-7, Sun. 12-6.
- Gallery Address: 175 Seventh Ave, (NE corner 20th St. & 7th Ave.)
- Nearest Subway: C, E to 23rd St., or I, 9 to 23rd St.

Lyons Wier • Ortt Gallery, New York is pleased to announce *Forces*, Mary Henderson's second New York solo exhibition at Lyons Wier • Ortt Gallery on view from October 10th – November 8th, 2008.

Mary Henderson's latest exhibition, *Forces*, continues the artist's hyper-real painting style that documents a particular American subculture or experience. In her previous exhibition, *Right Clique*, Ms. Henderson gathered inspiration from photo-sharing websites that celebrated rite-of-passage images of the elite prep-school experience. As a participant in this world, she was able to distill her commentary to a moment of realization within the context of her subjects, creating images that were captivating yet confounding.

With *Forces*, Henderson continues to draw from personal experience through her brother, a Commander in the U.S. Navy, who served in Iraq from February to August 2007. During his deployment, she sought information about her brother by visiting public web portals where service members posted information and images about the war as well as their day-to-day activities.



*In Iraq, 2008 oil on panel 11" x 14"*

During this time, Henderson became fascinated with images that depicted soldiers in uniform but in non-combat settings. She wanted to zero in on moments of 'down time', moments that seemed suffused with an odd combination of boredom, bravado, and anxiety. Her hope while rendering these images as paintings was to sharpen the complexities of their emotional tone, to capture their poignancy, and create something iconic and remote.

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Henderson's process remains largely the same: she re-crops and refocuses images sourced from photo-sharing websites and then paints from the altered digital image. Through this transformative act of painting, the image is distilled and changed into something more archetypal: it ceases to be simply about a particular person or captured fleeting moment, and becomes instead something more public, permanent, and aesthetically pertinent.

The artist cites inspiration from neoclassical artists such as Ingres and David, specifically from works depicting events and personalities of the French Revolutionary and early Napoleonic period. These painters elevated the status of events occurring around them as 'world history' – a task accomplished by reaching back to the visual tropes of Greco-Roman antiquity. The result was painting that was simultaneously about and beyond their historical moment.



*Division*, 2008 oil on panel 12" x 16"

Mary Henderson's work, in focusing on our own wars of 'idealism', attempts something similar: to render a contemporary experience as history by taking images from their original digital context and re-presenting them in a medium associated with the past -- painting. By referencing some of the visual language of French neoclassicism, particularly compressed palettes and strongly defined linear forms, Henderson evokes some of the luster and stillness that gave those images their timeless quality. The effect is that her paintings feel very contemporary in their vagueness.



*Sleeping*, 2008 oil on panel 16" x 20"

However, her ultimate goal in making contemporary history painting differs from those of artists like David. Whereas David was interested in imbuing the famous figures of his age with historical grandiosity, Henderson's subjects appear to be more modest and ambivalent. She focuses on ordinary people who find themselves caught up in our current historical moment (the Iraq war), and on their more inward and profound experiences.

Henderson wants her work to feel like historical portraiture and yet appear as candid snapshots, more reflective of the way we experience history in the digital age, where the distinction between

private and public experience has become increasingly blurred. Her paintings are neither a celebration nor a condemnation of their subjects. Rather, they are an attempt to explore a particular way of seeing and experiencing such a significant historical event and, in doing so, finding the monumental in the mundane.

Mary Henderson received her BA in Fine Arts in 1995 from Amherst College in Amherst, MA, and her MFA in Painting in 2001 from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA, where she currently lives and works.