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Changing spaces, but not goals

Three local outlets try some reinventions

By Cate McQuaid
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Roles, war, and insight

From online games and virtual communities to historic reenactment, role play is more and more common. The US military employs it for training procedures, and photographer Claire Beckett has visited Marine and Army training camps in the Mojave Desert to photograph some of the participants. Her strangely disconcerting but classically beautiful color photos are on view at Carroll and Sons.

The sets, such as the plywood and plastic-looking mosque in "Jabal Village Mosque, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA 2008," resemble playhouses. Military and civilian participants make up their own characters and throw together their own costumes. Many of them are pale skinned and blue-eyed, and wrapped in headscarves, which makes for a jarring collision of stereotypes.

Army Specialist Gary McCorkle, playing, according to the piece's long, expository title, "Jibril Ihsan Hamal, a key member of the leading terrorist group in town," wrapped himself in white and knelt in front of a plywood box, where he toyed with the wires in a fake IED. The dramatic light falling upon him, the darkened backdrop, and his stance and costume all echo Renaissance renderings of some of Christianity's most cherished stories.

Then there's civilian Krista Galyean, who, according to gallery owner Joseph Carroll, was born without a right arm. She's in fatigues, playing a Marine injured in a blast. The light pours in from one side, modeling her like a Vermeer maiden. She



At a training camp, Army Specialist Gary McCorkle role-playing a terrorist in photographer Claire Beckett's exhibit "You Are . . ." at Carroll and Sons.

stands before a plywood wall, gazing calmly into the camera. Yet her arm appears to have just been blown off, the stump bloody.

The earnest poses here blur the line between the subjects' fictive roles and their real selves. The result is a brew of self and projected other, an unnerving amalgamation that may offer up more truth than we know about who these people are and how they see the world.

CLAIRE BECKETT: You Are . . .

At: Carroll and Sons, 450 Harrison Ave., through March 26. 617-482-2477, www.carrollandsons.net

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