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# 'Always Lost' exhibit ponders the cost of war

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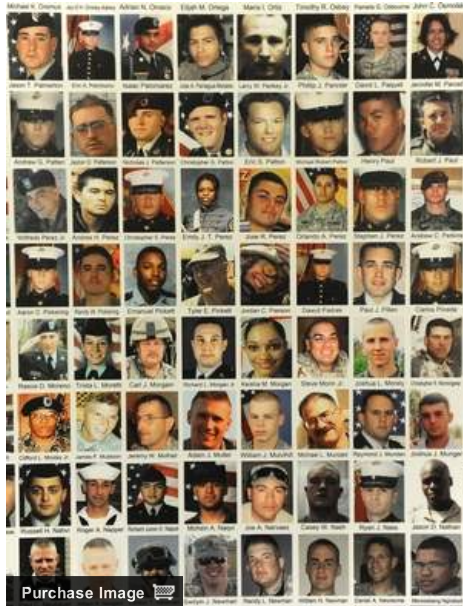
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The eyes haunt.

Almost 5,000 pairs of eyes fill an alcove at the Whittemore Gallery in the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center on the University of Nevada, Reno campus as part of the "Always Lost: A Meditation on War" exhibit.

They are military men and women killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars since Sept. 11, 2001. The 26 panels of faces are called the Wall of the Dead.

Kevin Burns ties the photos that stare at him in his sleep to a song by the Guess Who that became popular during the Vietnam War, "These Eyes."

*"These eyes cry every night for you.*

*These arms long to hold you again."*

U.S. military personnel who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan since Sept. 11, 2001 can be seen in an exhibit titled, "Always Lost: A Meditation on War" at the Whittemore Gallery at UNR. / Liz Margerum/RGJ

Written by **Geralda Miller** [gmiller@rgj.com](mailto:gmiller@rgj.com)

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The retired major in the U.S. Marines and English professor at Western Nevada College in Carson City was one of the approximately 40 students enrolled in Professor Marilee Swirczek's creative writing class in 2008. The class project was to personalize Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom through poetry and prose.

Words were not enough, so Burns coordinated collecting a photograph of every military person killed in the wars to include in a photographic display.

"We wanted to be able to show in a very stark way what this war has cost us," he said. "I wanted to make sure that we could see their eyes."

The exhibit's title refers to a quote by Gertrude Stein: "War is never fatal but always lost. Always lost."



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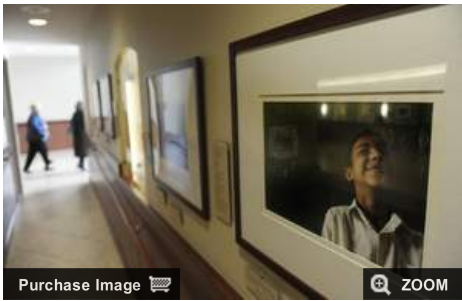
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PHOTO GALLERIES



Photos, poems and prose are on display at the "Always Lost: A Meditation on War" exhibit at the Whittemore Gallery at UNR. / Liz Margerum/RGJ

**IF YOU GO**

"Always Lost: A Meditation on War" is on display at the Whittemore Gallery in the

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"These people are always lost to us, and we'll never have them back," Burns said.

Purposely, the images randomly were arranged on the wall.

The men and women didn't die in alphabetical order.

"One of the functions of art is to make us aware of, contemplate things that we would not have been conscious of before," Swirczek said. "The least we can do as Americans is to know about the dead."

**A high price**

Swirczek's creative writing class was hesitant at first to take on the project.

"To devote your writing life to something so dark was something huge," she said.

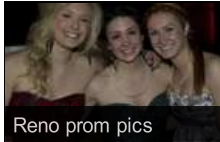
But for two semesters, the students wrote poetry and short prose and then placed it on display in spring 2009. Others from Northern Nevada's literary community were invited to submit work.

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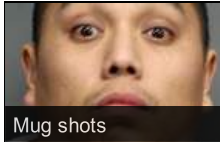
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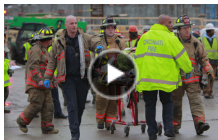
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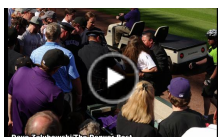
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
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