

There used to be the Universal Soldier. He really was to blame – so we were told. In Donovan's 1965 rendition of Buffy Sainte-Marie's song 'He's the one who gives his body as a weapon of the war and without him all this killing can't go on.' So we thought. And so we behaved. We being the people who clutched 'Out Now' and 'Bring Troops Home' banners on Moratorium Marches. Who had sons, brothers and mates who were 'Regulars' or struck it lucky with a Birth Day Ballot to become a 'Nasho' – all gone north to confront the communist peril in Vietnam. And when it was all over many of these same young Australians slipped out of uniform and out of sight perhaps to pick up on where they were about to start. History tells us that it was never going to be easy, this 'settling back' into civilian life. But a war that was never further away than a plane flight out of Sydney, a war that 'we' lost, began to slip from public memory. But not for those who'd experienced it and those at home and in the community who'd been drawn into its orbit and legacy of trauma and memories. And so the grand narrative of who won or lost breaks down into individual stories – and faces.

In a contemporary world the face of the individual soldier is beginning to be erased. Masks and helmets now provide protection and anonymity. Hollywood's Robot Cops and Iron Men have anticipated the adoption of the carapace as the signifier of the universal soldier, who isn't really to blame – just following orders relayed through wireless technologies. But until a bio-cybernetic era provides the politicians and generals with a truly depersonalized fighting creature - when the mask or helmet is removed, sentient, feeling individuals will continue to emerge and at some point go home and pick up on where they were about to start or left off. Andrea Malone's 'soldiers' have been doing this picking up business for almost a lifetime. In the context of this exhibition it is not possible to see their portraits as faces from the crowd. Through the portraitist's craft there is a semblance of eyes looking at and through the viewer. At such close quarters it seems impossible that these men do not lock eyes with us. They could be on the other side of a one-way mirror lost in their own thoughts but close enough for their faces to assume the character of a landscape, shaped by forces and events that can only be imagined. This kind of intense encounter is portrait painting's equivalent of crossing the wire where a false brush mark or gratuitous detail can upset the balance of trust between artist and subject and between one person and another.

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