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CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

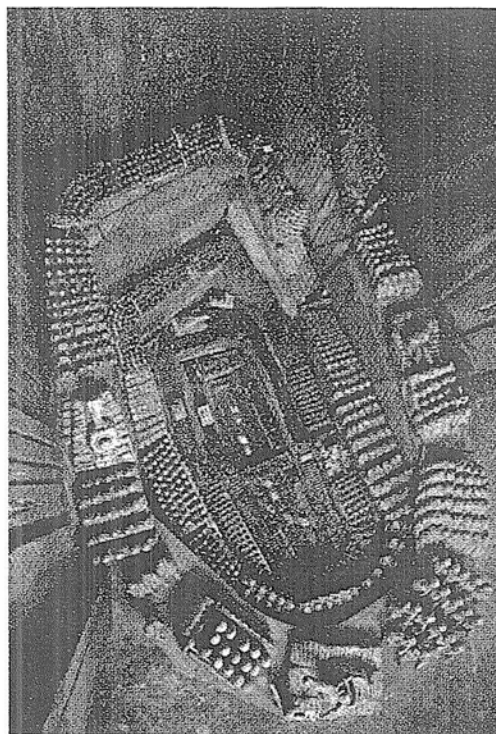
REVIEWS: *Massachusetts*

HARRIET DIAMOND: THE PIT

Canal Gallery • Holyoke, MA • www.thecanalgallery.com • September 7–November 7, 2010

Sometimes an artwork's subject is so important or compelling that it's impossible to separate the idea from its execution. Such is the case with Harriet Diamond's provocative ceramic installation, *The Pit*. Diamond tackles the ruins of war, handling this difficult subject with compassion, competency, and grace.

At the center of this exhibition stands *The Pit*, a tilted oblong sculptural installation (think giant stadium), depicting a marching army. This piece characterizes war as an endless military-style parade complete with rows of soldiers (some carrying American flags), tanks, and missiles. Although the work is a static sculpture, there is motion within the march's continuous, concentric circles that spiral into a darkened pit. Seeing war depicted in this way, inescapable, perpetual, without a defined beginning or end, filled this viewer with emotion—so many missiles being transported, so many tanks



Harriet Diamond, *The Pit*, 2009, painted fire clay, wood, Styrofoam, mixed media, 6½ x 6 x 5½'.

rolling off to fight, and so many soldiers marching off ready to sacrifice their lives.

Diamond's art can't be dismissed as just a political statement. There is no overt political message, no gratuitous gore or clumsy rhetoric. Instead, the sculptural imagery exudes a surprising lightness that is admirably restrained. Diamond's style is loose and even soft with muted hues to the paint. The images aren't visually abrasive, so the work allows viewers to drop their guard, just a little. It's this pseudo-realism and near-playful quality that harkens clay's malleability and tempers the figures. The piece is at once engaging and disturbing, inviting the eye to linger. With shining triangular shrapnel (pleated pieces from aluminum pie pans) whizzing above, this impressive work manages with its sheer power to surprise and captivate.

—Sarah Buttenwieser