

'Generation of War' taps deeply into Vietnam vet's past psyche

BREE PETERSON

Students had the opportunity on Feb. 10 to experience the art of filmmaking, the light of community and the terror of war. "A Generation of War," a collaboration between director Louise Salter, artist Johan Andersson, and activist veteran Ted Haler, was screened in CAA-112.

The journey of this film's production began when Cheryl Montelle, founder of the Mil-Tree Foundation, interviewed veteran and writer Jim Morrison. Morrison went to war for the experience. When asked if he would return to war, he said "yes" without hesitation. This sparked interest for Montelle, so she referred Morrison to Ted Haler.

Haler is a 66-year old, easygoing, multi-talented active speaker for veteran's rights. He is staunchly anti-war. He told the room that if the government were to walk in and demand that those bearing witness be sent to war, he would "break your fucking legs. You don't need to know what I know."

He says that he's never left the battlefield. "I was told there's (sic) a man who would go back to war. I had to speak out. I parted my skin and opened my chest and bared it all."

A stranger referred Haler to director Salter. Salter is one of the founders of The Laboratory, which is an International Arts Collective. She is also the creative director of the Laboratory Arts Collective Magazine. She became interested in Haler's experience, and at first did not set out to create this project.

After listening to Haler's emotionally gripping memories, she decided to capture what she saw. She wanted to film Haler with the intention of having a rebuttal to Morrison's views.

"We were so astonished and moved when we found about what happened to Ted and his friends," she said.

Haler revealed things to her that he had never spoken about to anyone. Thus their bond was tightly formed.

They were both then connected to the young influential artist, Johan Andersson. He has been named one of Britain's top 100 most influential, creative minds by TimeOut.com. He has also been featured on widely-popular Ted Talk.

As the blinds closed, the collaborators

took a seat in the front row. The room quieted to a thundering silence as the viewers waited anxiously. The music began, and Haler appeared on screen in black and white. He began recounting his tour. The screen then changed to Andersson and his blank canvass, sitting in front of Haler.

The premise of the film was that Andersson painted Haler while listening to his story to capture the fleeting emotions. Andersson began with Haler's eyes, because he believed that the eyes are the most expressive and central features of the face. Haler told his story as a voiceover. The painting was time lapsed. As the artist filled out the mouth, the sounds of war filled the room.

About his first kill, Haler says, "That was my baptism."

At the end of the film, the portrait is unveiled to Haler. He is clearly moved, but it's almost like his face and his mind were disconnected. His eyes swelled with tears. "That's me? I don't remember that."

Andersson remembered feeling proud of the finished product. He believed in the film providing justice and a voice. To Andersson, color, light and magic turned into his signature work.

It seems like they were equally surprised by the outcome. This film literally saved the life of a man so overcome by grief that he was on the brink of suicide. Haler told him to watch the film, and that put a stop to his actions.

Haler talked about the fact that more veterans are lost to suicide than to combat. "We all have a responsibility... We feel so isolated and alone. It's terrible."

Montelle believes that it's a ripple effect. "Practice listening to one another. If you have the opportunity, listen. Everybody affects everybody else." She felt awe and respect for the finished product.

One of the goals of the film was to inspire people to become active within the veteran population. Haler's best advice is "Be involved with all aspects of your community. Vote and when you see something out of place, take some kind of action."

The group will be back on Wednesday, March 12, with an exhibit called The Art of War in the CAA Student Gallery from 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m.