

# Creations of a veteran artist

BY CATHERINE PRITCHARD | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRISH BROWNLEE



In the photo, a uniformed soldier stares grimly off to one side.  
Half his face is in shadow.

But more is going on. Scratchy white lines – not part of the original photo – extend from one of his ears. More scratches cover part of his head and his torso.

The soldier made those marks on the image himself, says Hope Mills artist Trish Brownlee, who took the original black-and-white photo.

She explains: The soldier, who has had nine combat deployments, has a constant ringing in his ears. Thus, the ragged lines emanating from one ear. Nightmares regularly interrupt his sleep, leaving him frazzled and worn. Thus, the scratches on the other side of his head and on his torso.

“You try to find other ways to cope and deal,” Brownlee wrote in a note based on her conversations with the soldier,

“but those lead to even more problems and you are caught in the cycle until you (deploy) again.”

Brownlee knows first-hand about the complex feelings and traumatic effects that can result from military service. Now 34, she entered the military soon after graduating from high school, joining the Air Force National Guard and serving as a photojournalist.

Over nearly eight years, she served several periods of active duty, cared for a loved one who’d suffered debilitating physical and mental injuries during a military deployment, worked overseas and in this country as a photographer for the military, and developed health problems that she believes are related to her service.

Over time, she found that her thoughts about the military were diverging from the positive images she was being asked to record in her job.

“It kind of messed with me,” she said. “I had another story in my head.”

Brownlee wanted to create images capturing deeply personal feelings of individual service members, veterans and their families.

“The process started circling around in my brain in 2009 and I ignored it,” she said. “I wasn’t ready for it.”

That changed after she left the military in 2011. Brownlee started taking photos of a handful of soldiers and veterans with the aim of finding a way to tell their stories in a visually experimental way.

It took her a few years to hit on just how to do that but now that work is part of an exhibit at Artspace in Raleigh called “The Art of War.” The exhibit, which also includes work by two other veterans, runs through May 12.

Brownlee’s work includes traditional photographic portraits of herself and her husband, who also served, in fatigues. Their daughter, then 6 months old, is in two of the portraits.

Her other portraits are more unusual. As with the soldier with the constant ringing in his ears, Brownlee photographed individuals, then allowed each subject to make changes on his or her own image to express what they wanted about their military service.

In one, a shirtless veteran lies on a couch, his back to the camera, his head cradled in his wife’s lap. But a narrow strip of the image all the way around the veteran has been erased. The result: the couple is both together and separated. Brownlee said the veteran had suffered a traumatic brain injury in combat and everything in his life became a struggle. She said his wife fought for years to help him but

## Jernigan-Warren Funeral Home



*Three generations offering compassionate care: Ben Chambers, Lucille Warren and Lucy Warren Chambers*

***“When your family needs us, our family will be there”***

<p><b>WE OFFER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional funeral services</li> <li>• Cremation with a full array of service options</li> <li>• Arranging honors for military services (active, retired or veterans)</li> <li>• Assistance with the filing of benefits (Social Security, VA) authorizations (death certificates) and insurance</li> <li>• Memorial DVDs and other memorial tributes</li> <li>• Pre-planning funeral options</li> <li>• Serving all faiths and cultures: We care for families of all faiths and are able to assist those without a spiritual leader</li> </ul>	<p><b>WE PROVIDE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full service facilities</li> <li>• Chapel seating for over 200 people</li> <li>• Exceptional staff: We have carefully chosen each member of our staff to ensure that our families receive the most professional, compassionate care</li> <li>• Family operated atmosphere. We answer to YOU. We offer the level of compassionate care only a family can provide</li> </ul>
---	--



Family Owned and Operated Since 1933

545 Ramsey Street, Fayetteville, NC 28301 | 910.483.1331 | [www.JerniganWarren.com](http://www.JerniganWarren.com)

Find Concerts, Children’s Activities, Marathons, Fundraisers, and Other Local Events **INSTANTLY!**

Looking for something to do?



Just text the word **EVENTS** to the number **88000**

Local Events Will Display On Your Phone. **USE IT ANYTIME & ANYWHERE**

**SPRING-GREEN.**

Your *Neighborhood* Lawn Care Professional.

**How does your lawn look?**



- Turf Fertilization/Weed Control
- Mosquito Control
- Turf Insect & Disease Control
- Tree and Shrub Care
- Fire Ant Control
- Core Aeration

Call for a **FREE Estimate**

**910.426.2266**

or visit us online at

[www.spring-green.com/shopper](http://www.spring-green.com/shopper)

*Mention this ad and receive 10% off!*

**LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED**

By Steve Hopper



**CAPE FEAR REGIONAL THEATRE**  
*Blues  
-n-  
Brews*  
EST. 2003  
FAYETTEVILLE, NC

**MUSIC CITY EDITION**

**SAT JUNE 2 2018**  
**FESTIVAL PARK**  
Fayetteville, NC

VIP \$80 Tasting \$40\* DD \$10

*Don't miss the official start of summer!*

**WWW.BNB.CFRT.ORG**

**#HOTBLUES.COLDBREWS.**

\*\$45 Day of

**FANSTEAD'S**  
PREMIUM CIGARS

**96.5 BOB FM**  
WISKEY

**ARTS COUNCIL**  
FAYETTEVILLE/COLUMBIANA COUNTY

**Weekender**  
THE GREAT OUTDOORS

**CFRT**  
CAPE FEAR REGIONAL THEATRE

eventually the couple divorced.

“Some things can’t be healed,” Brownlee wrote in a note beside the portrait.

In another picture in this series, a female soldier sits on a sofa looking to one side as her young daughter stands on the floor looking up at her. The soldier erased part of the image, creating a blank streak between herself and her daughter.

“For the most part, I had great leadership” in the military, she told Brownlee. “What I lost was that time with my daughter. I’ll never have that back.”

Originally from Pennsylvania, Brownlee moved to the Fayetteville area in 2009 but had lots of other stops in between, including California, Arizona, Oregon and Kuwait. Always interested in art and design, she earned a bachelor’s degree in visual arts from Fayetteville State University in 2012 and a master’s degree in fine arts from Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2015.

She also became licensed to teach art in North Carolina schools and since 2014 has been on staff at Capitol Encore Academy, a public charter school located in downtown Fayetteville.

“I like teaching,” said Brownlee, whose students range from kindergarten through third grade. “I’m a better artist because I’m a teacher and I’m a better teacher because I’m an artist.”

She said her work helps her keep her artistic skills fresh. It also keeps her grounded.

As an artist, Brownlee works in a variety of mediums, including photography, painting and printmaking. She also makes paper, including the paper used for many of the portraits in the Artspace exhibit. That paper is made from old military uniforms and baby clothes (the latter because of their higher cotton content). Brownlee said that until she learned that paper-making process, she’d felt the portraits were incomplete.



Photo by Matthew Wonderly

Originally from Pennsylvania, Brownlee moved to the Fayetteville area in 2009 but had lots of other stops in between, including California, Arizona, Oregon and Kuwait. Always interested in art and design, she earned a bachelor’s degree in visual arts from Fayetteville State University in 2012 and a master’s degree in fine arts from Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2015.

# LEWIS FAMILY DENTISTRY

*Our family serving yours!*

910.488.0518

4140 Ramsey Street Suite 104,  
Fayetteville, NC

[Lewis-Dentistry.com](http://Lewis-Dentistry.com)



- Servicing the greater Fayetteville area for over 35 years
- Variety of dental services to meet your oral health needs
- Newly expanded and renovated offices making patients more comfortable
- Corporate member of the Association of United States Army
- Accepting new patients
- Call to schedule your appointment



**The Special Event  
Production Company**



**POOL PARTIES**



**REUNIONS**

**WE WILL COORDINATE  
ALL THE DETAILS!**

**Professional DJ Services  
Audio-Visual Rentals  
Photo Booths  
Karaoke  
Lighting  
Monograms  
Event Design  
Video Dance Parties  
Dance Floor Rentals  
Planning & Coordination**

CONTACT US TODAY TO LEARN MORE

**910.323.2409**

[WWW.FIVESTAR-ENTERTAINMENT.COM](http://WWW.FIVESTAR-ENTERTAINMENT.COM)



Brownlee's work shows the challenges that soldiers and veterans can face in balancing their service with other parts of their lives.

"I was putting these photos on beautiful paper but it felt like there was this piece missing," she said.

The paper made of old uniforms "brought it together," she said.

In 2016, she launched the Breaking Rag Project, a mobile studio offering workshops and demonstrations in making paper and art from worn uniforms and other materials.

She also creates art works by assembling disparate items into a unified story or experience. One such work, called Debris ArtWorks, was exhibited earlier this year at Fayetteville Technical Community College. The installation combined photography, video and found objects from the debris and events from the complete destruction of her home by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, as well as the art party that she and her husband held to bid farewell to their first home.


The act of turning that devastating event into art "gave us control back over it," Brownlee said.

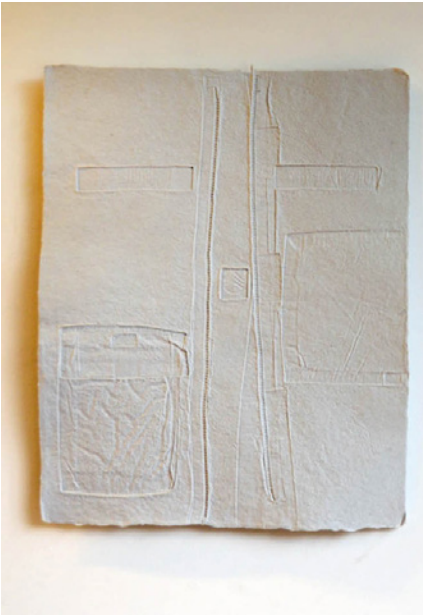
Brownlee said she sees art as a way to create space for conversations to take place – especially difficult conversations.

That can be hard for anyone but particularly for military service members and veterans who've absorbed an ethos of keeping any personal problems to themselves even as the general public is too often oblivious to their experiences.

Brownlee said there's often a sense of isolating separation between the groups. For example, she was surprised when people in the Northwest wanted her to tell them about her military experiences. "I didn't know that people away from the military cared to hear about it," she said.

But her art may help breach some of those barriers, providing a means for service members and veterans to express themselves in ways that civilians can relate to.

"The stories are the only thing that get people past these preconceived ideas of what we have and what the world is like," she said. 



Brownlee also makes paper, including the paper used for many of the portraits in the Artspace exhibit. That paper is made from old military uniforms and baby clothes (the latter because of their higher cotton content).

Brownlee said that until she learned that paper-making process, she'd felt the portraits were incomplete.

In 2016, Brownlee launched the Breaking Rag Project, a mobile studio offering workshops and demonstrations in making paper and art from worn uniforms and other materials.



AAFMAA Mortgage Services LLC



Lender NMLS 1423968

# Save Hundreds on Your Mortgage

Call 844-422-3622 (844-4-AAFMAA)  
or visit [aafmaa.com/mortgage](http://aafmaa.com/mortgage)

AAFMAA Mortgage Services LLC is an Equal Housing Lender and is a VA-approved lender not acting on behalf, in the direction of, endorsed or sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs or any government agency.

