

## JULIE HEFFERNAN

*Self Portrait as Emergency Shipwright, 2013*

Oil on canvas, 60 x 84 in



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, GALERIE MICHAEL HAAS, BERLIN AND P.P.O.W. GALLERY, NEW YORK

the sage, waiting for me to follow my erection out into the killing field.

“Okay. This is how we’re going to work,” Gary said. “I dig this unit. Suse, you bag. And you...”

“Hutch.”

“You start digging meter-deep holes. All around this unit. Got it? You stop when you hit something, and start another.”

I’d really like to say I hadn’t seen it coming. Really, I would.

“All right, then. We’re gonna move quickly now. I don’t want to be here more than a couple hours.”

I reached down for one of the two shovels.

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Gary and Susan were quiet and sullen as we picked our way back down to the truck from the site. What we left behind had little remaining archaeological value. It was just a bunch of holes in the desert—another incident of looting to be blamed on yahoos from Elko who had got wind of arrowheads being found out at Milepost 282.

“You know why we got our butts kicked in Vietnam?” Gary asked as he walked point through the sage.

I wasn’t going to touch that one, so I waited for him to continue.

“Knowledge of the terrain.”

“Hmmm...” I said.

“That and South Vietnamese double agents. Gooks in U.S.-Army-issue that were really playing for Ho Chi Minh. Backstabbing little fuckers.”

I didn’t like the implications of this history lesson. Not one bit. So I kept my mouth shut. The bones of at least five human beings rattled in the black Hefty bags I carried down the trail. They were surprisingly light.

Gary sighed. “But that’s what you get for letting bureaucrats run a war.”

**Ryan Masters** is a writer, journalist, and poet from Santa Cruz, California. His work has appeared in a wide range of publications such as *The Iowa Review*, *The Absinthe Literary Review*, *The Surfer’s Journal*, and *Scuba Diving* magazine. He holds an MFA from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and was the poet-in-residence for the City of Pacific Grove from 2002-2004. Read more @ryanmasters831.