

Impact Statement

Kaia Goodrich, Grade 7.

War Bird, 2017.

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12 Inches.

LaVilla School of the Arts, Jacksonville, FL

Unsung Hero: Cher Ami

I was inspired to choose Cher Ami the carrier pigeon as the subject of my painting because I am an avid bird lover and birds have always inspired me to wonder, study and learn. I enjoy learning about all kinds of birds and observing their habits and actions, so I was excited to find an unlikely unsung hero in a carrier pigeon whose name means "Dear Friend". Learning about the life and circumstances that lead to Cher Ami being honored with the Croix De Guerre or War Cross was fun and interesting. During World War I, British bird fanciers donated Cher Ami and other pigeons to American troops to be trained to deliver messages. Cher Ami delivered 12 messages successfully during the war. Cher Ami was with Lieutenant Colonel Charles White Whittlesey in October of 1918 when his American troops now called the "Lost Battalion" were separated from other Americans and became surrounded by enemy German troops in the Argonne Forest. They survived 6 days with little food, water, ammunition and no way to communicate. They must have been very scared. They had already sent out two other pigeons with messages unsuccessfully. Cher Ami was their last hope and her determination to get the message home saved the last 194 soldiers.

My vision for my piece was to portray Cher Ami's flight through a war zone and to show how strong the internal drive of a homing pigeon is. Cher Ami was shot in the chest, one of her legs was blown off and she was blinded in one eye but, she continued to fly and complete her mission. This amazes me and continues to amaze scientists who study this mysterious instinct. Scientists think that carrier pigeons use the earth's magnetic fields to find their way home. In experiments, they have even covered the pigeons' eyes and ears and the pigeons still find their way. My backyard chickens have strong instincts to run and hide when predators like hawks or even an innocent beach ball fly through the air in my yard. My pet parrot is deathly afraid of our vacuum cleaner and squawks, flaps and hides at the sight of it just being pulled out of the closet. I cannot imagine the incredible courage it would take for a small pigeon to continue to fly through smoke, bombs and loud planes even after being injured, so I recreated a scene with Cher Ami flying triumphantly over it all. A human might know at the time they are given an assignment that the completion of their job will to save lives. That knowledge might help them to work up the courage and drive needed to push through injury and pain to complete a mission. Cher Ami had no real knowledge of the importance of her mission, yet she persisted, and I think that is amazing. I hope that my painting helps others to learn how courageous she really was.

To arrive at my final piece, I thumbnailed different compositions and ideas. My teacher then approved one of the ideas and I drew a more detailed plan. I pictured Cher Ami flying away from the surrounded troops being attacked with her important message attached to her foot. I researched different images of World War I and pigeons online. I found images of explosions and trenches and World War I planes and tanks. The hardest part was figuring out what position to put the pigeon in. My teacher did not like any of my drawings of the bird twisted in its flight, as

if it was spiraling up and away from the gruesome scene below, so I settled for a more recognizable and familiar side view of her. It was also challenging to be sure that the tanks, planes and explosions were true to the time period I was trying to portray. I found many more modern war scenes in my research which confused me while I was drawing and caused me to do some revisions. Then, I scaled the image up onto my canvas and began my painting. First, I toned the canvas with a yellowish wash. Then, I laid in the values with an optical black. I painted the colors next. Pictures from the World War I era are black and white, so it was difficult to bring a colored painting to life. I finally got all the details correctly adjusted for the finished product at the end. I hope you enjoy it.