



Air Force Embeds Artists

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By Steve Brown

FOX NEWS

KALAMAZOO, MI — Hundreds of embedded reporters are on their way out of Iraq as the military action winds down, and now those with brushes and paint are ready to get embedded where the reporters were positioned.

Kalamazoo artist Rick Herter is waiting for the phone to ring so he can head to Iraq. His muse? Military airplanes, painted in oils.

Herter is one of several artists that contribute to military art programs that started in the 1950s as a way to publicize the mission of the Air Force.

"I've always loved history," he said. "I've loved flying from the time I was a kid."

With Iraq now largely secured by coalition military forces, Herter is heading there to be one of the "embedded artists" involved in the Air Force Art Program.

"They volunteer their time to go out to a base or wherever we may ask them to go and, through a matter of time, they will paint a painting and, in turn, they donate it to the Air Force," Russell Kirk, director of the Air Force Art Program, said.

"The United States Air Force Art Collection documents the story of the Air Force through the universal language of art," the military branch's Web site explained. "The actions and deeds of Air Force men and women are recorded in paintings by eminent American artists in a way words alone could never tell."

New additions to the collection can be viewed at the [Air Force art collection Web site](#).

Herter sells prints of his work with the Air Force's approval.

Herter plans on arming himself with a camcorder, still camera and a sketchbook when he goes on his trip.

Herter said he'll spend time with the flight crews and that he looks forward to "having a chance to talk to them about their experiences."

When he returns from his journey to the Middle East, Herter hopes that he is able to capture a moment that all the television coverage somehow couldn't.

"Because there are stories that I'm sure that are out there ... that haven't been told yet," he said.

This isn't Herter's first encounter of the high-flying kind. Months after Sept. 11, he flew with the fighter pilots who were first to respond that day.

That mission resulted in a pair of paintings that now hang in the Pentagon.

His works also currently hang in military installations from Washington to Hawaii and while the paintings are commissioned by the Air Force.

There is a message in each painting to American civilians, the artist explained.

You don't have to have this hanging in the hallway for the warrior to be reminded of what he does," he said. "The

public needs access to this work as well to remind the public of why we have warriors."

Herter hopes his paintings will still help illustrate history long after he's gone.

"Maybe what I do will help tell a story, 100 years from now, or 200 years from now," he said.

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