



## Sin Loi Desidaario

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"Sin Loi" is Vietnamese: it means "sorry about that", very politely.

Desidario" is Italian: it means, "we are sadly separated." I chose to give this work a name in Vietnamese and Italian because, I am the son of Italian immigrants, I grew up in an Italian neighborhood of Chicago, an old country village really. Therefore my body language and the foundations of my belief structure are Italian. Vietnamese because I was a typical American teenager until I served my country in Vietnam. 'Nam changed my life forever, and at 20 years old I was reborn. Therefore now I am also a child of Vietnam too. What is absent is also important. I was a proud American citizen willing to fight for my country, but because I did that, an ungrateful country has denied citizenship to me. Therefore no American name.

The press gave this work the name "Tracers".

In the beginning I had no title, nor did I feel signing it with my current name was appropriate. I decided that my army name, US 55898860, was how I should sign it. As I wrote US in blood red, I knew that was enough, so I called it "US". I did not add the numbers.

This work is a statement about separation and connections; to do this I incorporated several ambiguous layers of messages in it.

The first layer is: an Asian jungle with tracers originating from the bush engulfing an unprotected person. An overt statement of war on a physical level, a real life experience for a large number of men like myself.

The most subtle layer is: I used a jungle, which is a garden of Eden to many life forms, consequently, Heaven on earth to them. Incorporeal Heaven is our true

home. The human figure represents the family of man. The beams of light represent our souls' connection from our true home to our bodies.

My statement here is: Living people are always present simultaneously on earth, and in Heaven. The connecting ribbons of light represent the fact that no one is ever separated from who they truly are. The false belief that separation is possible is the pain the independent figure feels. The pain is the wanting to be home and not knowing we always are.

This work actually began Christmas Day, 1967, when I arrived at O'Hare Airport, Chicago from Vietnam. Seriously wounded in 'Nam, I had wanted to keep my mother from the fear of what was happening to me. So although she knew I was wounded, she had no idea of the extent of my injuries. On the plane before we landed, I removed all visible bandages from my head, face, arm, and threw one of my crutches away, so I would not look so frightening. I wanted to look as good as possible for Mom.

I knew my father would not be there to pick me up; it was his impending death that had motivated the Red Cross to get me sent home. I had been in a hospital, too, at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. My mother was also very sick; perhaps because her husband from the time she was sixteen years old would soon die. A girl I was dating had driven her from Indiana to the Chicago airport.

This piece began when I saw Mom standing with the girl in the terminal. When they saw me, the girl bolted for me intent on throwing herself into my arms. After all, it was our customary greeting. I would pick her up and throw her into the air whenever I saw her. However, this time, I could not. I truly feared her jumping on me could open the stitches of my numerous wounds. I had to stop her! The girl had no awareness of my fear.

But my mother did! War hero! Saved by Mom. I never thought of my 4'4", 90 pound, 50-something year-old mom as a potential Green Bay Packer defensive lineman before that, but that 5'4", 140 pound, 18-year-old girl in a blind, head long rush was no problem for my Ma. Mama caught up to the girl and threw a

football block into her bouncing her off the wall. The girl was pushed down to the floor shocked and stunned.

Excitement over, the girl enveloped me in hugs. But something else was touching me very gently, as if butterflies landed on my body. I turned to look into my mother's face. It was her inspecting my damages.

Now looking into Mama's eyes, I realized her deep, intense worry. As a child she always knew what I was doing, where and when I was lying. I had deliberately written her bogus letters while I was in 'Nam. I told her I was working in a motor pool changing tires, seeing no combat at all. Looking in her eyes I saw her pain for she knew those were lies. I understood that the bond we had enabled her to know, within herself, the danger I was in. Mom's intuition. I had spent a great deal of time getting shot at. The bond between us had reached from snowy Indiana to tropical Vietnam; no problem. She knew what was happening to me. I had never written her a single combat story. I told those I did tell the truth to: "Do not tell Mama this!"

When the s\*\*t was hitting the fan, I did not have time to be afraid. When I was most terrified, it was because I did not have the ability to take any action that would change the outcome of anything. I could only wait for them (the VC) to stop pounding. Waiting, thinking, not being able to do anything, yet knowing, is where terror lives. My lies intended for kindness had condemned her to this version of hell.

Twenty years passed before I developed the skill to speak this story through this sculpture. I used a female figure for Mama's vulnerability. Vulnerability I learned of on Christmas Day, 1967, as my Mom gently inspected her youngest son's body to know how much flesh and bone of his own was left. It was foolish of me to think that a woman, who had lived through four wars, sent sons, brothers, fathers, lovers, friends away to come back, or not, or even worse, would not understand the danger involved. Perhaps even better than me. In fact it is safe to assume that for each man in combat there was one mom, one or more lovers, one or more sisters. Uncountable blood and spiritual ties. The look on Mom's

face told me how much the mothers, wives and girlfriends suffered at home, making women in a unique way, combat Veterans, too.



#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTING

A large painting of a jungle interior dominates this piece. It is a view of a jungle as if the viewer is immersed in it. The enormity of the trees and the life everywhere as if, in truth, the viewer is inside a huge living creature. My intent is to imbue my painting with this celebration of life, for it is the raucous joy of life, now that I remember as the jungle.

A shadow of a woman is visible in the foliage, a missing piece of this living thing, is separated from the whole of this life force. The free-standing, full-sized female statue is the corresponding part, removed from that Garden of Eden. The statue's surface is brutalized; beaten, broken, cut, cracked. Naked, open wounds lacerated her body. The colors of the jungle and freestanding figure are the same, except the figure's are more violent; she is painted in camouflage. The very posture of the statue is one of sadness, nakedness, and vulnerability.

Machine gun ammunition comes in belts. After every fourth round in such a belt is a "tracer". Tracers emit red-orange light to be used for targeting in the dark. Four fingers of red-orange light emerge from the jungle silhouette, a hand of 20 rounds, reaching for and enfolding the life-size sculpture of a woman. The neon tubes coming out of the painting's shadow are red-orange neon rods connecting the separated part to Eden. Pulsing with electrical energy, the same way a machine gun's ribbon of flame would pulsate connecting two men of opposing factions. Although the figure is clearly removed from the foliage, as enemies are assumed to be removed from one another, the darting light binds the two forever together.