

Reflection of Veterans' Sense of Community

Maureen Drennan

In 2018, I was surprised to learn that over the past twenty years, membership in American veterans' halls had declined significantly—by nearly 23 percent in American Legions and by half in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. This revelation sparked my curiosity and prompted



Prince Wynn VFW Post 260, Broad Channel, Queens, NY ©Maureen Drennan



Andrew Mironchik, Commander VFW Post 8645, New Paltz, NY (standing behind the bar)

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me to begin visiting and photographing veterans' halls in the northeast while discussing the issue with their members.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion maintain a network of posts throughout the United States, serving as gathering places where service members and their families can find both privacy and a sense of community. One of the veterans I photographed at a VFW post

in New Paltz, New York, Ron Mironchik, said "It's a great place to sit and talk with people, or not," Ron is a Vietnam War veteran and the former elected Commander of the post. "There's a bonding that comes from being in a place with other veterans, people who have been through it," Ron said. "It's like a vibration."



Musicians Warmup, Colonel Charles Young American Legion Post 398, Harlem, NY

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I visited VFW's and American Legions in New York, Philadelphia, and Vermont, drawn to what I perceived as a poignant, lonely poetry. A significant part of my photographic process depends on serendipity and the generosity of strangers.



Jennings-Willets American Legion Post 346 (interior) ©Maureen Drennan



Veteran Lauren Williams, Post 346's
First Female Commander

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American Legion Post 346, Germantown, NY

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Michael A. Rawley, Jr., American Legion Post 1636, Brooklyn, NY

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I draw inspiration from people I engage with and photograph. If we end up talking for a while before I make any pictures that's fine, I enjoy the interaction. You never know what might happen or what people might share with you. It can be a truly enriching and humbling experience.

The settings and themes I seek out photographically are those of change or transition, often implying notions of loss and hope at once. I work with photography as a lens for understanding people, to merge with them psychologically and place myself in their environs, and I hope that viewers see my projects not only as documents of time and place, but also as avenues for self-reflection.

Maureen Drennan is a photographer born and based in New York City. She has been honored to have work included in exhibitions at the Museum of the City of New York, National Portrait Gallery, Tacoma Art Museum, Art Museum of South Texas, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Dorsky Museum, Ackland Museum of Art, Municipal Art Society of New York, Aperture, Mrs. Gallery, Transmitter Gallery, Field Projects, Partners and Son, Center for Photography at Woodstock, and Houston Center for Photography. Her images have been featured in *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *California Sunday Magazine*, *Photograph Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *Art 21 Magazine*, *UK Telegraph*, *Refinery 29*, *Narratively*, and the *Economic Hardship Reporting Project*. She teaches photography at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York.

Maureen Drennan's collection of American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars photographs were first published in Andrew Aoyama's "What Will Become of America's Veteran's Halls?" *The Atlantic*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/11/maureen-drennan-vfw-american-legion-photos/620648/>.