

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

SEAN BURTON - RORY CUSHNAHAN - BEN PULLIN





SEAN BURTON

Sean was born in 1966, in the United Kingdom. A former British soldier, Sean emigrated to Australia and served in the Australian Defence Force between 1989 and 2006, with deployments to East Timor, the Solomon Islands and the Middle East.

As an artist, Sean has a foot in both street art and the art 'establishment'. Whilst his primary canvas has been the walls of Melbourne's laneways, he has also been a finalist in the National Portrait Gallery's, Darling Portrait Prize and the Australian War Memorial's, Napier Waller Art Prize.

Growing up in the UK, Sean was heavily influenced by the punk movement. He was drawn to what he calls the 'do it yourself' ethos of punk: creating a style and identity from whatever people had to hand.

Sean stopped making art during his military career but his drive to pursue it again crystallised when he found himself struggling with deteriorating mental health as a result of his service. Art offered a way forward, teaching him about resilience.

Primarily using stencils and aerosol paint, his work often depicts people he's served with or stories of service men and women from the past. The facial expressions, colours, words and clever juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated elements, convey a feeling or mood distilled into a single moment.

In *Tough Love*, 2018, we initially see a confronting line of Australian soldiers in riot gear. Yet the image is overlaid with the words *love will win*. A love heart worn on the sleeve of one of the soldiers is a visual commentary on the use of discipline to foster responsibility and express care.

In *Selfless*, 2018, a First World War nurse takes a selfie on a mobile phone. With a humorous touch, Sean highlights the continuum of service from past to present and challenges us to see that the woman who served 100 years' ago, is not so different to those that dedicate their lives to service today.

Many of his works have multiple iterations. The work *Babs*, 2018 for example, was originally completed as a paste-up on a laneway wall, peeled off a year later, and attached to a canvas. Based on a photograph taken by Sean in East Timor, the piece explores personal qualities like resilience, strength and dedication that represent the people he served with.

The Lost Company, 2018 is another example of Sean's ability to crossover between street and gallery. Originally presented in an exhibition, the powerful installation highlighted the high rate of veteran suicide. The piece has continued to have a presence long beyond its time on the gallery walls; modified for display on concrete bollards around the city of Melbourne.

Sergeant Major, 2017 is a playful piece depicting an iconic character from the 1970s British television series, *It Ain't 'Alf Hot Mum*. The work expresses the sense of humour and good nature that, for Sean, is a defining characteristic of many who serve. The ability to make each other laugh and create a sense of camaraderie in the face of adversity is a cherished trait.

SEE MORE OF SEAN'S WORK VIA INSTAGRAM
[@sb6six](#)



RORY CUSHNAHAN

Rory was born in 1989 in Belgrave, Victoria. He pursued a career in the defence forces from a young age, joining in 2008, aged 18. In 2010, he was deployed as a combat soldier to Afghanistan with his unit, 5RAR, as part of Mentoring Task Force-2. After serving in Afghanistan he returned to Australia, continuing his career in defence for another two years.

Although always drawn to creative forms of expression such as drawing and music, he says that it wasn't until after leaving the army he discovered the true power of art. Rory describes his creative process as an exercise in mindfulness: the positive focus of attention and time spent mastering technique is a kind of meditation.

Much of his work contemplates identity as a soldier and the unique experiences of those who have served. The challenges of being deployed to a country so different in environment and culture to one's own; the gravity of war; the gruelling demands of life as a combat soldier and the transition back into civilian life, have become inspiration for Rory's painting practice.

Faces are a common preoccupation, occasionally his own, but mostly others'. In the piece *War is Home... Home is Hell*, 2019, the faces adorning the canvas are Christ and Madonna. His use of rich colours and large scale, draw us into the classical-style religious imagery, and we almost overlook Christ's army camouflage shirt and the words etched into the two faces: *Hope; Self Help; RIP; Lost; Found; War is Home; Home is Hell*.

The use of stylised text is also a recurring element in his work. The graffiti inspired lettering creates a unique visual identity, in the same way street artists use 'tags' as signatures. Written text is a central component to unpacking the layers in Rory's work. His commentary about service, sacrifice and the aftermath of war are distilled into carefully chosen words that elevate his works from purely decorative to deeply reflective: sometimes revealing what might be considered, uncomfortable truths about the human condition.

Rory describes the thoughts that were consuming him at the time he painted *War is Home... Home is Hell*, 2020:

War becomes home at some point in time of a soldier's life... War is meant to be the hard part but for some reason it's life once returning that becomes the challenge.

Most guys get back to a broken family and have to put the pieces back together because they haven't been around for so long. When you don't get rest after going to war, problems arise. Or doing a career change mid 20s and you are a combat veteran trying to fit into society, it can be a challenge for many different reasons...

When soldiers face bad problems in civilian life, some say, take me back to the simple days of war.

SEE MORE OF RORY'S WORK VIA INSTAGRAM
[@are.sea.art](https://www.instagram.com/are.sea.art)



BEN PULLIN

Born in 1970 in Perth, Western Australia, Ben's childhood years were spent moving from state to state due to the demands of his father's service. Growing up already immersed in military culture, the decision to follow in his father's footsteps and join the Australian Defence Force was a natural one.

During his service Ben was deployed overseas twice. First to Rwanda in 1994 with Alpha Coy 2/4 RAR Advance Party: a particularly violent and confronting peacekeeping mission. This was followed by East Timor in 1999 with 5/7 RAR as a Detachment Commander.

Ben medically discharged in 2000 with post-traumatic stress disorder. Like many service men and women, the long-term effects of being on constant high alert for imminent danger, witnessing atrocities inflicted by other humans and feeling powerless to protect families and children, left him invisibly scarred. Facing many obstacles in the years post-service, Ben turned to art as a way of transforming those scars into physical traces of his memories and experiences.

Both his sculpture and painting styles have the appearance of a sketch: marks and assemblages done with speed. The fast style Ben employs has been dictated by a back injury, but his work is simultaneously measured. His series of sculptures for example, are a continual work in progress that he obsesses over, perfects and refines in each rendering. The colours in his paintings are carefully selected to represent the familiar hues of life in the army.

The duality to Ben's work is also highlighted by the way it is both ethereal and grounded. On the one hand the figures in his paintings and sculptures are only partially present: the people and faces appear to us as outlines, shadows and shapes. On the other hand, they are anchored in unflinching subject matter. For example, in *Displaced* 2019, a soldier stands protectively among Rwandan refugees, but a little figure has broken away from the group and is standing alone. Ben describes the pain in knowing how fragile and fleeting human interactions can be during war as one of the lasting memories for many soldiers: something especially difficult to grapple with when children are the victims.

Requiem 2020, pays homage to several young men who lost their lives in Afghanistan in August 2010. Like a film still, the work captures the movement and action of the battlefield. These are moments in time from the lives of real soldiers. A nod to their sacrifice, comradery and the physically and psychologically demanding work they did.

In *Reflections* 2020, the bronze cast face is brought to life with the artist's eye projected onto it. Originally inspired by the Eternal Flame at the Shrine of Remembrance each version in his series of sculptures reflects on the identity of veterans.

SEE MORE OF BEN'S WORK VIA INSTAGRAM
[@ben.pullin1](https://www.instagram.com/ben.pullin1)

COLLABORATIVE WORK

Untitled, 2020 is a collaborative work by Ben and Sean that was created for the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition.

Developed with the Shrine of Remembrance's younger audiences in mind, the artwork was inspired by themes and stories from the Shrine's collection and permanent galleries.

The piece depicts six characters across Army, Navy, Airforce and veteran support services. Spanning different eras, they highlight qualities like resilience, mate-ship, selflessness and dedication exemplified by service personnel past and present.

The three figures portraying women in the Australian military highlight the pioneering service of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force during the Second World War. Their formation set a precedent for women's service in Navy, Army and Air Force in all roles across the Australian Defence Force.

Untitled also unpacks the idea that service and sacrifice comes in many forms. This is explored through the recognition of service animals.

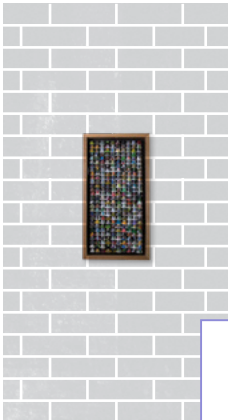
The history and significance of dogs in the military is represented by a digger and his terrier, used as a mascot and to keep the trenches free from rats; a contemporary soldier and his military working dog, highlighting the strong mutual bond formed in combat; and a veteran with his service dog, trained to enrich the lives of veterans and first responders suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.



ROOM PLAN



RORY CUSHNAHAN *War is Home...Home is Hell* 2019
acrylic paint and aerosol acrylic on canvas



SEAN BURTON
Untitled 2020
aerosol paint caps,
wood and glass

SEAN BURTON
The Lost Company 2018
hand-cut acetate stencil,
aerosol acrylic on cement



SEAN BURTON *Sergeant Major* 2017
aerosol acrylic on plywood

SEAN BURTON *Babs* 2018
hand-cut acetate stencil, aerosol
acrylic, re-claimed multi-layered paper
on medium-density fibreboard

SEAN BURTON *Tough Love* 2018
hand-cut acetate stencil, aerosol acrylic
on canvas

SEAN BURTON *Selfless* 2018
hand-cut acetate stencil, aerosol acrylic
on canvas



SEAN BURTON AND BEN PULLIN *Untitled* 2020
 hand-cut acetate stencil, aerosol acrylic and acrylic
 paint on cardboard

BEN PULLIN *Displaced* 2019
 acrylic paint on canvas



BEN PULLIN *Reflections* 2020
 Bronze, corten, salvaged metal, digital projection,
 vintage printing press letters

BEN PULLIN *Watch Over Me* 2018
 steel, alloy, sterling silver

BEN PULLIN *Requiem* 2020
 acrylic paint on canvas

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

SEAN BURTON-RORY CUSHNAHAN-BEN PULLIN

Between Two Worlds presents contemporary works of art by three veterans: Sean Burton, Rory Cushnahan and Ben Pullin.

Traversing painting, sculpture and street art, each artist interrogates notions of identity, dislocation and resilience.

Art has become a powerful voice for these veterans. Finding a therapeutic benefit in the creative process, they have developed a unique visual language to represent both their own personal experiences and shared issues facing many young service men and women today.



SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE
MELBOURNE

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