

Above *Lustral Bowl*, 2003
Cover *Enduring Afghanistan* (detail), 2008–present

Between Echo and Silence
Harriet Bart

Curated by Joanna Inglot

October 7–November 4, 2012

Opening Reception:

Saturday, October 6 from 7–9 pm

Artist's Talk:

Tuesday, October 9 at 7 pm

Soundings for Harriet Bart: Poetry Reading

by Nor Hall and Eric Lorberer

Sunday, November 4 at 4 pm

photos: Rik Sferra

Law Warsaw Gallery

Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center, Macalester College

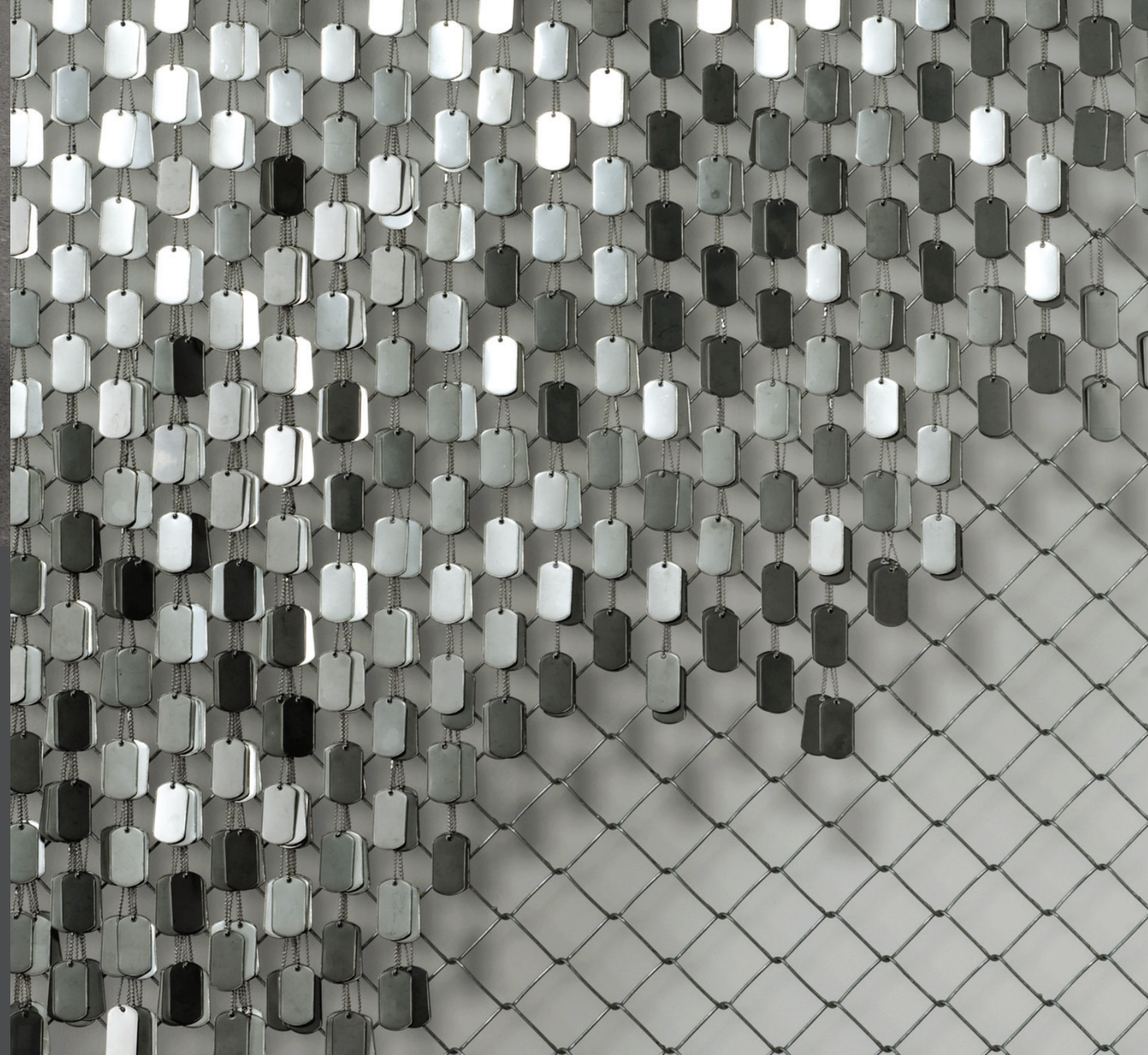
macalester.edu/gallery • gallery@macalester.edu
(651) 696-6416

Gallery hours:

M/T/W/F	10 am–4 pm
TH	10 am–8 pm
SAT/SUN	noon–4 pm



MACALESTER COLLEGE



BETWEEN ECHO AND SILENCE

HARRIET BART

I have a deep interest in the personal and cultural expression of memory. Using bronze and stone, wood and paper, books and words, everyday and found objects, I seek to signify a site, mark an event, and otherwise draw attention to imprints of the past as they live in the present.

—Harriet Bart

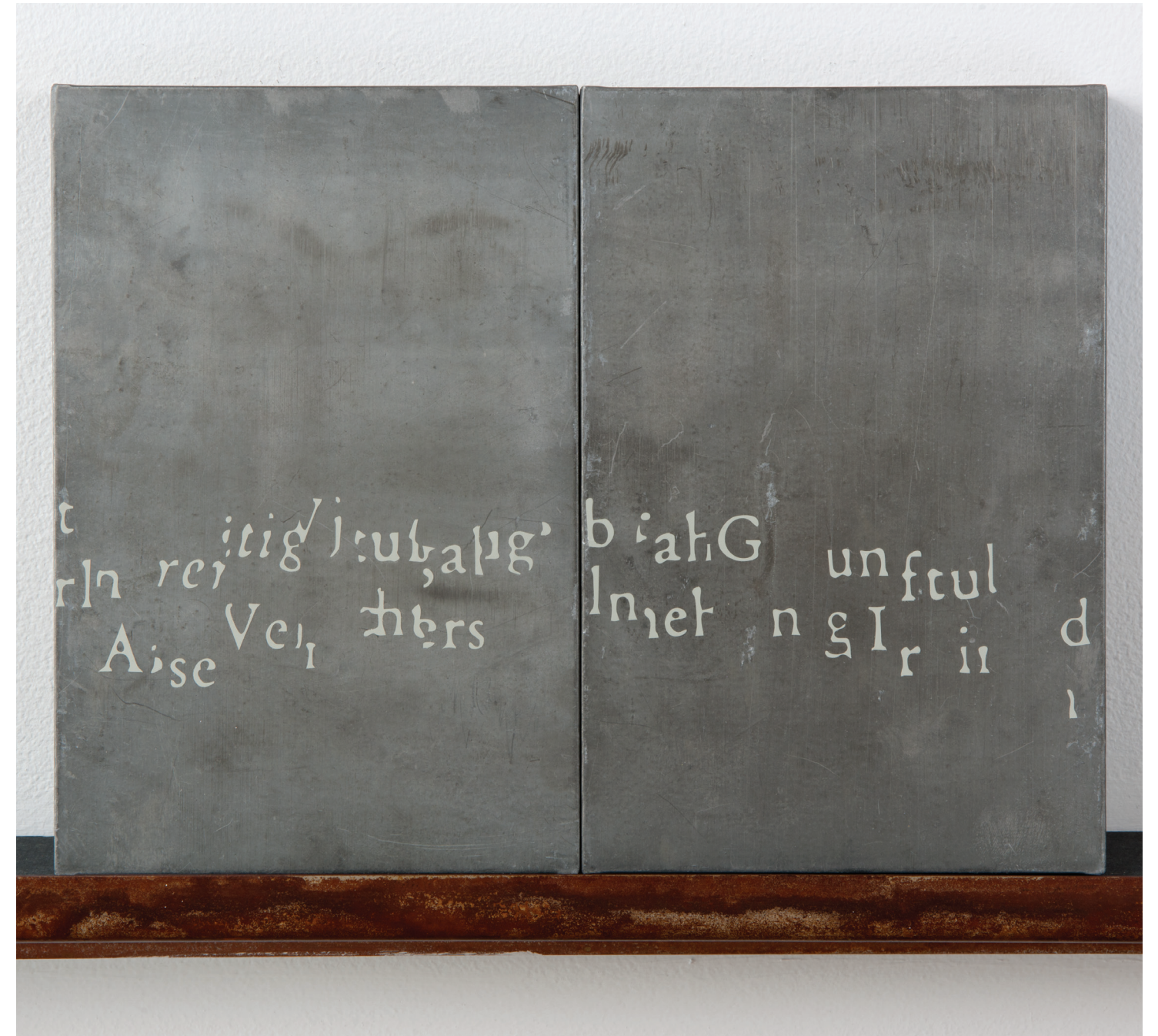
Between Echo and Silence is a carefully choreographed ensemble of objects and drawings that resonate with loss, history, and preserved memory. With its stark physicality of form and subtle ephemeral gestures, Harriet Bart's work instantly arrests the viewer's attention and captivates with its refined minimalist aesthetic. The ritualistic solemnity of her art, amplified by a score created from the thrumming sound of the striking and stroking of her metal sculpture, turns the exhibition into a place of spiritual refuge and a space for reflection on the personal and cultural meaning of human tragedy and war.

Based in Minneapolis, Harriet Bart is a well-established conceptual artist who works in a wide range of media, from fiber and book art to public sculpture and installations. She has exhibited nationally and internationally since the early 1980s and is represented in major galleries and museum collections in the United States, Israel, Germany, and Japan. Throughout her career, Bart has explored

memory, and her installations are laboratories that transform humble objects and ordinary materials into powerful visual statements and poignant cultural commentaries.

Themes of war, loss, and commemoration appear persistently in her art. Employing inscriptions, markings, fragments of deconstructed text, and her own handwriting in her artistic vocabulary, Bart constantly discovers and makes new webs of remembrance, as if bearing witness to that which cannot be accounted for. In *Without Words* (2003), for instance, significance is conveyed through spaces and erasure rather than text.

Requiem (2003–2011), an installation in memory of the American soldiers killed in the Iraq war, comprises seven long paper scrolls. Six are inscribed with the names of more than four thousand soldiers killed in the war. The seventh scroll is blank, as if waiting for what is still unknown in the future. From a distance, the cascade of names that rolls



Without Words, 2003



Requiem (detail), 2003–2011

onto the floor, overwhelming in number, turns the composition into an anonymous abstract script or sacred text. Up close, Bart's calligraphic penmanship honors each individual life, accentuated by metal plumb bobs that hang over the scrolls, as if in the act of writing an endless stream of names.

Begun in 2008, *Enduring Afghanistan* is another haunting evocation of absence and loss related to ongoing war. With the military I.D. tags worn by every soldier, Bart accounts here for the death of more than two thousand American men and women killed in the Afghan conflict. Attached to a chain-link fence, the shimmering metal dog tags form the shape of Afghanistan. Bart has placed each tag at the location in the country where a soldier was killed. Heavy layers of tags indicate areas, such as Kandahar and Helmand provinces, where the death toll was greatest. As in *Requiem*, a carefully compiled register of the names of fallen soldiers counters the anonymity of the empty tags. The names are recorded in a ledger placed on a wooden Koran stand in a transgressive act meant to represent tensions inherent in the American public discourse surrounding this war.



Enduring Afghanistan, 2008–present



Drawn in Smoke (detail), 2011

In a sweeping gesture that takes us away from the immediacy of current political events to the early twentieth century, *Drawn in Smoke* (2011) commemorates one of the worst industrial tragedies in U.S. history, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City on March 25, 1911. In a series of 160 elegiac smoke drawings, Bart marks this historic event, in which young immigrant garment workers (mostly women) jumped to their deaths or died in flames. The drawings are arranged in rows, in a grid-like formation that tries to hold these soft and vaporous images together. The graceful movement of smoke traces in the drawings seems to fill the room with the thin and intangible memory of those who perished. Below each drawing is the name of a victim of the fire, grounding these ephemeral, artistic depictions of smoke in the specific reality of the tragedy.

While working in a formally reduced aesthetic language, marked by geometry and serial structure, Bart always seeks to subvert the principles of minimalism. Subtly dismantling the grid and the imposed order, she opens up an emotive content and invites a personal interaction with her art. What seems at first reduced and restricted—such as geometric forms or modules—is quietly transformed into scenarios with pent-up drama. The movement of shadows, the wire fencing that contains potentially dangerous content, and the whispering echo of tragedy and death that runs through the exhibition are elements of disruption but also channels for change.

One distinct theme that emerges from these explorations is the untapped potential of empty objects and spaces. Three *Lustral Bowls* (2003) made of spun steel and arranged



Pendulum, 2003

on the floor, are pristine, vacant, and mute but also full of promise, waiting to be filled with sound or speech. The bowls change dramatically with the play of light on their smoothly polished surfaces; when struck with a soft mallet, they respond by producing a soft reverberation that induces a sense of hope. The imposing and shimmering cast bronze *Pendulum* (2003), which alerts us to this particular moment in time like an exclamation mark, assumes various guises and morphs into a symbol of rectitude or an expression of the human spirit as a luminous beneficent essence, boldly facing tragedies and violence that we can no longer ignore.

In all of her works, Harriet Bart evinces sensitive handling of materials and meticulous attention to process, marked by unhurried, laborious repetitive acts and the contemplative rhythm of archiving and collecting as a form of preserving memory. Using paper, ink, steel, bronze, wood, and found objects, she masterfully transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, absence into presence, oblivion into remembrance, while gently bringing that which is silent into the center of our cultural and political awareness.

Joanna Inglot, Curator and Edith M. Kelso Chair in Art History