Prosecutors call for Mubarak's execution

Pentagon braces for a future of shrinking forces

**NEW STRATEGY AFTER DECADE OF WAR**

In lean times, focus shifts to smaller operations

BY CRAIG WHITLOCK AND GREG JAPPE

The U.S. military will steadily shrink the Army and Marine Corps, reduce forces in Europe and probably make further cuts to the nation's nuclear arsenal, the Obama administration said Thursday in a preview of how it intends to reshape the armed forces after a decade of war.

The downsizing of the Pentagon, prompted by the country's dire fiscal problems, means that the military will depend more on coalitions with allies and avoid the large-scale counterinsurgency and nation-building operations that have marked the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Instead, the Pentagon will invest more heavily in Special Operations forces, which have a smaller footprint and require less money than conventional units, as well as drone aircraft and cybersecurity, defense officials said. The military will also shift its focus to Asia to counter China's rising influence and North Korea's unpredictability. Despite the end of the Iraq war, administration officials said they would keep a large presence in the Middle East, where tensions with Iran are worsening.

The strategy review was unveiled by President Obama in a rare visit to the Pentagon, where he was flanked by Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, the Joint
Museums

OPENINGS


EXHIBITIONS


ALEXANDRIA BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM Ongoing exhibit: Learn about the history of African Americans in Alexandria, from slavery to the present. Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 to 4. 902 Wythe St., Alexandria. 703-744-4356. www.alexblackhistory.org. 52.


NAVY MUSEUM VISITOR CENTER, U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY Ongoing exhibit: "From Models to Masterpieces," models and parts along with documents and artifacts show at sea. Open 9 to 5. March-December, open 9 to 1 January-February. 52 King George St., Annapolis. 410-293-8111. usna.mil/NMVC. 59. seniors, 57 age 18 and younger.


Baltimore MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY Ongoing exhibit: Collection highlights the heritage and preservation of Baltimore and Maryland’s industrial past. Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 to 4. 1415 Key Hwy., Baltimore. 410-775-4808. www.thebmi.org. 510. 58 seniors, 56 students and children, free for age 5 and younger.

BANNEKERT-DOUGLASS MUSEUM "In Each Other’s Shoes," through March 30. Works by outsider artist Loring Cornish explore the struggles and triumphs of African Americans and Jewish Americans. "Faces of Ghana: A Photography Exhibit by Jay Beker," through June 2. Pictures document the lifestyles of Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from European rulers. Ongoing exhibits: Stories from the lives of African Americans in Maryland from colonial times through the civil rights movement. Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 to 4; open Wednesday, Friday and Sunday 10 to 4; Thursday 10 to 7; Sunday 1 to 5 from Memorial Day to Labor Day. 84 Franklin St., Annapolis. 410-216-6180. www.bdmuseum.com. Free.


CHRISTOPHER CUNNINGHAM

Tomas Rivas’s work is part of “Traveling Light: 5 Chilean Artists and Common Place,” at the Art Museum of the Americas through Jan. 22. The exhibition focuses on the connection between art and politics.


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BELAIR MANSION Ongoing exhibit: A restored 1745 plantation home furnished. Ongoing exhibit: Opening Tuesday-Saturday noon to 4, 12207 Tulip Grove Dr., Bow...
Hardworking artist can be playful, too

Style and humor displayed in five-piece show

BY LAVANYA RAMANATHAN

The playful, fuzzed-out flowers, torn magazine pages and elegant strands of pearls in Flashpoint's latest exhibit, "Aoife Collins: Tickling the Ivories," may well have been lifted from the bedroom of a teenage girl.

But Irish contemporary artist Aoife Collins (pronounced El-fa), who comes to Flashpoint through a partnership with theater company and arts organization Solas Nua, arrives at her pop sensibility by way of a little pain: She plucks mundane, mass-produced items and transforms them into objects d'art simply by adding her own labor. Hours and hours of repetitive labor.

Those frayed, punch-colored wisps? They were once cheesy fabric orchids, the kind better left to collect dust at motel reception desks or Chinese restaurants. Collins purchases ready-made arrangements and spends months tugging each flower and bud apart, thread by thread, with a pair of tweezers before reassembling them. Reminding us of their origins as decorative afterthoughts, Collins cheekily installs the sculptures at Flashpoint's front desk rather than on the gallery floor.

The pearls, she drapes artfully over an open steel frame; the piece, "All I Want Is to Covet You All," is the definition of contemporary sculpture, but the pearls add a quaint, antiquated touch. They're inexpensive, common, freshwater pearls, yet Collins painstakingly hand-knotted each strand, imbuing them somehow with more value than the surface might suggest.

This is only the second U.S. show for Collins, whose work is frequently exhibited in London and Ireland. Though trained in painting, she has experimented freely with sculpture and installation as well as sound projects and video work. In an era in which some of the world's most high-priced art is conceived of by artists but created by armies of assistants, her work raises particularly poignant questions: Is it an artist's labor that makes an item art? Or simply what an artist chooses to show? (Acknowledging her due to French artist Marcel Duchamp, Collins frequently plays with the idea; in a 2008 New York exhibition, she had punch lines from a TV show recorded in a serious tone, ridding them of their context, then had them play in the gallery as a sound installation.)

"Tickling the Ivories" is spare — there are just five pieces — but one installation begs more than one look. "Floating Point," a simple wooden vitrine, bears what looks like a plain sheet of glass, but step within inches of it to see a millimeters-long sliver of paper with the word "love" enconced in the glass. To find that sliver, Collins snipped every instance of the word from the pages of Oscar Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray" (she guessed that there were around 36), then turned each slice over to see what was on the other side.

"It was kind of wishful thinking that something would happen," Collins explains of her game of chance. Something did: On the flip side of one of the cutouts, she found the word "hate"; that's the sliver she placed in glass. Walk around the sculpture to see it (and, thanks to the lighting, your own reflection staring back at you in the glass).

If there is one other common theme in "Tickling the Ivories," Collins says, it's the transparency in the work. The hand-cut patterns in the wall installation "Inherit the Window," the glass in "Floating Point," the steel cube in "All I Want," all of this is as wide open, and accessible, as Collins's sense of humor.

Aoife Collins, whose work is frequently exhibited in London and Ireland, uses strands of pearls to add a quaint, antiquated touch to a contemporary sculpture.

Aoife Collins: Tickling the Ivories
Through Feb. 4 at Flashpoint Gallery, 916 G St. NW.
Opening reception: Friday 6 to 8 p.m.
Hours: Open Tuesday-Saturday, noon to 6 p.m.
Price: Free.

ramanathanl@washpost.com