

## MELISSA WEST

*The Elephant in the Room*, 2012  
Monoprint with inkjet transfer,  
linoleum block figures, 12 x 12 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## PHILIP SWANSTROM SHAW

### In the Last Days of Our Future War

The voice that was hired to signal to us has made a mistake. It is 1:43 p.m. and we have been delayed and the voice that was hired has made the mistake of telling us, *Your plane has arrived*. The voice is telling us that this plane will eventually be ours, but *it must first unload* its current people. All of these passengers, and their belongings, or at least some of their belongings, will pour past us *as fast as possible*. And their other belongings, that were entrusted elsewhere, will attempt to follow them.

But our group has already been too late for too long. For those of us that the hired voice is now addressing, it will never be fast enough, this rushing by of others with their belongings. And now this mistake that the voice they hired has made makes our group anxiously erect. And now we will all stand. And now we will all just have to wait some more.

Standing and waiting, we try our best to not look at one another. We pretend to look out the wall of glass toward that plane that will eventually be ours. I look around at the others who are trying hard to not look at one another, or at me.

From where I stand, I can see a soldier stuck in the middle of the formless group that the hired voice wants to *form into a line* but will never be a line. The soldier's place in our group, which will never resolve itself into a line, is just a few paces from where I am standing. This soldier is wearing a camouflage meant to hide him in places that bear no resemblance to this field. For this soldier to blend in here, he would have to be wearing a golf shirt regaled with indistinct plumage, or tight sweatpants with a celebrity moniker emblazoned across his ass, or some similar regrettable affair. Unfamiliar with the wartime dress codes, I ask myself: *Do the soldiers get to choose what they wear when traveling among civilians?*

Our soldier's camouflaged uniform looks digitally rendered, an eight-bit pixel pattern of dry colors, the colors of settled earth and of the dust of hells that like to move. His uniform looks meant to hide him in those hells that have been, and are still, others' homes. When I first started noticing these uniforms, I thought to myself: *These newfangled camos look cheap*. I thought to myself: *They've decided to stop paying the fabric artists*. The artists who used to craft amorphous shapes to nudge against the seas of other shapes that worked hard to not be distinct shapes.