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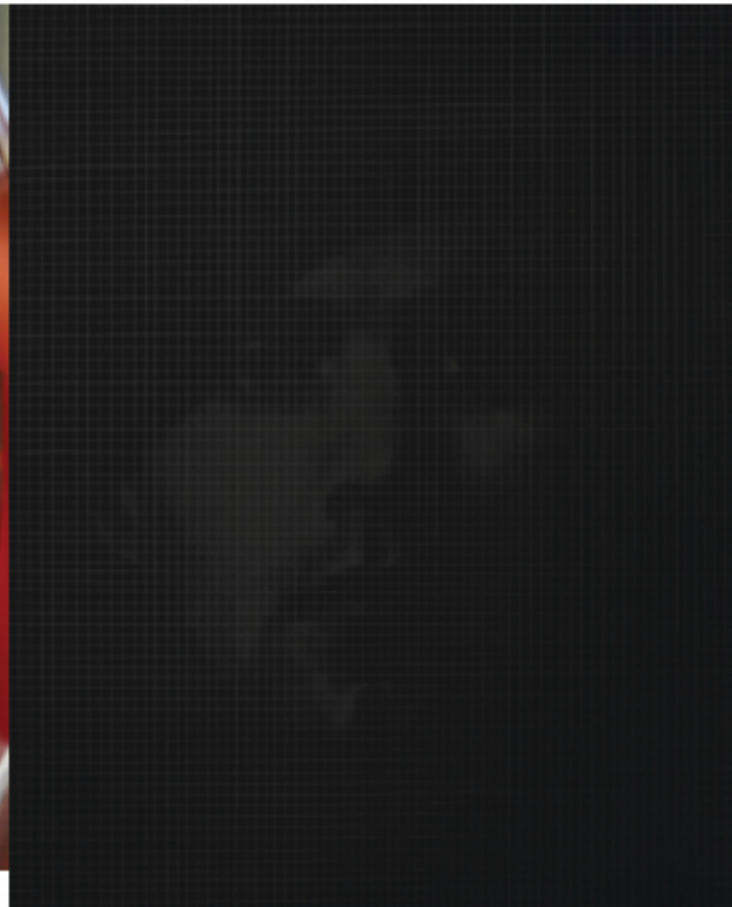
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Review by Mark Jenkins

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An installation view of Soomin Ham's "Lingering Glimpses" of American servicemen and -women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, grouped in a somber memorial.



Ham's "Lingering Glimpses #4." The artist prints photos with expired developer and no fixer, so the pictures turn almost entirely black

Soomin Ham

Local photographer Soomin Ham doesn't offer permanence. Often addressing her own family history, Ham devises images that are damaged or incomplete, thus suggesting absence and bereavement. "Lingering Glimpses," her Multiple Exposures Gallery show, returns to a previous strategy: printing photos with an expired developer and no fixer, so the pictures turn almost entirely black. What's new is that

Ham's subjects are American men and women in the military killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, grouped in a somber memorial.

Ham often combines analog and digital modes. For this project, she found images on the Internet and transferred them to negative film to make the inky 11-by-14-inch prints. The nearly indiscernible faces are arranged in grids, with another grid atop them: regularly spaced vertical and horizontal pencil lines that divide the darkness into hundreds of precise squares. This represents "endless loss," the artist's statement says.

The portraits are contrasted only by two landscape photos, one on each wall. The first depicts a watery vista framed by mountains; the second is of dot-size birds in front of billowing gray clouds. Both are stark and soft-focused, yet they have a sense of openness the gridded black portraits lack. The landscapes aren't lush, but they do offset the show's overwhelming solemnity.

Soomin Ham: Lingering Glimpses Through Nov. 28 at Multiple Exposures Gallery, Torpedo Factory, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria.