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Portraying Our Troops

By Rachel Beckman
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Husband-and-wife team Brandon Millett and Laura Law were fed up with the portrayal of soldiers in film and media. Millett's breaking point came when he read an op-ed in the Los Angeles Times that criticized people who support the troops. Law reached hers when she saw Joaquin Phoenix play a drug-dealing military man in the 2001 film "Buffalo Soldiers." The result of their frustration is the inaugural GI Film Festival at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center this Memorial Day weekend. Millett and Law will screen 22 films at the three-day festival. They hope to attract both Hollywood and military types.

"In movie after movie, all you see is soldiers raping and killing," Law says. "That's all that ever gets portrayed. . . . We want to show something a little more positive."

All of the films in the festival "portray soldiers with respect," Millett says.

The lineup includes a drama called "Divergence," about a wounded soldier returning from Iraq to his home town on the New Jersey shore. Comedian Jeffrey Ross will be on hand to screen his documentary "Patriot Act: A Jeffrey Ross Home Movie," about his 2003 United Service Organization (USO) trip to Iraq with fellow entertainers Drew Carey, Kathy Kinney and others. Pat Boone, the 1950s hit singer, will attend the festival to present a documentary about his new anthem for the National Guard.

The festival's marquee guest is actor Gary Sinise, who will screen 1994's "Forrest Gump," the film that won him an Academy Award for his role as Lt. Dan. Sinise travels the world entertaining troops with the Lt. Dan Band (he plays bass) and serves as the national spokesman for the Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation. The GI Film Festival is honoring Sinise with a VIP reception Saturday night.

"I have Vietnam veterans in my family, my side and my wife's side," Sinise said. "We all remember what happened with them when they came home from war. It was a national disgrace the way they were treated. I don't want to see that happen to our active-duty service members."

Mary Coble's "Aversion" is on view through June 30 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW, second floor. Free. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and by appointment.

The GI Film Festival runs Saturday-Monday at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW. Screenings cost \$12-25; day passes and VIP passes, \$65-\$375. Tickets available at <http://www.gifilmfestival.com>. For information call 800-928-6307.