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Forbes

PLASTIC ACTION FIGURES ARE NOW FIGHTING ALL OUR WARS...
AT LEAST IN THIS SILICON VALLEY MUSEUM SHOW



David Levinthal has photographed the Battle of the Alamo and Custer's Last Stand. He also shot Hitler's invasion of Russia, air raids over Vietnam, and the nocturnal maneuvers of American soldiers in Iraq. That may make him the most experienced war photographer ever. He's also probably the least conventional, since every battle scene he's ever photographed has taken place inside his studio. Levinthal photographs toy soldiers on tabletop battlefields. He shoots them with close-up cameras – both Polaroid and digital – creating the illusion of action by manipulating depth-of-field. His ersatz imagery, which frequently uses mass-produced action figures, questions our collective memory of history by documenting the encroaching overlay of legend. Levinthal's war photography has been widely exhibited recently, most prominently in an important 2013 show at the Corcoran Gallery. A visually arresting new exhibit at the San Jose Museum of Art puts the war photography in context, showing the myriad other subjects Levinthal has explored over the past four decades using the same photographic techniques. Featuring pictures of one-inch-tall cowboys and baseball players and bikini-clad pin-ups, the exhibit provocatively explores how the popular image of warfare fits in with practically every other aspect of our popular culture. It all looks so innocently beguiling. You might even believe it.

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