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*(Photo Caption: From left, Artist Maria Salazar, U.S. Medal of Honor Recipient Ryan Pitts, Veteran Artist Program Founder/President BR McDonald and Artist Matt Burda)*

## **Cohen Veterans Network Hosts Art Exhibit Exploring Themes of Resiliency, Healing, and Transition after Military Service**

*One-Day Exhibit, “A Veterans View,” Focused on the Importance of Mental Health Services for Veterans and Their Families*

**New York, New York (November 12, 2018)** – During the unveiling of an exclusive one-day art exhibit today focused on veterans, U.S. Medal of Honor recipient Ryan Pitts spoke about the need for mental health services among the military community. To honor Veterans Day, the [Cohen Veterans Network](#) (CVN), a not for profit philanthropic organization which provides mental health services for post 9/11 veterans and their families, hosted the exhibit in New York City with the Veteran Artist Program, featuring original pieces of work by military veteran artists.

The exhibit, entitled “A Veteran’s View,” was held at the Van Der Plas Gallery on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and highlighted paintings, sculptures and photography with themes of



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resiliency, healing, and transition after military service. The featured artists included Matt Burda of Manhattan, Maria Salazar of Long Island and Dario DiBattista of Washington D.C. BR McDonald, founder/president of the Veteran Artist Program and a U.S. Army veteran, partnered with CVN to curate the event.

“These artists represent the diversity of art and experiences throughout the veteran community,” McDonald said. “Cohen Veterans Network has provided an opportunity and place for each of these veterans to tell their story, share their talents and engage with their community. Our goal at the Veteran Artist Program is to provide these opportunities for veterans around the country.”

With the unique display of art as the backdrop, former Army Staff Sergeant Pitts explained the importance of mental health services when transitioning from the military to civilian life. He is the ninth living recipient of the United States' highest award for valor from the War in Afghanistan, receiving his medal on July 21, 2014 for extraordinary heroism in combat operations near Wanat Village, Kunar Province in July 2008. He was onsite explaining the importance of mental health services for veterans and their families.

“Many of our clinics throughout the country are offering community-building programs like artist workshops as a way of opening the conversation and reconnecting veterans with their civilian neighbors,” Pitts said. “Today’s exhibit really highlighted how veterans can give back, while others can receive benefits from understanding their experiences.”

All 10 of the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics around the country have taken part in local Veterans Day activities. The Silver Spring, MD clinic took part in a wreath laying ceremony at the Arlington National Cemetery yesterday. The clinics in New York, Philadelphia, Dallas and Denver all marched in large-scale downtown parades, while Fayetteville, NC; Clarksville, TN; Killeen, TX; El Paso, TX and San Antonio, TX all joined in various community events.

In partnership with the National Council for Behavioral Health, CVN recently issued the inaugural [America’s Mental Health 2018](#), a comprehensive study of Americans’ access to and attitudes toward mental health care. The study revealed that a majority of the veterans (75 percent) who responded, as well as their loved ones (79 percent), believe that mental health is as important as physical health. Nearly half of those respondents also strongly agreed that too many people who need mental health services cannot seek treatment. With 40 percent of veterans and 34 percent of their loved ones seeking treatment for a mental health issue, cost is the top barrier for seeking mental health services.

The network’s Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics provide high-quality, confidential care at no or low-cost to patients. These services are available for the entire military family, including parents, siblings, spouses or partners, children, caregivers, and others of veterans and active-duty military. For more information about CVN, visit [cohenveteransnetwork.org](http://cohenveteransnetwork.org).

## **ABOUT THE COHEN VETERANS NETWORK**



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The Cohen Veterans Network is a 501(c)(3) national not-for-profit philanthropic organization for post-9/11 veterans and their families. CVN focuses on improving mental health outcomes, with a goal to build a network of outpatient mental health clinics for veterans and their families in high-need communities, in which trained clinicians deliver holistic evidence-based care to treat mental health conditions. Learn more about the [Cohen Veterans Network](#).

### **ABOUT THE VETERAN ARTIST PROGRAM**

The Veteran Artist Program (VAP) fosters, encourages and promotes veterans in the arts through collaborations, partnerships, mentorship opportunities and original productions. VAP's goal is to provide creative outlets for veterans to tell their stories, showcase their talents and pursue real opportunities in the arts. These three artists represent over 1,800 veterans and artists who are sharing their work every day as part of the VAP community. For more information, visit [veteranartistprogram.org](http://veteranartistprogram.org).

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

*Matthew Thomas Burda* is an abstract expressionist painter and theater producer. Recent pop-up Art Galleries include 'Legendary Republic', '17 Frost', 'Brooklyn Bazaar' and 'The Melrose Room'. Producing credits include *Deployed: A New Musical* ('13), *Interview: A New Musical* ('17) and *Comfort Women: A New Musical* ('18) Acting credits include *Claude in Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*, *Bernie in Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and the title role in *Anatol*. Burda served six years in the U.S. Air Force Security Forces and deployed to Iraq & Afghanistan where he worked detainee operations and earned two Army Achievement Medals. Burda is a graduate of the City College of New York ('15).

*Maria L. Salazar* is a native of Peru. She emigrated to the United States at the age of 12 and grew up in Bridgewater N.J. After 9/11 she enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2002. She served in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and was honorably discharged as an E5 (Sgt) in 2011. After her service, she became a fitness instructor and moved to New York in 2012. Salazar is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in art therapy at LIU Post, where she has a GPA of 3.7 and was inducted into SALUTE, the National Honors Society for Veterans. Currently the Junior Vice Commander of VFW Post 1819, Salazar is the only female member of the post. Her mission is to give back to her comrades as an art therapist.

*Dario DiBattista* served in the United States Marine Corps Reserve from 2001 to 2007, later becoming a distinguished graduate of the Johns Hopkins University M.A. in Writing Program. He is currently working on a co-written screenplay about a Marine's return home from war. DiBattista is the editor of the anthology *Retire the Colors: Veterans & Civilians on Iraq & Afghanistan*. His work has appeared in the *Washingtonian*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, *Connecticut Review*, [Pank], Mic.com, and many other publications. Additionally, he's been profiled in the *New York Times* and has been a commentator on NPR, SiriusXM, and for the BBC.