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Wilson, Woods offer two very different sculpture shows

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A head-on encounter with a tank is not what you expect in a pristine art gallery.

But there it is: almost 11 feet tall, its priapic gun barrel angled toward the ceiling and its ridged tracks (almost) rumbling on the floor.

It won't advance any farther or aim its gun at the visitor. But this tank in steel, a piece of sculpture by Houstonian Ed Wilson, emerges 28 inches from its wall support to suggest what soldiers and war-savaged civilians see in real life.

Wilson titled it *The Big Bully on the Block*. It's the centerpiece of his exhibition at Moody Gallery — his first solo in a commercial gallery — where the topic is war. It's not about blood and guts but rather the longer-lasting decimation war leaves in its wake. Elegant, masterful craftsmanship makes his works all the more terrifying.

In the series of nine square panels collectively titled *Evacuation Site*, Wilson cut and welded steel seamlessly to describe desolate city views. The low reliefs belie their visual and emotional depth.

No rubble, no refugees, no bodies litter the scenes. Instead, sharp angles and a pervasive emptiness enhance the sense of tragedy and foreboding. A street recedes between empty buildings to a distant horizon line. The steps of a curving staircase disappear through a doorway on the right while the alley they rise from (or descend to) continues off on the left. In a composition as austere as a black-and-white photograph of the Rothko Chapel, sharp edges defining doorways and windows speak of lifelessness.

The desolation and melancholy Wilson achieves echo Giorgio de Chirico's paintings as Europe entered World War I.

In a second series, arched like votive panels, Wilson describes single symbolic images: a woman encased by her burqa, a tall tower, a locomotive, a fist clenching a detonator. We know what they all mean. Like the first letter of an illustrated manuscript, each carries the seed of a complex narrative.

A small group show installed in an adjacent room complements Wilson's soliloquy. Featured are one work each by Moody's artists, among them an early Jim Love "put together," David McManaway's bell jar encasing Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph of the flag at Iwo Jima, and Luis Jimenez's terrifying gas masks cast in fiberglass. Sober and somber, yes, and shaped by artists who remind us to be human first.

At McMurtrey Gallery, Troy Woods offers a gentle panorama of lyrical free forms. He combines hard, cold metal with the warm gleam of polished exotic wood — ebony, maple, bloodwood — in sculptures