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Calibrating Official War Art and the War on Terror

DICK AVERNS

Abstract: This paper comprises primary research investigating contemporary official war art in Canada, Australia, Egypt, Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Findings are drawn from fieldwork conducted in these countries during the height of the so-called War on Terror, in 2008 and 2009. My thesis suggests that the degree to which nations are willing to provide military support for contemporary artists, to gain access to the frontlines of the War on Terror, serves as a barometer for how different nations either enable or disable conflict-related cultural canons. I demonstrate that official war art can provide important benchmarks for the value and health of liberal arts in liberal democracies.

BEING A WAR ARTIST offers a privileged view of humanity in conflict. As an artist selected to travel to the Middle East with the Canadian Forces Artists Program (CFAP), I was able to create not just lens-based artworks and sculpture, but also undertake research into a range of international war art programs. The resulting fieldwork forms the basis for identifying a series of benchmarks to assess, or calibrate, official war art in relation to the War on Terror.¹

My research suggests that the degree to which sovereign nations are willing to provide military support for contemporary artists to gain frontline access to the War on Terror, serves as a barometer for how different nations either enable or disable conflict-related cultural

¹ I acknowledge here that the American White House has now ceased to use the Global War on Terror (GWOT) argot, but of course related conflagrations have not ceased to exist.



Figure 1. *October 1973 War Panorama* (detail) c. late 1980s by Egyptian and North Korean military artist team. 360 degree panorama painting and diorama. [Photo Dick Averns, 2009.]

canons.² Put another way, the greater the degree to which a country fosters critical artistic enquiry in the realm of military conflict, the greater the hope for a functioning liberal democracy.³ For instance, in Egypt, only a year before the so called “Arab Spring,” the country’s official war art featured art of the state: uniformed military personnel operated as artists and took on commissions for government buildings and maintained historic murals of victorious battles (Fig 1).⁴ In contrast, Canada has professional civilian artists that are afforded

² My fieldwork covers select official war art programs spanning five continents: North America, Africa & Asia (The Middle East), Europe and Australia. Research has involved looking primarily at official war art programs. I have also researched unofficial artistic projects conducted independently of military or government support, but they do not feature here: the focus is on how federally sanctioned initiatives shape conflict and humanity.

³ This assumes liberal democracies still exist. There are arguments that the late capitalist empire may suggest otherwise, but this is not the purview of this paper. Instead, it takes dominant forms as *a priori*.

⁴ Garry Blight, Sheila Pulham and Paul Torpey, “Arab spring: an interactive timeline of Middle East protests,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>, accessed on January 12, 2014. Information on the Egyptian war art program was obtained via fieldwork, including an interview at the Egyptian Military Museum with a senior Egyptian war artist. This is expanded upon later in the paper.



Figure 2. Dick Averns. *Retired Observation Posts (MFO North Camp Sinai)*, 1/5, 2009. Archival digital print on aircraft grade aluminum. 40" x 56.5". [Collection of the Artist]

frontline access with the opportunity for self-representation and the adoption of more nuanced approaches (Fig 2).

CALIBRATING OFFICIAL WAR ART

By way of introduction, war art has historically been a form of government or military-sponsored record keeping, much of it figurative or representational.⁵ In terms of media, artworks have primarily been drawings and paintings or, in the case of war memorials, sculptures and reliefs.⁶ Many war artists have been soldiers on active service, or afforded access to the frontlines with military support.

Official war art receives wide and varying degrees of support across a spectrum that includes propaganda, socialist realism,

⁵ Again, it is important to recognize that this discussion focuses on official war art: that which has been supported federally and/or militarily. As per note two above, there are many other forms of art that address war, but they are not the focus here.

⁶ Visual artistry in this context is founded in traditions of fine art. Other forms of war art that could be expanded upon are photography, newsreels, film, theatre, music, journalism, war correspondence, poetry, and digital media.

military record keeping, and genuinely critical and incisive art. While military support for war artists is unlikely to foster investigative work, war art can nevertheless shape how conflicts are perceived. There is potential for artists in some theatres to portray what might otherwise remain unseen. Here I am thinking of Egyptian scholar Edward Said and his revisionary work on colonialism, necessitating a re-reading of cultural representations and their silence on different aspects of dominant conflict.⁷ Specifically, Said spoke of the need to “draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent, marginally present or ideologically represented.”⁸

For the more progressive contemporary war art programs, such re-presentations of conflict can be taken beyond the positioning of the two dominant protagonists, governments and their militaries, facilitating what Homi Bhabha has termed a new hybrid “third space.”⁹ This third space allows “other positions to emerge... and sets up new structures of authority.”¹⁰ Crucially, frameworks such as these foster critically engaged artistry: practices that push beyond record keeping or illustration, instead offering alternative visions that afford new positions through their critical value. From here, we need to see what form of third spaces may or may not exist.

My CFAP fieldwork marks the first time Canada deployed a non-fiction writer as a war artist. Some might see this as a culturally supported military endeavour, but either way the outcome is a project that I have termed “Calibrating Official War Art and the War on Terror.” I considered cultural initiatives from six countries –Canada, Egypt, Israel, Australia, the UK, and the US—and formulated seven benchmarks, or evaluative tenets. This framework comprises the basis for establishing my thesis as to how different nations either enable or disable conflict-related cultural canons, specifically official war art and the War on Terror in the context of liberal democracy. The seven benchmarks are as follows:

1. Whether artists are military or civilian
2. Access for artists to regions of conflict

⁷ Edward Said, “Narrative and Social Space,” *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 211.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

3. Selection process for artists
4. Duration of assignments
5. Range of predominant media
6. Role of remuneration
7. Arrangements for collection/exhibition/dissemination of works

In preparing to apply and analyze these benchmarks across diverse territories, it is necessary to address methodology regarding how the surveyed countries were selected. Canada, Australia and the UK have official war art programs dating back to the Great War, and as such comprise a Commonwealth triumvirate with extensive histories that could not be overlooked. The US, as the leading prosecutor in the War on Terror, is an obvious inclusion and shares a relationship with the aforementioned three countries that also participated in international conflict after 2001. These four countries also subscribe to varying forms of liberal democracy. Egypt and Israel may appear unlikely candidates for inclusion but were key in my fieldwork as countries that have tangential histories to the War on Terror, that are parties to a long-standing peace treaty, and that continue to wrestle with liberal democracy across their fractured and oft-times partitioned territories.

VISITING FIELDS OF CREATIVE DEPICTION

Before considering my research into other war art programs, I would like to highlight the democratic structure supporting the Canadian Forces Artists Program, one that is centred on an open public call for artist submissions.¹¹ Instead of a military figure or institutional curator selecting individuals, the current structure comprises a two-stage panel process including personnel from the Canadian War Museum, the National Gallery of Canada, the Department of National Defence, Canada Council for the Arts, a practicing artist,

¹¹ “CF Artist Program (CFAP),” *National Defence and the Canadian Forces*, last modified March 14, 2011, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/index-eng.asp>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

and a member of the Senate of Canada.¹² Whilst not unusual in the art world, it is novel for the military to be so open. I know of no comparable program with an open submission process for artists that also offers deployment with its country's military. Accordingly, the benchmarks being framed here should be considered important standards by which to evaluate other programs.

CFAP artists are volunteers "selected to capture the daily operations, personnel and spirit of the Canadian Forces" for which CFAP supports the "independent, creative work of professional Canadian artists of all cultures."¹³ Artists are generally afforded between 7-10 days of deployment (although some secure longer) plus "food and accommodation equal to the level provided Canadian Forces being deployed," but no money for materials or their time.¹⁴ There is a contract for deployment, and "National Defence may request from the artist a tangible artistic contribution to be negotiated at the time of selection," but there is no acquisition budget.¹⁵ This leaves artists with possible avenues of raising funds, donating work, or securing an acquisition grant.

My fieldwork undertaken during deployment with CFAP commenced in Egypt in 2009. Although not seemingly involved in the War on Terror (hereafter termed GWOT, for Global War on Terror), Egypt, by its geography, proximity to Palestine and the locus of suicide bombings in 2005-2006 is relevant. For instance, on 25 July, 2005 the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheik was hit by suicide bombers, killing eighty-eight persons. Earlier in April 2005, two suicide bombers attacked vehicles belonging to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), and in 2006, two roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were planted on the approach to MFO North Camp. During an interview I conducted in Egypt (source protected) it was stated that there were

¹² The committee structure has expanded since my selection for 2008-2009 and now also includes representatives from the Diefenbunker Museum and *Legion Magazine*. The CFAP website has a page describing their committees, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/cfap-pafc-eng.asp#com>, accessed on July 7, 2016.

¹³ CF Artists Program (CFAP). <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/index-eng.asp>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

concerns that Al Qaeda were operating in the Sinai Peninsula.¹⁶ More recently there is little doubt that this region has been hit by terrorist activity. The downing of a passenger jet over the Sinai in October 2015, in an attack claimed by the jihadist Islamic State, was well reported. Less known is that in September 2012, MFO North Camp was stormed by sixty to seventy attackers “described as Bedouin jihadists, possibly affiliated with Al-Qaeda,” requiring the Egyptian army to regain control and restore order.¹⁷

My trip was overseen by the Department of National Defence’s Directorate of History and Heritage in Ottawa. I had proposed both a photographic and written account to highlight how “art and military activity can re-frame the War on Terror.”¹⁸ When I was offered the chance to deploy to the Sinai, I realized how few Canadians were aware that Canada has stationed troops in Egypt for decades, with a contingent remaining to this day. More specifically, the Multinational Force and Observers is a little-known international peacekeeping organization headquartered in Rome.¹⁹ It is unconnected to the UN or NATO and deploys more than 1,600 troops from eleven nations.²⁰ The MFO is responsible for overseeing the security provisions of the 1979 Jimmy Carter-brokered (Camp David) peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Thus arose the opportunity to access a relatively unseen aspect of Canadian peacekeeping, at the centre of what one soldier described as “a tinderbox.”²¹

Before deploying with troops in the Sinai, I visited The October 1973 War Panorama in Cairo: a large museum commemorating Egypt’s crossing of the Suez Canal to fight Israel, leading to the

¹⁶ Tamim Elam, “Insight: Mimicking al Qaeda, militant threat grows in Sinai,” *Reuters*, August 13, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/13/us-egypt-sinai-militants-idUSBRE87CoP620120813>, accessed on January 12, 2014. Since my visit and the onset of the Arab Spring, specifically the deposing of long-time leader Hosni Mubarak and changes in Egyptian governance, international concerns about Al Qaeda operating in Sinai have been more widely reported.

¹⁷ “Gunmen attack Sinai HQ of MFO peacekeeping force, four injured,” *Times of Israel*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/gunmen-attack-sinai-headquarters-of-mfo-peacekeeping-force-several-reported-killed/>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

¹⁸ This quote comes from my application to the CFAP, November 2007.

¹⁹ “Welcome to...,” *Multinational Force and Observers*, <http://mfo.org/>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

²⁰ *Ibid.* As of 2014 the Multinational Force and Observers draws from 13 countries.

²¹ This quote came from my fieldwork in the Middle East. Subsequent events have proven the tinderbox analogy as accurate.



Figure 3. Dick Aaverns. *October 1973 War Panorama (Cairo)*, 1/5 2009. Archival digital print on aircraft grade aluminum. 40" x 60". [Private collection]

eventual reclaiming of the Sinai peninsula as part of the Yom Kippur War. Egyptian President Mubarak had seen a similar panorama in North Korea in the early 1980s and was inspired to seek North Korean support to build a panorama in Cairo.²² The venue has echoes of socialist realism but is undeniably emotive, comprising a central 360-degree painting replete with revolving auditorium, exterior wall reliefs and a landscape of military hardware (Fig 3). The works are at once monuments and propaganda; representational murals, figurative reliefs and monolithic relics all relate to many ongoing commemorative war art practices.

At the Egyptian National Military Museum I met one of Egypt's contemporary war artists, Colonel Mahmoud Ayman, a uniformed soldier whose work as a sculptor is his full-time job. I learned that North Korean military artists also mentored this program, although Egyptian forces have trained their current crop of war artists, all of whom are serving troops. Content is predominantly realist and figurative: busts of heroes from the past, public wall reliefs and

²² The involvement of North Korea in the creation and production of this panorama was researched via fieldwork both at the monument and through an interview with Colonel Mahmoud Ayman, an Egyptian official war artist at the Egyptian National Military Museum.



Figure 4. Dick Averns. *Lookout (West Bank)*, 1/5 2009. Archival digital print on aircraft grade aluminum. 24" x 36" caption. [Collection of the artist]

objective sculptures for government buildings. As part of a practice better considered as military art, Ayman and his peers tend to work toward fulfilling design briefs rather than creating their own content. So while subject matter is overtly patriotic, conceptual and critical value is limited. Artists are paid full-time wages and guaranteed an audience for their work, albeit art of the state rather than art destined for a contemporary gallery.

By contrast, upon travelling to MFO North Camp I was able to photograph freely on base, as long as the content related to the work of the Canadian Forces and my lens did not point outside the wire. Further afield I was able to journey alone, hiring private guides to access areas where solo travel was more difficult, such as the Palestinian West Bank (Fig 4).

Turning to Israel, also part of my CFAP trip, we find a locus of ongoing conflict that predates the GWOT, but is geopolitically implicated. Visiting the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) History Museum, I spoke with a museum guide and it became clear that, for Israel, the notion of contemporary war artistry was slightly bizarre if not anathema. I was directed to view some historical portrait paintings, but the guide's final quip was most telling. "We don't have time



Figure 5. Unknown. Israeli roadside memorial to Colonel David “Mickey” Marcus’s 1948 military “Burma Road” construction supporting convoys to relieve siege of Jerusalem. Highway 1, near Latrun. [Photo Dick Averns, 2009]

for art in this army!”²³ This aside, in touring the museum, I found reference to some major sculptural memorials located near Latrun on Highway 1 between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv that I subsequently visited and photographed. Here, not far from the West Bank, one finds a commemorative work in a series of stripped-down armoured cars from a 1947-48 mission led by Colonel David “Mickey” Marcus during the First Arab-Israeli War (Fig 5). The museum text panel tells us: “The vehicles on the roadside...bear witness to the gallant men who lost their lives attempting to get supplies to the beleaguered city of Jerusalem.”²⁴

The Museum exhibit did not include information on the artist team behind the project, and my subsequent repeated enquires to the IDF spokesperson on the nature of contemporary war art remained unanswered. This might be in keeping with Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s line that “Israel never responds, never confirms and

²³ Fieldwork conversation with military conscript IDF History Museum guide, Tel Aviv-Yafo, August 19, 2009.

²⁴ Text Panel from IDF History Museum, Tel Aviv-Yafo, August 19, 2009.

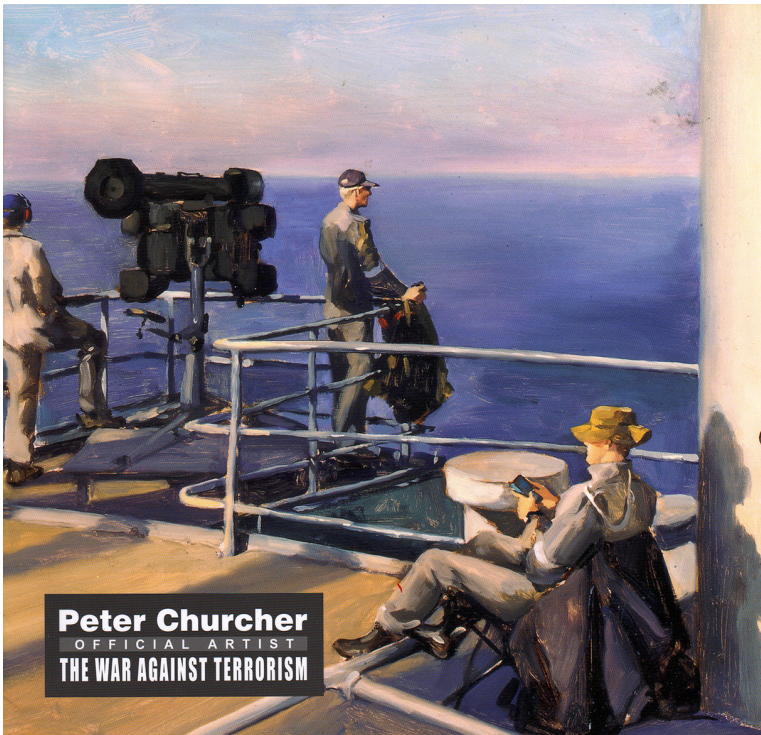


Figure 6. Peter Churcher. *Peter Churcher, Official Artist: The War Against Terrorism*. Catalogue Cover, Australian War Memorial, depicting *The RBS-70 afternoon watch, HMAS Kanimbla*, 2002. Oil on board, 56 x 66 cm, acquired under official war art scheme. [Permission to reproduce courtesy Australian War Memorial (ARTT91761). Photo Dick Averns 2009]

never denies.”²⁵ Israel may be a liberal democracy that has many cultural institutions, but it appears too conflicted for war art to be seen as a cultural imperative.

Having looked at the war art programs associated directly with my CFAP deployment, I will now address my fieldwork in Australia, the UK, and US. In January 2008, when I was first selected for the CFAP, I visited the Australian War Memorial (AWM), a major museum in the nation’s capital, Canberra. As I learned from curator Janda Gooding, the AWM is explicitly dedicated to commemoration.²⁶ This is

²⁵ Associated Press, “Israeli FM Defends Mossad over Hamas Hit,” *CBS News*, February 17, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/17/world/main6215857.shtml>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

²⁶ Janda Gooding, Curator, *Australian War Memorial*, fieldwork interview with the author, Canberra, January 10, 2008.

not the case for all programs under discussion: the US and Egypt are in some ways, but Canada and the UK less so.

The AWM's war art practices have varied over the years, as is the case with most countries I've reviewed. Around the turn of this century, the AWM's approach was to research specific theatres, create a short list, check the output and reliability of artists, and then make offers to the artists they thought suitable.²⁷ However, this led to some artists declining assignments due to the dangers of visiting frontlines such as Afghanistan.²⁸ Consequently, in 2006, the AWM began to approach high-profile artists whose practices appeared suitable in order to ascertain their willingness, and then tailored projects based on mutual agreement.

The selected artists receive a five-day orientation with the military and are paid for their time and materials in exchange for their subsequent work being acquired under what the AWM calls their "Official War Art Scheme."²⁹ There is also an AWM acquisition budget for acquiring additional works. The AWM are committed to programming exhibitions for their contemporary war artists with similar support for solo publications, the latter being a standout factor.

One high-profile artist is Peter Churcher who created the craftily titled show *The War Against Terrorism* (Fig 6). Claire Baddeley and Steve Gower recount in the AWM's catalogue that in 2002 Churcher spent three weeks with the Royal Australian Navy in the Persian Gulf and a fortnight with their Air Force on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, the latter being a base for sorties into Afghanistan.³⁰ Churcher's work was exhibited in the AWM Special Exhibitions Gallery (there is no dedicated art gallery) from June–October 2002 and documented in a twenty-four page colour catalogue.

The collaborative photography and painting duo, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, saw their show, *Framing Conflict: Iraq and Afghanistan*, tour to twelve galleries across seven states between

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Australian Official War Artists," *Australian War Memorial*, http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/war_artists/artists.asp, accessed on January 12, 2014.

³⁰ Claire Baddeley and Steve Gower, *Peter Churcher, Official Artist: The War Against Terrorism* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2002), 9 & 2, respectively.

2009 and 2012.³¹ Like Churcher, their work appears as a record of “activities and experiences of the Australian troops.”³² In this sense, it seems at first to follow a traditional format, figurative and two-dimensional, although the artists state “we aren’t documentary photographers nor is that our task, even though our work might resemble that...[the work is a] portrait of force, of the hard edge of globalization.”³³ Notably, curator Janda Gooding advised me that the AWM was considering expanding media options. Since that time, Shaun Gladwell’s Afghanistan output included some video art, while aboriginal artist Tony Albert has created camouflaged text-based paintings.³⁴

To conclude, there is a strong commitment from the AWM and Australian Defence Force to provide substantial access for artists and promote their culture via war art nationwide. But whilst artists are paid for their efforts, they are all handpicked established practitioners.

Turning to the UK, I visited London’s Imperial War Museum (IWM) in December 2008. The IWM has extensive galleries and excellent holdings, particularly of contemporary art. The program has seen more than forty commissions since 1977 operating via a process that, since 1992, has required no formal sanctioning from the military. Indeed, in 2001 “the name of the committee was changed from Artistic Records Committee to Art Commissions Committee to reflect the newer emphasis on commissioning rather than creating records.”³⁵ This arms-length approach managed by the IWM, not

³¹ “Framing Conflict: Iraq and Afghanistan – Lyndell Brown and Charles Green,” *Australian War Memorial*, <http://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/raming/>, accessed on February 18, 2010.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “Extracts from Artist Statement, 2007,” *Australian War Memorial*, <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/raming/statement.asp>, accessed on December 23, 2016. For additional reading see Susan Cahill, “The Art of War: Painted Photographs and Australia’s “War on Terror”” in *RACAR: revue d’art canadienne / Canadian Art Review Vol. 39, No. 2, Photography and War / La photographie et la guerre (2014)*, pp. 71-87.

³⁴ Janda Gooding, Curator, *Australian War Memorial*, fieldwork interview with the author, Canberra, January 10, 2008. Shaun Gladwell Afghanistan. <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/gladwell/>, accessed on December 23, 2016.

Tony Albert, <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/P10028711/#biography>, accessed on December 23, 2016.

³⁵ Jenny Woods, Curator, Imperial War Museum. Phone interview with the author, May 2006. Reconfirmed in interview with the author, IWM, London, December 18, 2008.



Figure 7. Langlands & Bell in association with Tom Barker V/Space LAB. *The House of Osama bin Laden*, (detail). 2003. Digital installation. [Courtesy of Langlands & Bell]

a military wing, allows for a high degree of artistic freedom and innovation, as indicated by their recent projects linked to the GWOT.

In October 2002, Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell—artists known for their collaborative practice investigating links between art, architecture and social control—travelled to Afghanistan. Their research included making a dangerous journey to Daruntah, where they were able to extensively photograph and video a former dwelling occupied by Osama bin Laden.³⁶ Back in London, Langlands and Bell transformed both Osama’s mountain hideaway and their imagery into a site of circulation and exchange: a virtual reality digital environment.³⁷ Museum visitors could tour Osama’s quarters from afar, reminiscent of how early photo-pioneers deployed the stereoscope to create virtual renderings of foreign lands. *The House of Osama bin Laden* (2003) led to these contemporary war artists being short-listed for the 2004 Turner Prize³⁸ (Fig. 7). Unlike the Australian

³⁶ “The House of Osama bin Laden - Langlands & Bell,” *Imperial War Museum Collections*, <http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.g13>, February 18, 2011, Collections information also at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1360021375>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

³⁷ Ben Langlands & Nikki Bell. Email interview with the author, May 2006.

³⁸ “Turner Prize: Year by Year,” *Tate Gallery*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain-other-venues/exhibitionseries/turner-prize-series/turner-prize-year-year>, accessed on January 12, 2014.



Figure 8. Steve McQueen. *Queen and Country* (installation view). 2007. Artist stamps and casement. [© Imperial War Museums (ART17290). Permission to reproduce courtesy Steve McQueen via Thomas Dane Gallery and IWM License number LIC-000011674]

commemorative examples that are predominantly representational two-dimensional forms, Langlands & Bell created more nuanced and coded systems of representation.

There is a criticality to this work, both in the choice of media and the manner in which audiences experience *The House*. Digital media are increasingly used to manipulate constituents, be they gallery-goers or enemies in a theatre of war. For instance, military operatives increasingly rely on such technologies, often remotely from the field of combat, to pull the trigger. Relationships between absence and presence raise critical questions for all involved.

IWM artists invariably rely on the military to provide transportation and logistical support. In Iraq this was a stumbling block for video artist Steve McQueen. Although he was able to travel to southern Iraq in 2003, security concerns prevented McQueen from reaching Baghdad.³⁹ In the interim McQueen moved from video art to mail art, creating a series of artist stamps called *Queen and Country*, each edition bearing the portrait of a fallen UK Soldier (Fig. 8). McQueen's idea was to have them adopted by the Royal Mail as currency of the

³⁹ Jenny Woods, Curator, Imperial War Museum. Phone interview with the author, May 2006

realm, but to date this has not occurred despite the project receiving widespread acclaim from critics, curators, families of the fallen and a broader public.⁴⁰ Again, the critically engaged nature of this project comes to the fore. Its media is conceptually accessible to a wide audience as portraiture that combines form with function in a manner that could quite easily enter national circulation and anyone's home on the front of an envelope. Conversely, the inability or unwillingness of the Royal Mail and the British government to give their seal of approval seriously undermines the currency of McQueen's work as public art.⁴¹

To sum up, the IWM pursues its official war art in tandem with its commitment to contemporary art for which artists are handpicked through curatorial invitation. As in Australia, artists are civilian and receive remuneration for their work. Military assistance is provided for travel and artists have some choice in their destination. While there is not a regular program of deployment, the work produced can be seen as both dynamic and progressive in terms of media and content, with a likelihood of broad dissemination via the IWM's national network of galleries and loans.

And so to my final area of review: the United States. Like Egypt, the US has soldier artists known as combat artists. These personnel are not permanent artists but seconded, as in the instance of the "Army Staff Artist Program."⁴² Henrietta Snowden and Darrold Peters are two such artists with works in the Center of Military History's "Global War on Terrorism."⁴³ It appears healthy in contrast to the Israel Defense Forces that the US Army fosters artists' endeavours. But the work is firmly in the realm of representational, figurative, and predominantly two-dimensional work that is for the most part

⁴⁰ "Queen and Country," *The Art Fund*, <http://www.artfund.org/queenandcountry/index.php>, accessed on January 12, 2014,

⁴¹ Dick Avers, London, UK," *Akimbo*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.akimbo.ca/akimblog/?id=382>, accessed on January 12, 2014. My analysis of *Queen and Country* published in an art review.

⁴² "Army Art Program A Brief History," *Center of Military History United States Army*, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/museums/art-hist.html>, accessed on February 18, 2010.

⁴³ "Army Artists Look at the War on Terrorism, 2001 to the Present," *Center of Military History United States Army*, http://www.history.army.mil/books/wot_artwork/wot_artbook.html, accessed on February 18, 2010.



Figure 9. SFC Darrold Peters. *Knock Knock*, 2006. Digital Oils, Corel Painter IX.5. [U.S. Army Center of Military History. In United States Army Art Collection, Sergeant First Class Darrold Peters, Online Gallery Exhibit, <http://www.history.army.mil/art/peters/peters2.htm> (accessed August 5, 2016)]

illustrative (Fig 9). Similar to Egypt, this work appears more as military art rather than contemporary, critical war art. Further, this program does not enable civilian deployment. This is in contrast to the program's antecedent; the WWII *Life* magazine artists were civilians who received the same War Department access afforded to journalists and film correspondents.⁴⁴ That being said, I am aware that freelance artists can request Afghanistan access (at their own cost) through International Security Assistance Force Public Affairs. But this of course is not specific to depicting US Forces.

In 2009, the School of the Visual Arts in New York hosted the conference *Visions of War: the arts represent conflict*, where I was able to interview two curators attending from the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Virginia. Vickie Stuart-Hill and Joan Thomas both work at the United States Marine Corps Combat Art Gallery in Quantico, a venue that deals with a mostly historical collection of two-dimensional figurative and representational works. The collection

⁴⁴ "Army Art Program A Brief History," *Center of Military History United States Army*, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/museums/art-hist.html>, accessed on February 18, 2010,

includes some works by non-military artists from the Vietnam era, indicated by museum records which show that “Colonel [Raymond] Henri identified and deployed dozens of Marine and civilian artists to Southeast Asia.”⁴⁵ Further, the museum is in the process of expanding, with both Thomas and Stuart-Hill engaged by the possibility of including more works by civilian artists.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the current emphasis is more on commemoration than the critical concerns of the contemporary art world, and while artists are remunerated, this is primarily in their capacity as salaried forces personnel.

In terms of dissemination, the US combat artists can expect their work to enter into the collection of the forces with which they are employed. After all, like Egypt, that is what these artists are being paid for: to make military art for the state. Compared to Canada, all the other war art programs discussed here are quite different. While many people would argue that artists should be treated professionally, which would include remuneration, the Canadian structure of having volunteer artists seemingly bucks this trend. The same people might also argue (indeed some have) that this is a shortcoming of the CFAP; yet the quandary is that if artists are paid, the paymaster may influence the results. The upside is that Canada’s public volunteer war artists enjoy a greater degree of creative freedom and latitude in what is produced and subsequently circulated. So too, potentially, are the volatile issues of public or political influence better managed. If a CFAP artist were to create a challenging or controversial work, or should political cuts be suggested, the public purse would not have been responsible for directly funding the costs of art production.

As an entity without a public venue, the CFAP organizes short-term biennial showings in Ottawa at venues including the Cartier Square Drill Hall, and more recently the Diefenbunker, Canada’s Cold War Museum. Additionally, the CFAP collaborates with the Canadian War Museum to organize periodic exhibitions. *A Brush With War: Military Art from Korea to Afghanistan* toured Canada

⁴⁵ “USMC Combat Art Gallery,” *The National Museum of the Marine Corps*, http://www.usmcmuseum.com/Exhibits_CombatArt.asp, accessed on February 18, 2010,

⁴⁶ Conversation with USMC Combat Art Gallery curators, Vickie Stuart-Hill and Joan Thomas and the author. Algonquin Hotel, New York City, 22 October 2009.

to six venues in four provinces between 2009-2011.⁴⁷ It featured works from the CFAP and its antecedents, plus some loans. Much of the work is two-dimensional and figurative but Gertrude Kearns' *Somalia 2, Without Conscience* (1996), depicting Canadian troops murdering a captive in Somalia, is certainly critical.⁴⁸ This fits with the current and extremely progressive mandate of the CFAP: "welcom[ing] painters, sculptors, and printers as well as other professional artists such as musicians, actors and writers...[to] help usher in a new era of Canadian military art."⁴⁹

By way of example, for the 2008-2009 CFAP, lens-based practitioner Althea Thauberger visited Canadian troops in Kandahar—a female artist concentrating on the role of female soldiers in a country struggling to enable female human rights! For my part, rather than trade in nationalism and monuments to war, the paradigm of peacekeeping is, I propose, analogous to the counter-monument in relation to war.⁵⁰ The counter-monument takes shape when a particular architecture or structure may be seen as an abstract memorial, one that looks forward to the possibility of change, rather than back in time to the fixity of bygone events. Counter-monuments also seek to activate an audience to participate in such change. Potentially, the art that emerges through the CFAP serves to enable that which might otherwise remain unseen or silent to become visible, leading to the possibility for opening up new third spaces.

CONCLUSION

Connecting the dots in this paper is not simply about using art to portray the GWOT. Rather, I seek to highlight varying degrees of democracy and criticality evident within these contemporary war

⁴⁷ Dick Averns, "A Brush With War: The Art of Conflict," *Canadian Art*, March 17, 2011, http://www.canadianart.ca/reviews/2011/03/17/brush_with_war/, accessed on January 12, 2014. My ongoing fieldwork into Canadian war art appears in this published review.

⁴⁸ This exhibit only includes a photo reproduction of her work.

⁴⁹ "CF Artist Program (CFAP)," *National Defence and the Canadian Forces*, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/index-eng.asp>, accessed on January 12, 2014.

⁵⁰ Dick Averns, "War and Peace: Monument and Counter Monument," *On Site Review*, no. 22 (2009): 64-5. My CFAP fieldwork positing counter-monuments appears in this publication.



Figure 10. Dick Averns. *Canadian Airman Duff* (MFO North Camp Sinai), 1/5 2009. Archival digital print on aircraft grade aluminum. 24" x 36". [Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts]

art programs. My argument is that they are valuable benchmarks for calibrating degrees of freedom within liberal democracies. To articulate this I have restructured the benchmarks outlined at the outset of my paper. Key factors for calibrating freedom and criticality include:

1. Support for civilian artists, as in Australia, Canada and the UK.
2. Open access to war art programs, as seen in Canada.
3. The broadening of critically engaged contemporary art, clearly seen in Canada and the UK, for which diversity of media and artistic disciplines can play a positive role.
4. Access to regions of conflict, fostered by most programs.
5. The regularity of selection and deployment (factors perhaps more important than duration of individual deployment). Canada and the UK are prominent among civilian programs. Military artists such as in Egypt and the US are afforded endemic access but the work is generally less critically engaged.
6. The degree to which dissemination is fostered, as varies from program to program, but for which Australia and the UK have strong support.

7. The role of full time remuneration, seen in Australia and the UK; plus, of course, Egypt and America that employ soldier artists.

I conclude here that official war art programs can bring both visibility and criticality to trans-cultural issues of our time, even as we experience ongoing threats to liberal democracy. Ironically, while such programs can provide a peaceful demonstration of the value of the humanities, they also point to the almost lost art of peacekeeping within humanity (Fig 10).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dick Averns is an interdisciplinary artist and writer teaching studio art, art history, and theory at the University of Calgary. His deployment as an official war artist to the Middle East marked the first time Canada selected a non-fiction writer to this role.

His research has been disseminated in Canada, USA, Australia, UK and Middle East. Notable exhibitions include *Ambivalence Blvd* (multiple venues including Glenbow, Artspeak and YYZ,), *Terms of Engagement* (Esker Foundation, Agnes Etherington, MSVU Art Gallery, curated by Christine Conley), *War Art Now* (The Founders' Gallery), and *Brick + Mortar International Video Art Festival*, curated by Denise Markonish.

Notable publications include “War Art in the Face of The Project for The New American Century: A Postmodern Rake’s Progress” in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence*, “In Deference of a New Diabolique” for the international exhibition catalogue *Diabolique*, and “War + Peace: Monument and Counter-Monument” for *On Site Review*.