

Author's accepted manuscript (postprint)

Introduction: War and Creativity

Presiado, M. & Jacob, F.

Published in: War and Art: The Portrayal of Destruction and Mass Violence  
DOI: 10.30965/9783657702923\_002

Available online: 27 July 2020

Citation:

Presiado, M. & Jacob, F. (2020). B Introduction: War and Creativity. In M. Presiado & F. Jacob (Eds.), War and Art: The Portrayal of Destruction and Mass Violence (p. 1-25). Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh. doi: 10.30965/9783657702923\_002

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh in War and Art: The Portrayal of Destruction and Mass Violence on 27/07/2020, available online: <https://www.schoeningh.de/view/book/edcoll/9783657702923/BP000006.xml>

## **Introduction: War and Creativity**

Mor Presiado and Frank Jacob

If war really, as according to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (ca. 535-475 BCE), were the father of all things (Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι), it would explain why so many art works are related to it. In our imaginations, however, war is the complete opposite of art. While war oppresses, destroys, and annihilates, art is seen as a realm of creation, freedom, and creativity. Art is Eros, our life force and the drive of sexuality, while war is Thanatos, the embodiment of the instinct of death and annihilation. However, in fact, war is another face of creation and creativity, stimulating creation due to destruction. It is consequently no surprise that the history of art reveals its interrelationship with war from the beginning, as war has always been one of its most fundamental subjects. The first stories human beings expressed with their art work were often related to the commemoration of acts of war, of victories of ancient tribes in feuds with others.

Violence is a basic element of the human psyche and an inherent component of any creative endeavor, especially since, to quote Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), “[t]he very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it.” The psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall (1920-2011) suggests that art is a sublimation of aggressive impulses. The creative urge is intense, and creative individuals use their power to impose and externalize their thoughts, dreams, and nightmares about the real world through artistic acts. Moreover, art itself is created by strong inner feelings that externalize intense experiences. In other words, art is generated by violent internal impulses and at the same time responds to expressions of individual or collective violence, such as war. The expression of war experiences through art consequently can also function as a form of trauma therapy for both artist and spectator. Art can serve as a tool for raising suppressed and unprocessed content and in other cases it provides its creator with perspective and conscious control of his/her past.

The following words of the German expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), written during World War I, highlight the close connection the artist identified between creativity and war:

I believe that many of those who stand on the battleground discovered humanity and then are able to appreciate the expression of human feeling in art. The development of these men and creators is parallel because both set apart their ego in order to fulfill this noble task.

Kirchner volunteered for military service in August 1914, and in May 1915 began his service as an artillery driver in Manstein Field Artillery Regiment No. 75. In September of the same year, he was discharged from the army against an unclear background of mental and physical collapse. In the years that followed, he was hospitalized in a sanatorium several times until he was diagnosed with advanced syphilis. In his *Self-portrait as a Soldier* (1915) (Fig. 1), he described the artistic and existential crisis that led him to enlist in the army. In this work, he is depicted seated in his studio wearing an army uniform. On his right are a canvas painted black and a nude model. His skin is yellow, and he appears to be ill. His eyes are blank, a cigarette droops from his mouth, and his right arm is amputated and bleeding. Kirchner did not really lose his arm in the war (in fact he never took part in battle), but his depiction of himself in uniform next to a blank canvas with an amputated arm symbolizes a crisis of a loss of personal identity and a sense of castration as a man and as an artist. Kirchner conveys the intense feelings of depression that subdued his life drive or Eros and creativity as a result of his enlistment in the army, but actually it seems that his anguish was what led him to create one of his masterpieces, and in fact one of the most widely discussed artistic responses to World War I.

Fig. 1

Fig. 1: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69 x 61 cm, Oberlin College, Ohio, USA /Charles F. Olney, Fund/Bridgeman Images

Another masterpiece created that year by the German painter Otto Dix (1891-1969) exemplifies the duality of Eros and Thanatos within us. Dix was drafted into the German army in 1915 and trained as an artilleryman and machine-gunner. He fought on both fronts and was wounded. In *Self-portrait as Mars* (Fig. 2), Dix depicts himself as the god of war and war as arousing the creative instincts within him. Around him fly city buildings, doors, windows, a horse galloping away in fright, bloody faces, and cemetery

crosses. His eyes and mouth are distorted and abstract power lines are cast outward from his face. Dix's war is an apocalyptic spectacle and it reaches beyond the battlefield to invade the natural world as well as the mechanized, urban world. This work is generally regarded as a manifestation of the expressionist attitude of the period, when war was perceived as a cruel, destructive, and chaotic force that would, nonetheless, lead to revival, change, and renewal.

Fig. 2

Fig. 2: Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait as Mars*, 1915, 68 x 53.5 cm, Städtische Sammlungen Freital.

The war amplified Dix's creativity and he became a very prolific artist. He produced hundreds of sketches and portraits, and painted several oil paintings during this period. Influenced by its sights, he even updated his style as he turned to futurism (with which he had become acquainted before the war). The innovative fracturing and fragmentation of futurism that appear in *Self-portrait as Mars* seemed to him best suited for the treatment of the subject of war, and his choice of this style was probably related to the enthusiasm of the members of the influential futuristic avant-garde movement, who declared in 1909: "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman."

Later, the sights of battle and the long war that was revealed in all its horror led to Dix's disillusionment (as they did for many of his contemporaries) and he became one of the most prominent voices of anti-war German art after World War I. In his later works, almost nothing remained of his enthusiasm for the aesthetics and thrill of war. What persisted was the unrefined (but no less creative) sublimation of the pain and horror of the battlefields and of the disintegration of German society between the two world wars.

The hypnotic works of Dix and Kirchner, like many other works of war art throughout history, disprove the renowned maxim "When the cannons roar the muses are silent." Art historian Gideon Ofrat suggests that the assumption that the muses are silent during wartime is based on classical and romantic concepts that claim that the muse, that is, the artist, needs quiet to make his voice heard. The modern art world perceives the artist as isolated and alone in his studio. His thoughts and aspirations are in a detached sphere, far from everyday politics and the sounds of war. Ofrat also

argues that this statement is based on the assumption that the muses are so sensitive, so frail and spiritual, that the destructive tumult of war and the oppressive power of rulers paralyze them. In other words, art lacks power. This approach is further based on the notion that in times of war neither the public nor the artist has the leisure or inspiration to create or consume art. Art is reserved for times of peace.

However, history reveals that not only are the muses not silent (especially in modern and contemporary times)—they cry out. Even under the most severe conditions of oppression and terror, artists have created art and often been abused by their governments to create art in the name of war, or to achieve propaganda victories. Another example of war-related art are the works created in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. In the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, prisoners created works that they hid and even smuggled out of the camp as personal testimonies and to point out the perpetrators of the crimes committed there (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

Fig. 3: Wincenty Gawron, *Marching out to Abbruch*, 1942, pencil on paper, 24 x 32.3 cm, Collections of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

They also drew portraits of prisoners, which were often the only memento that remained of them. Artists in the camp worked under the threat of severe punishment (including executions) if they were caught creating art not ordered by the camp authorities. They labored under inhuman conditions that included selection (the process of separating prisoners to be sent to their deaths from those who could work), horrific violence, starvation, slavery, exhaustion, cold, and filth. It was nearly impossible to obtain materials, and the quest to obtain them demonstrated how important it was to these artists to create and bear witness. They used any materials they could find, from sheets of drawing paper and cardboard to the margins of used newspapers and leaflets and tiny bits of pencil and charcoal. Art such as that which was created in Auschwitz is resistance art, which employs not weapons, but rather *spiritual resistance* against the attempt to dehumanize prisoners.

Art in Auschwitz is, of course, an extreme example of resistance art that was actually produced in a time of war and genocide. The theme of war in art is naturally

much broader, and includes works created using many diverse strategies and not always from the standpoint of opposition. Some of it was initiated by the military or authorities that dispatched artists to battle zones for documentation or propaganda purposes. But often, war art, especially from modern and contemporary times, like the art addressed in this book, is independent art by individuals (combatants or civilians) who respond overtly or covertly to war, and their personal works often express an emotional appeal that warns against its calamities.

### **The Personal Voice and a Brief History of War Art in the West**

The personal voice has not had a presence throughout the long history of war art, which began in the early stages of human civilization. In the following pages, we will trace this history in the West by briefly reviewing a number of canonical masterpieces on the subject and focusing on the fundamental role played by modernity in introducing the personal individual voice into art on the theme of war.

In her book *War and Art*, Laura Brandon suggests that characteristics of war art can be identified even in cave paintings that depict people with weapons alongside animals. These descriptions began to be created in light of the need of these prehistoric humans to defend their territories against invaders, both animals and other humans. The fact that these paintings exist reveals that the basic human-social need for defense merged with another human-biological-social need, i.e. art.

While the weapons depicted in cave paintings may also be interpreted as hunting tools, in more established cultures the first explicit representations of war appeared. One of the best-known of these is the *Standard of Ur*, created in the third millennium BCE in Sumer, in southern Mesopotamia, where independent city-states had begun to thrive. It consists of a small wooden box with a cruel depiction of war on one side and on the other a depiction of the subsequent peace that ushered in wealth and prosperity. In both scenes the largest figure is that of the great ruler, who is victorious and brings peace to his people. The very design of the box and the ruler's dominance within the war scene highlights the early understanding of kings that art plays an important role in creating shared historical memory and that establishing the image of a common enemy promotes social unity and the construction of the ruler as an omnipotent figure. Another important early work is the *Narmer Palette* from ancient Egypt, dated to 3200-3000 BCE. At its center appears Narmer, who united Upper and Lower Egypt, defeating his enemies. In the upper part of both sides of the palette, the cow god Bat, who is identified with the

iconography of the unification of Egypt, is depicted. The depiction of symbols of divinity alongside kings was not unique to ancient Egypt. These images gave divine-religious validity to the control of the kings and the wars that ultimately established their rule. The idea behind these ancient works was reconstructed over and over again for thousands of years in many different civilizations that created canonical works that addressed war and rulers' victories over their enemies.

These works could have been realistic or religious allegories, or even both. The Greeks, for example, used myths to describe the superiority of Greek society over its enemies. *The Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths* in the Temple of Zeus and Olympia (469-468 BCE) depicts the victory of the legendary Lapith people over the Centaurs, which symbolized the victory of the Greeks over the Persians. The Hellenists, who succeeded the Greeks, used the same allegorical method. The images in the great frieze of the *Battle of the Gods and Giants* (197-159 BCE) at the altar of Zeus and Athena in Pergamon, associated with Eumenes II, son and successor of Attalus I, Pergamon's ruler in Asia Minor, are used to praise the victories of Attalus's father. The gods symbolize his armies and the giants his enemies. In the Roman art that came after the Hellenistic culture, a combination of allegory and reality appears in the *Arch of Titus* in Rome (82 CE), dedicated by Emperor Domitian to commemorate the conquests of his brother Titus, including his victory over the Jews in the Great Revolt in Jerusalem that ended in 70 CE. In the passage at the Arch of Titus is a relief that realistically reconstructs the spoils of Jerusalem being brought into Rome and an additional relief with an allegorical depiction of Titus in a triumphant procession riding a chariot with four horses accompanied by the goddess of victory.

The art of the Middle Ages, which lasted from about 400 CE to 1400 CE, focused mainly on Christian themes and the spiritual world. Nonetheless, it also includes works that address war, especially from the second millennium onward. Large paintings were supposed to document military victories by the ruling powers. One of the most remarkable works of the period is the *Bayeux Tapestry*, a 70.4 meter embroidered carpet that tells the story of William the Conqueror's conquest of England in 1066, after which he became king. The carpet's magnificent embroidery tells the story of the war as a detailed narrative without symbolism or allegory. Here too we see continuity—war art commissioned and undertaken to memorialize the leader.

According to Brandon, the Renaissance in Italy, which began in the 14th century, marked a stylistic and iconographic turning point. This change also applied to war art in

the sense that it became more detailed and grandiose and included more genres, such as military portraits and scenes of detailed battles not seen in Western art since the Greek and Roman periods. One of the many examples of this period is the monumental painting of Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), *The Battle of San Romano* (1435-1460), which depicts events surrounding a battle that took place in 1432 between the forces of Florence and those of Siena.

During the late Renaissance and the Baroque period, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European society became militarized both on the continent itself and overseas. Great artists such as Rembrandt (1606-1699) and Velázquez (1559-1660) continued to commemorate military victories in grandiose, complex works in which they could demonstrate their genius. Despite the fact that their works follow classical standards, the 17th century also marks a revolution. Until 1630, Brandon claims, art did not criticize war. There was no anti-war art, but during this period a change took place and art that represented the ugly sides of the war began to be created.

It is common to see the chilling series of engravings by Jacques Callot (1592-1635) of the Duchy of Lorraine, *The Great Miseries of War*, also known as *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War* (1633), as one of the most prominent harbingers of this change. The series includes eighteen small plates depicting remote scenes, seemingly neutral, made in response to the Thirty Years' War, which took place in Central Europe between 1618 and 1648. The series begins with a regular depiction of war that includes the recruitment of soldiers and a battle scene. However, in subsequent etchings, things begin to fall apart and Callot depicts the soldiers' crimes. They loot a roadhouse and peasants' homes and torture the peasants to force them to reveal where their treasures are hidden. They then proceed to the destruction of monasteries, churches, and additional villages. In fact, all military discipline has disappeared. The soldiers have become robbers and highwaymen. Once they are caught by the authorities, they are punished severely. The plates also depict how they are hung on strappados and executed by mass hanging, torture, or fire. Later, it seems that some of them ended their lives as disabled people in hospitals or beggars seeking alms from the peasants, and then we witness the revenge of the peasants themselves. The last print in the series features a different scene that depicts the distribution of prizes and rewards for the loyal soldiers of the king. Despite the fact that Callot called the series *The Great Miseries of War*, which hints at the Renaissance tendency to describe war in grandiose and



monumental terms, in fact he chose to focus on its ugly aspects and the moral corruption it generates.

In the literature on art history, the series of prints entitled *The Disasters of War* (1810-1820) by Spanish artist Francisco Goya (1746-1828) is commonly seen as following the new path pioneered by Callot. But while scholars are not always in agreement regarding whether Callot wished to convey a universal message regarding the horrors of the war, specifically criticize the disaster of the Thirty Years' War, which affected his life personally, or address the morality of war, Goya's series is seen as universally and unequivocally critical of war. The series includes 82 prints and is divided into three main themes—war, the famine that followed it, and political and social allegories in response to the violence of the 1808 Dos de Mayo Uprising, the subsequent Peninsular War of 1808-14, and the setbacks to the liberal cause that followed the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1814. In dramatic works accompanied by sarcastic and morbid headlines, Goya expressed a sharp social criticism of the cynical and oppressive monarchical regime and the Spanish religious establishment, the evil, irrationality, and ignorance of Spanish society, the cruelty of the French army, which committed serious crimes in the name of liberal values, and the institution of war in general. Goya is considered one of the first modern artists, and his liberal and innovative messages were transmitted in a pioneering artistic form. Unlike Callot's depictions of war, which are cold, distanced, devoid of emotion, and drawn from a broad perspective with no close-up views, Goya's are expressive and full of tension. He draws the scenes from a close perspective and uses the contrasts of black and white and bright and dark to create the drama, hallucinatory distortions, emotions, and shock of the figures on each side of the barricade. Thus, unlike Callot's work, with its emotionless reporting of the events of war, Goya's employs dramatic means to emphasize the pointlessness and horror of war, which destroys man's humanity and emphasizes his disgust with rulers who use the common people to preserve their power. In this way, Goya teaches us to read war art as social and political criticism.

One of the most terrible new ways in which modernists expressed their criticism of war was to use the motif of corpses whose limbs have been amputated, as Goya did in the print *An Heroic Feat! With Dead Men!* (Fig. 4) from his war series.

Fig. 4

Fig. 4: Goya Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, Plate 39 from *The Disasters of War: An Heroic Feat! With Dead Men!*, 1863, etching, 15.5 × 20.5 cm, ©Trustees of the British Museum.

Here, amputated body parts of soldiers are displayed against a desolate landscape. Goya's fragmented bodies may express what art historian Linda Nochlin recognized as the aesthetics of the guillotine, born of the events of the French Revolution, which became a metaphor for modernity. For modernists, the fragmentation and amputation of human body parts was a metaphor for the crushing of what were considered oppressive traditions in art and society. The modernists aspired to distance themselves from the respectability and conservatism of the past and to address precisely the abject, the repressed, and that from which society averts its gaze.

Amputation creates a *visual shock*, that is, a deep emotional shock caused by a surprising new sight that is both horrific and troubling. Amputation and other forms of fragmentation serve as allegories of the social and psychological understanding of the modern experience, which grew stronger as the old structures of religion, family, patriarchy, and peasantry were replaced by technological, mechanical, and urban revolutions, secularism, and the gradual breakdown of gender roles. These phenomena, according to Nochlin, led to the feelings of social, psychological, and even metaphysical fragmentation that marked the modern experience—the loss of perfection, the breakdown of the connections to the past and the permanent, and the destruction of stable values. Henry Unger, who follows the definitions of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), sees the fragmentation that is so common in modern art as dehumanization, which symbolizes the loss of the validity and certainty of the concept of man. This is a struggle with factors that create in the viewer an affinity with and natural empathy for what is taking place in the work. According to Unger, modern art turns “from man onward” and applies various negations to previous human concepts by distorting the old forms of man. The guillotine, followed by the advanced forms of warfare developed mainly during the 20th century, exacerbated this crisis.

Anti-war criticism and the struggle against the old traditions and motifs of fragmentation became extremely acute following the humanitarian crisis of World War I, which merged with the flourishing of the movements of the European avant-garde, which at that time were at the height of their frenzied, anti-establishment rebelliousness. They

were best characterized by the dada movement, born of the crisis created by the war, which called not only for a total destruction of the art world as previously recognized, but also for the abolition of all the principles and values of European society in the hope of creating a new and utopian world. Dadaism failed in its efforts to create a new world, but did succeed in changing the art world forever, while Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) ideas and his readymades were entirely rooted in the world of art, eventually brought about the flourishing of conceptual art in the 1970s, and in fact continue to shape contemporary art today.

The avant-garde of modern movements that emerged during World War I led, as mentioned above, to a real change in the representation of war and a flood of clearly critical anti-war art. Many artists who were recruited or even enlisted enthusiastically found themselves faced with a long war. Some of them were wounded or saw their comrades falling in battle alongside them. The cruel reality of trench warfare was revealed in its most terrible physical form, confronting them with death. This war exposed humanity to new and deadly weapons such as machine guns and gas. These, in turn, created visual shocks in response to the new technology, both in those who witnessed it firsthand and in those who saw their images through the mass media. On the home front, the soldiers who had returned were battered, disabled, and often missing limbs. It soon became clear that in the course of destroying the old order, the war had left in its wake a tremendous number of dead and wounded. It was no longer perceived as a purely defensive war, but rather as a war that served the whims of the occupations of rulers and their foreign interests. Dix, who painted himself at the beginning of the fighting as the god of war (Fig. 2) and, like an entire generation of young people, saw the war as a refining force that would make room for an idyllic new world, an invitation to extricate himself from boredom, a call to a heroic life, and a cure for degeneration, quickly became disillusioned, and his perception changed completely. He no longer saw war as a force that would bring man closer to a better and loftier state. On the contrary, he saw that what remained was a survival instinct only. In his post-war work, he depicted the wretchedness and vulnerability of the liberated soldiers in the city and condemned the indifference of the civilians. As for his war paintings, he focused on the horrific scenes that haunted his memories.

In his work *The Trench* (1920-1923), a trench that has just been bombed is revealed in a mysterious yellow dawn light. The scene is apocalyptic and both fantastic and realistic. The trench is composed of the horrors of mutilated bodies and parts of

human beings, open skulls, broken limbs, intestines, shreds of uniforms, and half-rotten remains of the fallen. A soldier wearing a gas mask who does not seem to be a human figure at all is the only living being in the landscape. In his most familiar work on the subject, *The War* (1929–1932), Dix returned in the middle panel of the triptych to the composition of *The Trench*. Here, too, the body parts, rot, and chaos take on a central role. Dix began working on this monumental work in 1929 and continued until 1932, when the Nazi party had already gained considerable influence and argued for war to seem heroic and inevitable. However, even earlier, in 1924, Dix had produced a series of war etchings, *The War*, which was often compared to that of Goya. The series includes fifty extraordinarily realistic and dramatic prints. Here, too, hell and hallucination are the most prominent elements. As in the works of Goya and Callot, here there is an emphasis on the morbid, the ugly, and the horrific rather than on heroic depictions, supporting the notion that the works of these artists convey universal anti-war messages.

Dix was only one of many artists who expressed their opposition to World War I. One of the clearest and most original voices was that of the German Expressionist artist and socialist Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), who placed women and children as well as the lower classes at the center of her work. After the war, she began working on a series of prints called *War* (1922-1923) following the fall of her youngest son, Peter, in October 1914. The seven prints in the series depict the terrible price society pays for war—the dreadful mourning for the loss of the lives of the young men, the bereaved widows, and the orphaned children. These anti-war messages were expressed as clearly as anyhow possible in her impressive 1924 poster *Never Again War*, in the center of which is a figure of ambiguous gender opening its mouth with an impassioned shout of protest and holding its arm high in a salute used for the swearing of oaths. The figure, we learn from the banner, is calling for a halt to the violence. Scholars claim that Kollwitz's sharp cry is related to the fact that her son fell in battle, and it appears that the traumatic event brought Kollwitz to the understanding that, as a woman and mother, she could not continue to support the path of war and should call for pacifism. During the war, Kollwitz had joined many demonstrations and often wrote open letters on journalistic platforms in which she attacked many of her country's political positions and eventually even openly condemned German militarism and the war itself. Kollwitz's voice was important and original, because it expressed, perhaps for the first time in art, the feminine anti-war perspective when she spoke on behalf of the victims of the home front, the victims of the wars waged by men.

Despite voices like Dix's and Kollwitz's, in 1939 the world found itself caught in the whirlwind of another cruel and insane world war. Like World War I, this war also provided events that created visual shocks to which the world of artistic images had to respond. One of these was aerial warfare, which became a major component on all fronts, including the home fronts. A well-known response to the shock of these scenes was a work that became a source of inspiration for many subsequent ones, *Guernica*, by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), painted in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War following the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica on 26 April 1937 by the Nazis at the request of the nationalist Spaniards. Picasso saw black-and-white photographs of the tragic bombing of the town in the newspaper and reacted to it in the Cubist language identified with him. The painting is replete with symbols that hint at the local nature of the event, but at the same time arouse the feelings of pain and suffering common to all wars. Picasso's work, like that of Goya, has become not only a local Spanish symbol, but also a powerful universal one that warns humanity against the suffering and destruction of war.

Aside from the many battlegrounds and the huge loss of life, the exposure of photographs and film reels of two additional mega-events that took place during World War II and were based on technological and scientific advancement also created an intense visual shock. The first of these was the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, with its apocalyptic spectacle of the enormous mushroom cloud of smoke and fire, the photographs of a desolate landscape following the erasure of the cities, images of the dead and wounded, and the penetration of the concept of radioactivity into the public consciousness. The second was depicted in the scenes discovered following the liberation of the Nazi concentration and death camps: piles of bodies in mass graves, gas chambers with skeletons inside them, piles of hair and objects taken from the victims, and emaciated prisoners on the verge of death—*Muselmänner* staring at the camera with closed gazes. The novelty and horror of these images caused them to become deeply engraved in the collective memory and thus led to endless artistic responses, both realistic and symbolic. These responses are still dominant in the art world today and continue to concern even the generations that followed, despite the fact that they did not experience this war directly. Marianne Hirsch calls this phenomenon *postmemory*. This term refers to the generation that came after the events, which carries personal, collective, and cultural trauma. The members of this generation remember events they did not witness by means of the stories, images, and

behavior of those who lived around them so deeply and effectively that the memories became their own. The link of postmemory to the past is in fact mediated by imagination, projection, and creation. Hirsch's original intention was to relate to the relationship between Holocaust survivors and their children, but the definition has been extended more generally to "the aftermath of catastrophic histories," which is anchored in the recognition that trauma appears to be transmissible: it spreads from victims to listeners or viewers, who often shift to a state of sympathy and total empathy, even to the extent of experiencing secondary victimhood. Hence, trauma is not only present in direct victims, but in greater society, as a community's perception of an atrocious event leaves lasting scars upon its group consciousness.

The Vietnam War was another traumatic event, related to the conflict of the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union for the "hearts and minds" of the people around the globe, that remains etched in the collective memory of Americans in particular. As such, it became one of the most influential events in the world of art and culture. This war served as the catalyst for the birth of a general socio-cultural change in the Western world and the growth of counter-culture. In the art world, this period marked the end of modernism and the birth of conceptual art, which brought with it new forms of artistic activity such as land art, body and performance art, installations, and feminist art.

*The War Series* (1966-1970) by feminist artist Nancy Spero (1926-2009) is one of the most impressive documents produced in response to the Vietnam War and an example of how traumas and images from the past flood new traumas and connect to new images. The series includes some one hundred and fifty paintings in gouache and ink on paper that feature images laden with symbols drawn from previous wars, such as the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb and the chimneys of the Auschwitz crematoria, which are combined with some of the images that created visual shock during the Vietnam War: helicopters landing in tangled jungles and photographs of heavily bandaged victims, many of them women and children burned by napalm.

Many of the images in Spero's series depict power as belonging to men, and the works are filled with phallic symbols, including men with erect sexual organs, alongside exploding bombs and helicopters, while women are portrayed as victims. In the introduction to the book that presents the series, Spero explains her intentions:

These works were intended as manifestos against our [the US] incursion into Vietnam, a personal attempt at exorcism. The bombs are phallic and nasty, exaggerated sexual representations of the penis; heads with tongues sticking out, violent depictions of the human (mostly male) body. The clouds of the bombs are filled with screaming heads vomiting poison onto the victims below, etc.

Spero's series follows a line of exemplary war series that began with Callot and continued with Goya and Dix. All of them related to a local war, but created a universal anti-war message. Moreover, Spero continues on the path that Kollwitz courageously pioneered by linking feminism to pacifism.

Certainly, over the course of the 20th century, there were countless other global crises, genocides, local wars, and terrorist incidents. In fact, as Andreas Huyssen notes, the entire century was marked by "historical trauma." Unfortunately, the consequences of the events of the 20th century continue to reverberate in the twenty-first. Mass tragedies, such as the 9/11 terror attack, are reproduced repeatedly in the media. These spectacles heighten public anxiety and a general sense of trauma.

This situation, in which endless news events and horrors reach into our homes, has given birth in the new millennium to the art of *sensation*, which responds to the horror and even increases it. The works of Dinos Chapman (b. 1962) and his younger brother Jake (b.1966), who recreated, for example, Goya's *The Disasters of War*, are among the most prominent examples of this art. *Hell* (1998-2000) (Fig. 5), which was burned and recreated named *Fucking Hell* (2008), illustrates more than anything else our inability to contain and cope with the flood of images and stories that come to us daily and actually addresses what Susan Sontag calls "the pain of others." The work consists of tens of thousands of miniature figures of Nazi toy soldiers in nine models of extermination camps framed in glass cabinets arranged in the shape of a swastika, and contains dozens of horrific situations, an orgy of violence and murder. The soldiers, chopped up, with amputated limbs, kill and torture one another in insane and perverse ways. The work is loaded with symbols of concentration camps such as barbed wire fences, watchtowers, and factories with chimneys. Among these are the skeletons of soldiers in a state of advanced decay and dozens of figures of the smiling McDonald's clown, crucified. This work is not about the Holocaust, of course, but rather about chaos, a postmodern apocalypse in an era of hypercapitalism, a nightmare.

Fig. 5

Fig. 5: Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Hell*, 1998-2000, Installation, Saatchi Gallery, London.

Two years after the Chapman brothers presented *Hell*, the Israeli artist Sigalit Landau (b. 1969) presented her own work of sensation art: the installation *The Country* (2002) (Fig. 6), which began to take form in her mind when the Second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, began in 2000.

Fig. 6

Fig. 6: Sigalit Landau, Installation view at the exhibition *The Country*, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2002. Photo: Avi Hai, Courtesy of the artist.

The title of the installation is a literal translation of the name of the daily newspaper *Haaretz* (“the country” in Hebrew), whose pages in the two years prior to the exhibition provided the main raw material for the installation. This is a dystopian, apocalyptic, terrifying work. The two rooms of the installation are full of details: the roots of invisible trees, fruits made of newspaper pages with dates painted in red, wheelbarrows, small pools of water or juice, cups—a kind of disruption of nature. On the roof are life-size human figures with muscles laid bare made of newspaper pages and painted red-brown. The whole exhibition is painted in the red color of blood and pieces of flesh that hint at an explosion are glued in numerous places (a reaction to the visual shock created in this Intifada, which was identified with suicide attacks that caused thousands of wounded and dead on the Israeli side and was also a response to Israel’s aggressive counter-reaction). The installation also contains an iconic photograph of the artist, naked, bent over, standing in a large puddle of red liquid smeared over most of her body. Next to her is a large pile of newspapers. This work, according to Philip Leider, is “the Israeli *Guernica*: an endless lamentation [...] that expresses the sense of destruction, despair, loss of hope and, above all, the sadness that has filled the hearts of all people of good will in this country in the last two years.” Landau’s installation speaks the local Israeli language (for example, in its use of *Haaretz*) and is associated with local events, but it is also a universal allegory, like that of the Chapman brothers, of a shocking situation of humanity on the verge of destruction and loss.

War art is a powerful vehicle for expression and for reflection on human experience. It has the ability to teach us history by activating our intellect, emotions, and senses in closed places with which we are unfamiliar. The creation of art and the experience and contemplation of iconic images in visual culture also enable the cathartic



processing of trauma that enables artists and their audiences to withstand trauma and crises, to commemorate, and to mourn. However, the ubiquitous presence of the personal voice that cries out against war in these works highlights the fact that art is not only a tool of the individual artist for voicing and overcoming personal and collective trauma, but also a means through which social and political responsibility may be taken. The present volume can consequently only provide a rather superficial and selective study of the interrelationship of war and art, but the editors hope to stimulate further research in the field by highlighting different approaches and fields to study in the future.

### **The Contributions**

The first seven chapters of the present volume will deal with individual case studies to show how artists related their work to war as a topic. The time period covered ranges from World War I to contemporary art. Miruna Cuzman will deal with the metamorphosis of the Irish painter William Orpen (1878-1931) and his modernist paintings from the time of World War I. The horrors of the Great War also had an impact on the art of Eastern Europe, as will be highlighted in the chapter by Iwona Luba and Ewa Paulina Wawer which takes a closer look at the “New Perfection” and Polish painter and art theorist Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952).

After this initial section related to the Great War, Erika Dupont will take a closer look at the paintings of English artist Paul Nash (1889-1946) in the interwar period, before Renata Dias Ferraretto Moura Rocco traces the life and works of Italian painter Danilo di Prete (1911-1985) from World War II in Europe to Brazil, where the artist was active in later years. The last three chapters will focus rather more on modern and contemporary art. Jenna Ann Altomonte discusses the Post-Traumatic Performance in Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal’s *Domestic Tension*, before Emma Crott analyzes the photographic work by English photographer Simon Norfolk related to the war in Afghanistan. The section closes with Paul Grace’s chapter on the role of destroyed bodies in the works of Swiss installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn. The first section consequently provides multiple approaches towards different individuals and their artistic constructions of war as a topic related to or shown within their works. The second section will further intensify this insight, however the authors of the second part will deal with a broader perspective on the topic when analyzing it from regional or national points of view.

Anne Marno traces the impact of war surgery and the reconstruction of faces for modern perceptions of photographs taken in World War I. Afterwards, Liza Kaaring's chapter is interested in the overall topic of man's fears and how they have been portrayed in the post-World War II period by Danish and British artists. Knowing that the world would not survive another world war, i.e. atomic annihilation, the perception of war in art must have changed as well. Yet there were the proxy wars of the new era already awaiting the artists' interest as the willing and dying soldiers and civilians alike. The above-mentioned impact of the Vietnam War was in the period of the Cold War not exclusively American, as is shown in Sam Bowker's chapter, who explains its impact on Australian artists, once the war in Vietnam had ended.

The work of artists in this country, especially of refugee artists in South Vietnam, is then taken into closer consideration by Jennifer Way, before Till Ansgar Baumhauer analyzes the visual cultures of contemporary Afghanistan, where warrior images and other warfare-related images seem to be quite popular, regardless of the violent experiences the country has gone through in the past decades. Finally, Maria Frick will discuss the attempts of Latin American Expressionism to denounce war.

All in all, the history of the relationship between war and art can hardly be fully explained or described in a single volume. We therefore hope that the reader will gain some stimulating insights from reading the present chapters. At the same time, we would like to highlight that the study of art reveals a lot about the experience and perception of war, something that also has to be taken into consideration for the general study of war. Art shows how the people portrayed suffering and death, how artists perceived the violent world around them, and how they complied with or criticized this condition. Art, therefore, tells us much about war in all its facets and not surprisingly offers a therapeutic approach to deal with living memories as well.

## **Works Cited**

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, 1-30. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Amishai-Maisels, Ziva. *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt Books, 1970.
- Benz, Wolfgang, Peter Eckel, Andreas Nachama, eds. *Kunst im NS-Staat: Ideologie – Ästhetik – Protagonisten*. Berlin: Metropol, 2015.

- Blatter, Janet. "Art from the Whirlwind." In *Art of the Holocaust*, edited by Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, 20-35. New York: Routledge, 1981.
- Brandon, Laura. *Art and War*. London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007.
- Decamou, Gabrielle. *Invisible Colors: The Arts of the Atomic Age*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2019.
- Dekel, Tal. "Following Käthe Kollwitz: Gendered Aspects in the Work of Ruth Schloss." *Bezalel Journal of Visual and Material Culture* 14 (September 2009). (Hebrew) accessed May 28, 2019 <http://journal.bezalel.ac.il/he/protocol/article/3050>
- Dissanayake, Ellen. "Art as a Human Behavior: Toward an Ethological View of Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38:4 (1981), 397-406.
- Eberle, Matthias. *The World War I and the Weimar Artist: Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, Schlemmer*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Feinstein, Steve, ed. *Absence /Presence: Critical Essays on the Artistic Memory of the Holocaust*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2011.
- Gaehtgens, Thomas W. "Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: An Inner War." In *Nothing But the Clouds Unchanged: Artists in World War I*, edited by Gordon Hughes and Philipp Blom, 118-127. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2014.
- Griffiths, Antony, Juliet Wilson-Bareau, and John Willet. *Disasters of War: Callot, Goya, Dix*. London: South Bank Centre, 1998.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 15:2 (1992), 3-29.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Presidential Address 2014—Connective Histories in Vulnerable Times." *PMLA* 129:3 (2014), 330-348.
- Hornstein Shelley, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein, eds. *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Jacob, Frank, Jeffrey Shaw, and Timothy Demy. "Introduction." In *War and the Humanities: The Cultural Impact of the First World War*, eds. idem, 1-19. Paderborn: Schöningh/Brill, 2019.
- Jacob, Frank and Riccardo Altieri, eds. *Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel des Sozialismus 1914-1918*. Berlin: Metropol, 2018.
- Jacobs, Robert A. *Filling the Hole in the Nuclear Future Art and Popular Culture Respond to the Bomb*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.
- Jünger, Ernst. *In Stahlgewittern: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, 2 vols., ed. by Helmuth Kiesel. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2013.
- Korte, Hermann. *Die Dadaisten*, Fifth edition. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2007.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Leider, Philip. "The Israeli Guernica." *Eretz Acheret* 13 (2002), 72-75. (Hebrew)
- Lubin, David M. "Losing Sight: War, Authority, and Blindness in British and American Visual Cultures, 1914–22." *Art History* 34:4 (2011), 796-817.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London; New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Marinetti, F. T. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909." In *Futurism: An Anthology*, edited by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, 19-24. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- McDougall, Joyce. *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality*. London: Free Association Books, 1995.

- Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau: *Former Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp*. "Works of Art." Accessed May 28, 2019. [auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/works-of-art/](https://auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/works-of-art/)
- McGreevy, Linda. *The Life and Works of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International Publisher, 1975.
- Micale, Mark S., and Paul Lerner, eds. *Traumatic Past: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Milton, Sybil. "The Legacy of Holocaust Art." In *Art of the Holocaust*, edited by Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, 36-43. New York: Routledge, 1981.
- Nochlin, Linda. *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1994.
- Nora, Pierre. "General Introduction: Between Memory and History." In *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1, Conflicts and Divisions, edited by Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, 1-21. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Novitch Miriam, Lucy Dawidowicz, and Tom L. Freudenheim. *Spiritual Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps, 1940-1945: A Selection of Drawings and Paintings from the Collection of Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetot*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981.
- Ofrat, Gideon. "When the Cannons Fire." *Gideon Ofrat's Warehouse*. Accessed May 28, 2019, <https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2014/07/26/%D7%9B%D7%A9%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%97%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D/>. (Hebrew)
- Rosenthal, Norman, and Richard Stone. *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. London: Thames and Hudson in association with the Royal Academy of Arts, 1998.
- Rosenthal, Norman, and Michael Archer. *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000.
- Rüdiger, Ulrike. *Grüsse aus dem Krieg: Feldpostkarten der Otto-Dix-Sammlung*. Gera: Kunstgalerie Gera, 1991.
- Schubert, Dietrich. *Otto Dix – Der Krieg: 50 Radierungen von 1924*. Marburg: Jonas, 2002.
- Seltzer, Mark. "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere." *October* 80 (1997), 3-26.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin, 2002.
- Spero, Nancy, Leon Golub, and Robert Storr. *Nancy Spero: The War Series*. Milan: Charta, 2003.
- Springer, Peter. *Hand and Head: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Self Portrait as a Soldier*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Stone, Andrea. "How Art Heals the Wounds of War." *National Geographic*, February 15, 2015. Accessed July 5, 2019. <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/02/150213-art-therapy-mask-blast-force-trauma-psychology-war/>
- Weinstein, Joan. "Expressionism in War and Revolution." In *German Expressionism: Art and Society*, edited by Stephanie Barron and Dube Wolf-Dieter Dube, 35-44. London: Thames and Hudson, 1997.
- Unger, Henry. "Models of Dehumanization in Modern Fiction." PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1989. (Hebrew)
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. "What Cold War In Asia? An Interpretative Essay." In *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, eds. Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi, 15-24. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Wilkinson, Richard H. *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003.

Wolfthal, Diane. "Jacques Callot's Miseries of War." *The Art Bulletin* 59:2 (1977), 222-233.