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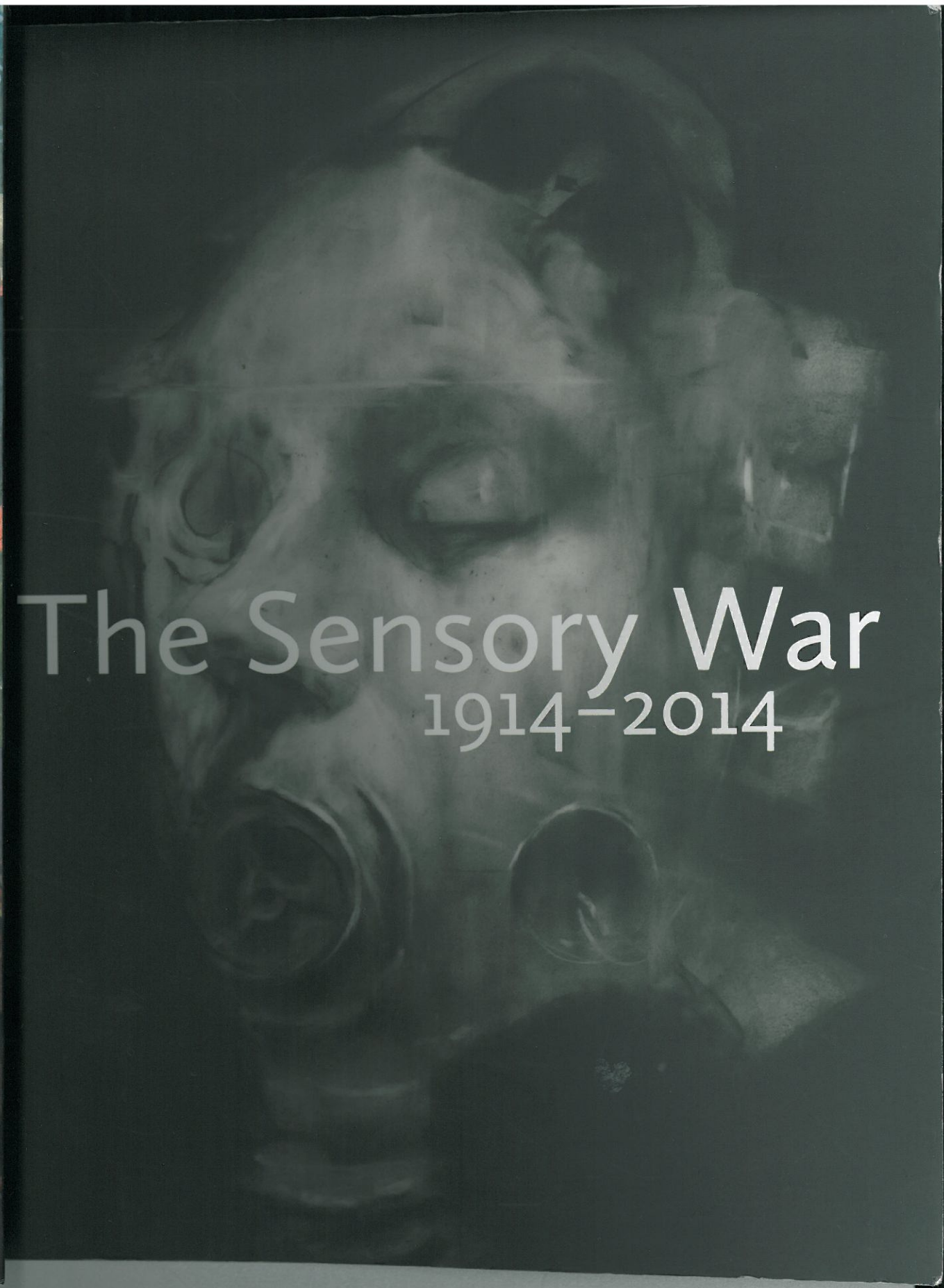
Manchester
Art Gallery



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

The Sensory War

1914-2014



Published in conjunction with the exhibition

The Sensory War 1914–2014
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Cover: Sophie Jodoin, *Gas Mask (S/54)* 2008 (detail)
Inner front: CRW Nevinson, *Explosion 1916* (detail)
Back cover: Henry Lamb, *Advanced Dressing Station on
the Struma, 1916* 1921 (detail)
Inner back: Omer Fast, *5,000 Feet is the Best* 2011 (detail)

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The Sensory War 1914–2014: Bodies, Minds, and Environments

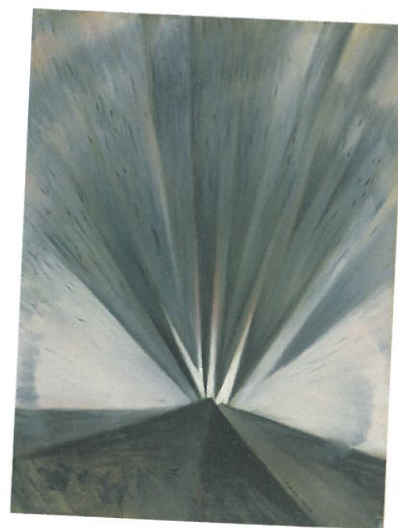
Ana Carden-Coyne

In 1914 the world was at war. Soon to be called 'the Great War', it felt immense in its global and local reach. The Empires and countries that were drawn into the fighting, the millions of combatants involved, the mobilising of entire societies, brought the frontline and the home front together as never before. The streets were full of wounded and disabled men and soldiers on leave; women dressed in paramilitary uniforms; the traffic of wounded being ferried to hospitals; the hunger, the grief, and the apprehension of bombs. The ferocious technology of the war became integral to the cultural response of artistic endeavours. The British Futurist, Vorticist, and official war artist CRW Nevinson, like many others, became a Red Cross ambulance driver and an operating theatre assistant (and later joined the military RAMC). He was immediately thrown into the gruesome realities of modern weaponry colliding with soft, human flesh. After a month of working in an under-resourced frontline casualty station near Dunkirk, tellingly named 'the Shambles', Nevinson said:

'My former life seemed to be years away... I felt I had been born in the nightmare. I had seen sights so revolting... shrieks, pus, gangrene and the disembowelled'. Determined not to 'shrink' from it, the sensitive artist began to paint. He confided: 'I was pursued by the urge to do something, to be "in" the War; and although I succeeded in the end and was "in" it, I was never "of" it'.¹

This tension between the artist's proximity and distance to war lies at the heart of this exhibition. Over the last century, artists have perceived the sensations of modern war through the mind, the body and the environment, and tried to communicate its affects in their various representational practices.

In 1914, Lawrence Haward was appointed the new Director of the then Manchester City Art Gallery. He began to build up what is widely regarded as an important collection of war art, drawing on his personal connections with artists, acquiring work direct from their studios, and



CRW Nevinson
Explosion 1916



CRW Nevinson
A Howitzer Gun in Elevation 1917

circumventing the Official War Artists scheme. In 1916, Haward wrote an intriguing lecture on *The Effect of War Upon Art and Literature*, delivered at the University of Manchester and subsequently published by its press. He surmised that artists are dependent on 'the stimulus of external reality for their conceptions', and are 'affected by the changes in the condition of the world which war produces'. Artists grappled with the experiences of war while trying to apprehend its meaning. But Haward went further: war is sensory and emotive, and the artist will 'reflect that world and the human emotions it arouses'. The artist will 'give expression to aesthetic emotion' especially when confronting the horror of war. Haward was right.² The artists he knew were compelled by the war to communicate its physical, emotional and sensory qualities through aesthetic devices and designs.

In this exhibition, *The Sensory War 1914–2014*, we find something almost 'synaesthetic' – the intermingling of different sensory modes. For instance, in the way paintings elicit the sounds of war; colours transmit sensations; etchings and drawings are tactile; images evoke pain,

nerves, and thoughts; sounds elicit emotions and visual imagination; video works immerse us in a sensorial world. Art can generate a psychological and neurological response in audiences. In looking at art that tackles the subject of war over the last century, Haward's words ring true: the artist has a capacity 'for seeing through the present to the distant future', though, as he noted, artistic 'prophecy' is often misunderstood. *The Sensory War 1914–2014* surveys a century of artistic exploration of war and conflict, finding it as relevant today as it was in 1914. Artists have made dynamic conversations between the past and the present, looking back as much as looking forward, communicating the sensory imagination and acting as cultural barometers of the impact of war on people and society. Perhaps this is why, in our own search for greater understanding about war and conflict, contemporary audiences turn to artists as though to the feeling of history itself.

Militarising Bodies, Manufacturing War

When CRW Nevinson painted *Explosion* 1916, he condensed into a devastating abstraction the aural and neural reverberation of a detonating bomb. Fragmenting particles project upwards and outwards, resonating the sensory assault of deafening noise and blinding spectacle. With phosphorescent light splintering the planes of dark colour, light-shards from the blast appear to lacerate the darkness; *Explosion* radiates sensory impact. The viewer is immediately drawn to the blast on the horizon, plunged into the darkness of earth rising and falling from the epicentre's impact point. This is not just art, this is the materiality of modern war, felt and seen as the reverberating force and velocity of the direct hit. This exemplary painting conjures the sonic pounding of modern weaponry.

The sheer noise of the painting contrasts with the one he made a year later, *Howitzer Gun in Elevation* 1917; a frightening stillness pervades the

moments before an artillery strike and its 'storm of steel', as German writer Ernst Jünger described it. The British 8-inch Howitzer was a supreme piece of military hardware that flattened villages, destroyed bodies, and penetrated minds with its deafening boom. In Nevinson's frame, the gun arrests the viewer with its inescapably phallic symbolism indicative of the masculinity integral to military power. The lone barrel is raised skyward, awaiting orders to fire. Nevinson was tuned in to the moment before the blast, as much as its aftermath. The anxious silence of this painting



David Bomberg
Study for 'Sappers at Work: A Canadian Tunnelling Company' 1918

provides its eerie quality. This is distant war, only close-up; it is modern weaponry essentialised into a steel-encased, penetrating male body part.

The noise of ground troops marching is captured in Nevinson's *Returning to the Trenches* 1916 (p.54), where soldiers' bodies are turned into machines; the sound of bayonets clashing like machine parts is almost audible. Nevinson said, 'to me the soldier was going to be dominated by the machine'.³ He was going to merge with it and become the machine – a cyborg, an automaton, initially revered and eventually reviled in the aesthetic conscience of the war artist. In *Making Aircraft: Making the Engine* 1917 (p.55), the machine

and man have merged in a picture resonating with the hammering din of the wartime factory. The image vibrates simulating the whirring, deafening noise of industrial spaces reverberating with the production of war machines. Artists such as Wyndham Lewis extended the human/machine interaction into the stressful clamour of the mechanised battlefield. *To Wipe Out* (p.57) refers to Nietzsche's concept of 'wiping out' human and material existence. Vorticist lines depict five bombs exploding near an armoury; the scratch-marks squeal like shells, called 'whizz-bangs', and two soldiers exit the frame, rushing for cover.

Futurists often revered the mechanised and industrialised body of men, whether in home front munitions or frontline soldiering. During the war, Slade School educated Futurist, David Bomberg joined the Royal Engineers, and was later commissioned by the Canadian government to paint the mines operations around Messines and Arras. Bomberg's *Study for 'Sappers at Work: A Canadian Tunnelling Company' 1918* was completed in preparation for the final oil painting of 1919, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, in which he was forced to give over to more palatable figuration. The drawing shows what Bomberg had intended to convey: the feeling of pure, intense action in the movement of soldiers' bodies, abstracted into an essence of interlocking dynamic parts. The colour contrasts of red and black chalk intensify the sensation of flesh turned into geometric time; this is man as a machine, a reality of war's dehumanising effect that Bomberg witnessed at the front.

During the First World War artists were particularly cognizant of the industrial process of militarisation and the effect of noise in the munitions industry and on the battlefield. Like many Futurists of the period, Nevinson initially revered the war as an opportunity to celebrate 'the beauty of strife'. But soon, the reality hit home. Attached to the Friends Ambulance Unit,

Nevinson had been emotionally affected by his role caring for French infantry. In *La Guerre des Trous (The Underground War)* (p.53), French soldiers wait in a beam-covered trench for the call to go over the top, possibly in Woesten, Ypres, where Nevinson was stationed. He recalled: 'I had a shell go clean through my ambulance'.⁴ The barbed wire – a major technology used en masse in WW1 – forms a twisted, menacing skyline. Guillaume Apollinaire recognised that Nevinson had outgrown the bravado of Futurism's machismo, and was instead 'making palpable the soldiers' suffering and communicating to others the feelings of pity and horror'.⁵

George Clausen's, *Study for 'The Gun Factory at Woolwich Arsenal' 1919* (p.63) was made in preparation for the larger oil, a commission to document 74,000 munitions workers occupied at this vast factory site. Shades of light permeate the 'Study', streaming in and around the centrepiece of the colossal machinery used to mould gun-barrels. The 'machinery' resembles a gigantic beast against the barely visible workers below; it bears an alien corporeality similar to Jacob Epstein's *Rock Drill* 1913–15, though it seems more grotesque and ominous. Frank Brangwyn's *Study for a Tank in Action* 1925–26 was in preparation for a large canvas commissioned by Lord Iveagh to commemorate the peers and their relatives killed in the war. Despite the glorious modernity of new technologies such as the tank, the image nevertheless resembles a devouring machine-monster, a sensibility that soldiers' expressed at the time. Though this work is meant to describe an attack moving forward, there is fear in the soldiers' faces; they seem to be fleeing in panic.

The Sensory War 1914–2014 includes some of the work from the 66-piece portfolio *The Great War: Britain's Efforts and Ideals* 1917, commissioned by the Ministry of Information in 1917. The commission involved twelve artists including Frank Brangwyn, CRW Nevinson, Eric Kennington,

Archibald Standish Hartrick, Augustus John, and William Rothenstein. The propagandist intentions make explicit the wartime emphasis on machines and men, and that the collective militarisation of men's bodies was also about manufacturing the consent for the war and its continued prosecution. In *Making Sailors: The Gun* (p.62), artist Frank Brangwyn focuses on the sailors' muscular torsos and arms; it is not just emblematic of the warrior's idealised physical masculinity, but provides an



Eric Kennington
Making Soldiers: Ready for Service 1917

unusually sensual, even seductive embodiment of the British warrior nation. In Kennington's *Making Soldiers* series, a similarly robust masculinity in squared jaws and torsos appears in *Ready for Service*; *Into the Trenches*; *In the Frontline Trench for the First Time*; and *Over the Top* (p.61). These bodies are devoid of aggression; even *Bayonet Practice* has the weapon out of frame. Military efforts and ideals are not just heroic, masculine and British, but they are embodied.



Archibald Standish Hartrick
Women's Work: On munitions: Heavy Work (Drilling and Casting) 1917

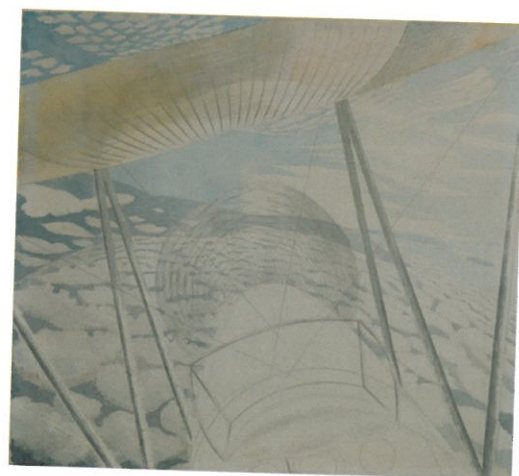
Female Factories

What made the First World War (The Great War) so great and so modern was its mobilisation of the whole society; not just turning soldiers into citizens, but transforming gender roles, turning work places and public spaces upside-down. In his series devoted to *Women's Work*, Archibald Standish Hartrick depicted the new visibility of women and the militarisation of the female body, signifying its masculinisation through work usually associated with men. Whether dressed in quasi-masculine paramilitary uniforms or wearing dungarees for work on the railways (*On the Railways, Engine and Carriage Cleaners*) (p.67), or adapting their bodies and minds to the tiring, physical labour of heavy engineering (*On Munitions: Heavy Work (Drilling and Casting)*) (p.68), the risky task of building explosives (*On Munitions, Dangerous Work (Packing TNT)*) (p.69), and the finer techniques of explosives (*On Munitions, Skilled Work*) (p.68), the habits and practices required by the war machine were fundamentally inculcated into women's bodies.

CRW Nevinson depicted the skilled work conducted by women in munitions factories, in his exciting Vorticist style. The two women featured in *Building Aircraft: Acetylene Welding* 1917 (p.66) wear protective eye-goggles, aprons and scarves. The superb graphic technique conveys the sensory elements of flying sparks that almost singe the exposed arms, hands and clothes of the women, and draw in the viewer. Ensnared in their task, the women become anonymous bodies in the war machine, a familiar trope in art of the period only usually applied to soldiers' bodies.

Aerial Warfare and the Sensation of Flight

The First World War saw aeroplanes adapted from reconnaissance tools into manned fighting machines, resulting in the advent of the Flying Corps and the heroic figure of the Ace. Aerial warfare was fought in the skies, but heard and felt on the ground. It delivered devastating bombs and machine gun fire, but aircraft were also vulnerable to attack from the ground. In Nevinson's *Archies* (1916; the term derived from a popular music hall refrain), anti-aircraft gunfire is abstracted into a beautiful spectacle. The effect of iridescent-blue



Eric Ravilious
View from the Cockpit of a Moth 1942

oil paint on glass turns the annihilation of a plane into something ethereal and magical. It delivers the sensation that many spoke of at the time: the dreadful beauty of modern war.

Indeed, the war in the air was both a visual spectacle and an aural sensation. Nevinson made aerial trips over France for the 1917 print series, *Making Aircraft*, which includes many scenes of aerial warfare he witnessed: *Making the Engine*, *Swooping Down on A Taube*, *Aeroplane in Flight*, *Banking at 4,000 ft* (p.74) (which includes the artist's hand gripping the side of the plane). Artists' responses to the sensations of flight continued in the Second World War, with Walter Thomas Monnington's official war artist commission, *Fighter Affiliation: Halifax and Hurricane Aircraft Co-operating in Action* 1943 (p.76). The physical sensation is of being above the clouds, mastering technology while riding into a khaki sunset, battling the elements and the enemy. Also taken from the flyer's perspective, but more reminiscent of a dream-space than a warzone, Eric Ravilious' *View from the Cockpit of a Moth* 1942 is saturated with sun and blinding light. Before film gave us *Apocalypse Now's* imperial conquest in the Ride of the Valkyries, the artists of the two world wars found in aerial warfare an exhilarating sensation and a destructive beauty. Paul Nash's unusual pencil, chalk and watercolour drawing, *Arrival of the Stirlings* 1943 (p.78), an official war art commission, shows his fascination less with war, than with the sensations that these 'savage' machines elicited.

Pain and Succour

Nothing could be more poignant or more sensory than the story – and the art – of Henry Lamb. He was a reluctant medical student-turned-painter. But the demand for medics in the First World War drew him back to the profession he had escaped. After completing his training at St. Guy's Hospital, London, in 1916, Lamb served in France and Macedonia, which he depicted in *Advanced Dressing*



Henry Lamb
Advanced Dressing Station on the Struma, 1916 1921

Station on the Struma 1916 1921. In one glance this is a medical narrative – a scene of medical aid to the wounded man on a stretcher – and, yet, in another it bears an almost religious pietà-like symbolism of the pain and succour of the entire war. Lamb does not paint with the clinical distance of the doctor; he paints with the empathy of the humanitarian. Had anyone heard of the Struma (the river that formed the Macedonian front between Greece and Bulgaria)? Most Medical Officers were educated in the Classics: the symbolism of the *strymon*, (the Thracian King who drowned in the river, from where English gets the word 'stream') resonates. Lamb turns this frontier – and its anonymous wounded – into a paean to the wounded man's fate and a homage to the kindness of brothers. Cupping the patient's head, to give what wounded patients always craved and cried out for, a drink of water, was like pouring a libation in classical terms or giving the sacrament to the Christian. It was also given under the most stressful and life-threatening situations and the chaos of war – the lamenting figure in the lower corner contrasts with the intimate gesture of the man giving succour.

For the first time in their exhibition histories, Henry Lamb's magisterial painting is brought

together with Henry Tonks' unfinished canvas, *An Advanced Dressing Station in France* 1918 (p.81). Like Lamb, Tonks was a doctor-turned artist, and was the Director of Drawing at the Slade School of Art, London, teaching Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer and CRW Nevinson. Serving as a surgeon in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Tonks dramatises his intimate knowledge of shrapnel wounds to the head and body, and the procedures of frontline evacuation medicine under the chaos of military attack. The sensory qualities of this painting are revealed in the lurid glow of burning buildings and the choking haze of smoke-filled air, in patients' grimaces and their endurance of gripping pains, and in the relief that a drink of water brought the desperately wounded. Paul Nash rarely included figures in his eerie, devastated landscapes, however in *Wounded: Passchendaele* 1918 (p.82) deep empathy for the patient is invoked. Struggling under the gangrenous, green sky, the sickly, ashen-faced stretcher-bearers carry their heavy burden through a landscape of charred trees resembling amputation stumps. Together, these works exemplify the sensations of pain and succour in the warzone.

Claude Shepperson's series *Tending the Wounded* 1917 (pp.84–86), part of the official commission *Britain's Efforts and Ideals*, tells the story of the wounded man's evacuation through



Harold Sandys Williamson
Human Sacrifice: In an Operating Theatre 1918

the military medical system: *Advanced Dressing Station in France, Casualty Clearing Station, On-board a Hospital Transporter, Detraining in England, In Hospital in England, Convalescence*. The advent of the casualty clearing station in the First World War was a major shift in the faster provision of frontline medicine. Casualties soon became a feature of wartime art and photography. John Hodgson Lobley's *The Operating Theatre, First Casualty Clearing Station* 1918 (p.88) was one of 120 works he completed as a commission by the Royal Army Medical Corps. The dark space of the rudimentary operating theatre contains a subtle tension. Pristinely white theatre gowns, surgical gloves, and shining instruments present the image of hygienic modern medicine, even in the war zone. The gas and oxygen tanks are also critical reminders that anaesthesia was used on the frontline, contrary to earlier wartime rumours. The patient's ear is barely visible; the surgeon's hand is poised above the site of the head wound adding to the tension of the claustrophobic underground scene.

By contrast, Harold Sandys Williamson's hospital scene is a more sinister representation of the wounded patient as an experimental subject of unchecked medical science: *The Human Sacrifice: In an Operating Theatre* 1918. Incongruously, the delicate watercolour is crafted with sharp precision. Fragile flesh is concealed under the clinical aesthetic, as scalpel-like lines render the operating theatre hygienic and surgical. Williamson worked as a theatre orderly at the No. 6 General Hospital, while recovering from an infected ankle, where he observed operations closely. He wrote to his parents of the lightning speed of casualty operations under pressure with heavy casualties: 'They are very quick. I think they could take you to pieces completely in half an hour.'⁶ In this picture, white-gowned doctors loom over the patient, peering inside his body. He is an anonymous object of modern surgery more than a wounded man in pain.

Williamson joined the King's Royal Rifle Corps as a rifleman. Promoted to Lance Corporal in the 8th Battalion, he was wounded by a grenade during a battle near Villers-Bretonneux. He depicts his own wounding in *A German Attack on a Wet Morning, April 1918* (p.83), as he hobbles away from the scene, gripping his bleeding hand. A comrade lies dead in the foreground, while the misty haze over the morning assault denotes the confusion of battle, the fog of war. He wrote:

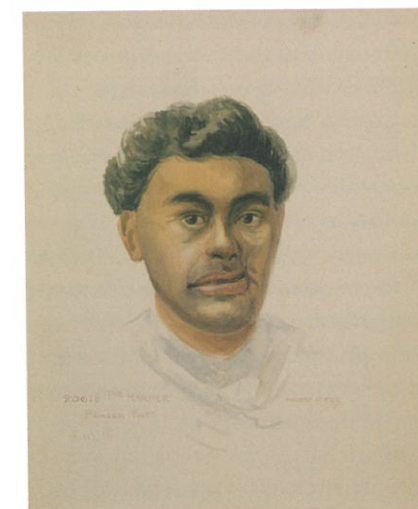
In the gloom and rain the storm troops then came over, and smashed through our two first lines...Two men are firing a Lewis gun. The wounded man has a poor chance of getting away; he must cross much open country swept by enemy fire, and go through a heavy barrage.⁷

Williamson's wound was serious enough for him to be repatriated to England. Like many artists of this period, experiencing and witnessing the extent of suffering in modern war underpinned the intense sensory feel of their work.

Rupture and Rehabilitation: Disability and the Wounds of War

From pain and succour experienced on the battlefield, we turn to the on-going impact of wounding on the body, the sensory trauma of vulnerable flesh, and the attempt to repair it. German Expressionist Max Pechstein followed Gauguin to the Micronesian island of Palau. On his return to Europe he was made a prisoner of war in Japan before being sent to the German frontline in 1916. Serving on the Somme and Flanders led to a nervous breakdown. His wartime experiences and his interest in 'primitive art' converge in this effigy of the soldier's ruptured face in the woodcut print *Wounded* 1919.

The medical reconstruction of faces and body parts can be seen in Herbert R Cole's watercolour 'portraits' of the facially wounded at Sidcup Hospital, and Alfred R Thomson's *Grafting a New*



Herbert R Cole
20618 Pte Harper Pioneer Batt 4.10.19 1919

Eyelid 1943 (p.93), where the patient's exposed, blood-soaked face is the focal point of the wider scene of the operating theatre. Though medical illustrations, such works have been more recently appreciated as art. Most of the plastic and dental reconstruction patients at Sidcup Hospital were white soldiers from Britain and the Empire; there were sections for Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, serving under Harold Delf Gillies. Intriguingly, one of Herbert R Cole's drawings from the New Zealand section is of a Maori patient. The portrait of *Private Harper* (Pioneer Battalion, New Zealand Expeditionary Force, 1919) is a rare example of an indigenous colonial soldier drawn into the European conflict. The Native Contingent and Pioneer Battalion was raised in 1915 with around 2227 Maori and 458 Pacific Islanders, and eventually suffered over 1,000 casualties.

Cole's portrait of Private Harper also reflects the longer history of the conquest and colonisation of indigenous lands and peoples: the massacres, disease epidemics, musket wounds, the lawlessness of the frontier, the land dispossession

and the subsequent wars of resistance that fractured loyalties within aboriginal societies. Today, colonialism casts its long shadow over contemporary conflicts, such as in the Congo. Richard Mosse's *Infra* series used the 'Aerochrome' film once deployed by the military for camouflage detection to startling effect. The *Untitled* 2011 (p.109) portrait of a mutilated militia boy-soldier is suffused with a pink, bloody, tinge. The film stock intensifies the soldier's open wound. His face has healed at the impact point and his arm has been amputated, revealing what happens in the absence of modern methods of facial and prosthetic reconstruction.

Kader Attia has also tackled the subject of colonialism, and the profound history of black men fighting and being wounded in the name of white men's wars in *The Debt* 2013 (p.108). From the earliest history of colonial French Africa, Attia's dual-slide projections take us through the First and Second World Wars, juxtaposing archival images of weapons with mutilated African soldiers, prosthetics, surgical casts and medical equipment. The rupturing of colonial soldiers



Rosine Cahen
Hospital Villemin (2 January 1918) 1918

bodies is extended to the historic losses they have experienced and their on-going legacies, implying that the African ghostland is still haunted by the colonial past.

Artists have used medical imagery to represent the rupture of modern war, but they have also plunged into the depths of the intimate suffering of the wounded as they recovered in hospital or returned to their domestic, civilian lives. Alsatian-born, Parisian-trained artist (Académie Julian) Rosine Cahen, mostly known as a lithographer, turned to delicate pastel, chalk and charcoal to draw the wounded and disabled she visited in French hospitals during the war. In her sketches, the observer is so discrete we are never allowed to gawk at the men's wounds, but rather it is their faces in a state of almost serene despair that we seek to understand. These works exude great calmness both in the men's expression and in the way the artist alludes to the intimate relationship of these captured moments. Nearly all the disabled soldiers are wearing their medals, even when lying in their beds, imbuing them with the honour and pride of great sacrifice. Cahen gives the wounded dignity – they are never medical objects.

Cahen was 59 years old in 1916, when she began visiting the war hospitals of Paris and Monte Carlo on numerous occasions over three years. Perhaps her motherly age enabled her to build a personal rapport with the soldiers while they 'sat' for her, quietly recovering. She seems deeply touched by their plight, occasionally recording the wounded man's name, regiment and nationality, the date of injury, and even if he had succumbed to his wounds and died. Unlike the purpose behind medical drawings, Cahen's viewpoint contains great emotional depth as she fixes on simple moments and everyday activities in the recovery process, such as doing handicraft therapy (*Hospital Alexandra Monte Carlo, 23 June 1918*) (p.100), and yet each drawing bears the weight of history

marking the fate of these soldiers' bodies. In *Hospital Rollin (Magenta A 1916)* (p.99) – a temporary hospital in Trudaine Avenue, 9th district, Paris – the forlorn patient stares out with hopeless despair from his head-wound bandages. His quiet gaze and clasped hands indicate pain and anxiety, but also the depths of his vulnerability. Cahen conveys intense feeling in the eyes of the patient. *Hospital Rollin (October 1918)* is a portrait of an amputee from the 17th Infantry Regiment, wounded on 21 August 1918, near Soissons. Preoccupied with reading his gazette, a little blue slipper juts out of his trouser leg. The space next to it is empty and crutches reveal his early stage of recovery.

In *Hospital Rollin (Pasteur Ward, October 1917)* (p.98) an orthopaedic patient lies in bed with both legs in splints raised above his body. He appears trapped under the apparatus, and stares intensely at her, almost pleading. Reflective light infuses the scene, complementing the touches of colour; chartreuse pyjamas; national flags; green and red sandbags. In *Hospital Villemin (8 April 1919)* (p.100) a blind soldier practices brail while still sitting in bed recovering from wounds. Wounded soldiers were expected to begin their rehabilitation before they were fully recovered. In the background are little sketches of the same patient, perhaps completed on other occasions. *The Amputees' Workshop 1918* (p.101) reveals the temporary wooden leg of an amputee; it juts out awkwardly, uncomfortably, under the table. His left hand is also amputated. But, we the viewer, do not attract his attention, as he concentrates on his writing task. In *Hospital Villemin (2 January 1918)* (p.97), the facially wounded patient is disguised under bandages, contrasting with his luminous purple shirt. A solitary eye peers out, as he tries to eat something from his tray. Unlike medical imagery, these intimate studies offer unique insights into the recovery process and the fragile humanity of the wounded. Cahen contrasts the brilliant blue-eyed gaze of a patient with the widow's downcast

expression. *Hospital Rollin (Wagram Ward, February 1919)* (p.99) thus hints at the losses of the war experienced collectively within the family.

Intimate suffering in the aftermath of war, and in the lives of the disabled, is also the subject of the Cologne artist Heinrich Hoerle's *Cripple Portfolio* 1920. In particular, the work entitled *The Married Couple* (p.105) frames the disabled soldier's personal loss as a shared loss between husbands and wives, a pain held like a fragile baby within the family. Hoerle's tender portrait of the couple is relevant to all families from the combatant nations. It is a universal message. At least one third of all German soldiers were married, and varying between 50–70 percent of servicemen in other European countries. Couples were affected by separation, infidelity and venereal disease, emotional estrangement, starvation and impoverishment, which saw postwar rises in divorce rates in all combatant countries, and in Germany it had doubled by 1921.⁸ Disability also put huge pressure on families. What Hoerle shows is the couple's shared pain in living together with the consequences of disability.



Heinrich Hoerle
Drei Invaliden (Three Invalids) 1930

By 1930, however, Hoerle was preoccupied with the machine-man symbol. His *Drei Invaliden (Three Invalids)* 1930 presents a dramatic shift towards critiquing the prosthetic imagination and the fantastic promise of the superhuman cyborg – half man, half machine. Prosthetic discourse insisted on men's willpower as the key to overcoming dysfunction, and assumed its hyper-masculinity and symbolic virility could compensate men for lost limbs. For artists, this rhetoric was fuel for the aesthetic politics of resistance.

Embodied Ruins: Natural and Material Environments

The destruction of the western front seemed incomprehensible to ordinary soldiers, but artists gave expression to the sensation of modern war as an abyss of putrid mud, charred and 'torn trees', and water-logged shell-holes. Three extraordinarily beautiful drawings by Paul Nash set us on a journey through the fragile beauty of the ruined environment. *The Field of Passchendaele* 1917 (p.114) and *Desolate Landscape* 1917 (p.116) are uninhabitable dystopias. *The Landscape: Hill 60* 1918 commemorates the infamous battle near Ypres in 1915. Nash was invalided out in 1917, but returned soon after as an official war artist and witnessed the battle of Passchendaele. The ruined



Paul Nash
The Landscape: Hill 60 1918

landscape parallels the ruined mind; it is as much a psychological as an embodied ruin. It is bleak, but sometimes a red poppy grows through the barbed wire, even while the bombs are still exploding in the distance: nature is violated but remarkably resilient. In the midst of destruction were signs of life; nature was determined to return. Harold Sandys Williamson noted the 'dismal wastes of shell holes, and the devastated woods of torn tree stumps', alongside 'green foliage on unharmed trees, and hedges'.⁹ In a similar vein, William Orpen depicted the apocalyptic landscape blown into a chalky dystopia in *Schwaben Redoubt* 1917 (p.118) and *The Great Mine, La Boisselle* 1917 (p.117). The former was a German stronghold near Thiepval, while the latter was the large crater in the Somme heartland. The landscape appears as a gangrenous wound, with slashes of red and green around the decomposing cavities of the environment.

Artists were not only struck by these vast wastelands, they also felt the terrifying impact of war on the domestic front. They depicted the ruin of the material and built environment – roads, villages and churches – such as in William Orpen's *Village: Evening* 1917, where shattered homes and putrefying corpses are ruined bodies. In William Rothenstein's *Church at Bourlon* 1920 (p.119), an ominous blue sky amplifies the solemnity of the crumbling structure. The body is absent, but the loss of community, of civilian life, livelihood and shelter, is inescapable. The wholesale destruction of rural France and Flanders was felt as an atrocity, deeply scarring the collective psyche.

Continuing in the next century, this apocalyptic imagination is refracted through Sophie Ristelhueber's approach to the landscapes of recent conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the West Bank.¹⁰ The *WB* series depicts roadblocks with deeply ambivalent sensations. In *WB #8* (p.123), the viewer stands before the gritty impasse; slowly the eye



Simon Norfolk
Track of a Destroyed Taliban Tank at Farm Hada Military Base 2001

travels beyond, only to be confronted with an impenetrable set of barriers, and further still, a settlement on the horizon appears impossibly faraway. The artificial topography of man-made violence in zones of conflict and disputed territory is strangely sensual and fleshy. The barricades appear as brutal, jagged scars on an ancient geological body.

The dream of a Palestinian homeland turns into a futuristic nightmare in the cinematic drama of Larissa Sansour's *Nation Estate* 2012 (p.124). In Sansour's 9-minute film, the Palestinian state consists of cities, such as Ramallah, Nablus, and Jerusalem, transferred to the floors of a skyscraper. There is dark humour in Sansour's 'clinical dystopia' as Palestinians are said to be 'living the high life'. However, elemental realities pierce the surreal fantasy; an Israeli helicopter circles above, an olive tree erupts from the floor, and a glass window is shattered. The challenges to statehood appear both environmental and man-made.

The embodied ruin that artists have been concerned with since the First World War also refers to the way that military technology and the detritus strewn on the battlefield could appear human and bestial. Muirhead Bone's *Torpedoed*

Oil Tanker 1940 (p.120) is broken open like a flesh wound with its chasm of twisted metal intestines. Like many artists concerned with war zones, the photographic artist Simon Norfolk has worked in Bosnia and the Middle East. In *Track of a Destroyed Taliban Tank at Farm Hada Military Base* 2001, the remnants of military technology appear as the spine of an ancient carcass, a beast from the archaeology of historical conflict. In the First World War soldiers often thought of tanks as devouring beasts from the mythical past, as visualised in Brangwyn's *Tank in Action* 1925–6 (p.121) and Bone's *Casualties: Tanks Drawn at Flers on the Somme* 1917 (p.120).

Shocking the Senses

Modern war brought new sights, smells and sounds as well as confined spaces. Tanks, trenches and submarines compressed the body and stressed the human mind. 'Thousand-yard stares', electrified faces, nervous ticks, and hysterical gaits revealed the sensory impact of shell-shock. In 1915, British neurologist CS Myers invented the term 'shell-shock'. Similar concepts followed in French, German and Italian as soldiers were diagnosed with traumatic shock, war neurosis and traumatic psychosis. The English term, however, magically conveyed the experience of sensory assault as a result of modern, industrial warfare. The centrality of the shell to the shock indicated how shellfire damaged the mind. It also made the madness of sons and husbands seem more understandable. Siegfried Sassoon's poem *The Repression of War Experience* explains: 'you can hear the guns, Hark! Thud, Thud, thud... they never cease... I want to go out and screech at them to stop... I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns.' Shell-shock provided a dignity, and potential empathy, for the sufferer rather than the stigma of psychiatric illness. Shell-shock was not what we understand as trauma today, but a medical term to describe the shock

that shellfire had on bodies and minds in the chaos of war.¹¹ Shell-shock was a sensory nightmare that reverberated through society and culture as no other medical condition. Artists were sufferers, witnesses and communicators of it; they helped to make it visible. Nevinson, like Dix, and so many other artists and writers of the period, suffered emotional and psychological problems as a result of the war. Nevinson described his 'delayed shock' as 'uncontrollable tremblings' and vomiting, 'anticipating evil', and rage.¹²

In this exhibition, the shocked senses of soldiers and civilians are visualised from German, British, and French perspectives. Eric Kennington's *Bewitched, Bemused and Bewildered* 1917 (p.132) encapsulated the 'thousand yard stare' of the shell-shocked soldier. Gripping the asylum cell window, and perhaps even chained to the bed, Conrad Felixmüller's *Soldier in the Madhouse* 1918 (p.130) has jagged furrows in his forehead; the work portrays the desperate isolation of the shell-shocked patient.

The visibility of psychological wounds was increasingly important to artists during the First World War and afterwards, as evidenced in Otto Dix's famous series of lithographs *Der Krieg* (War) 1924. Dix depicted the face of terror in *Fliehender Verwundeter* (Sommeschlacht 1916) (Wounded Man Fleeing – Battle of the Somme, 1916) 1924 and in the half-naked, emaciated ghost-figure of *Unterstand* (Dugout), conjuring the tension of shell-shock inside the cramped space of the trench. The deprivation of starvation on the frontline, and its psychological impact, is also represented in Harold Sandys Williamson's anguished *Hungry Soldier* 1919 (p.131).

The shocking impact of bombardments on civilians is powerfully conveyed in Otto Dix's print *Die Irrsinnige von St.-Marie-a-Py* (The Madwoman of St.-Marie-a-Py) 1924 (p.128). Her baby lies dead among her ruined home, while she beats her bare breast in the agony and powerlessness of grief. This is a rare but stark moment of Dix's sorrow for

the innocent casualties of men's wars as we are forced to share in her state of absolute distress. There is an element of this state of human abyss in Leslie Cole's women of Belsen and Zinkeisen's skeletons. However, it is in *Croatian and Muslim* 1994 (p.143) that Peter Howson's distressing and brave depiction of the gang rape and torture of a Bosnian woman in her home, that strikes us with the reality of women's unspoken terror in war. This is not technological modern warfare, but the universal and timeless weapon of men. It is the sensory abyss of rape in the warzone, and a predominant way in which women's bodies are treated as conquered territory in all wars.

The ruthless torture of captured men has been a more common representation of sensory war. The experience of prisoners of war was perilously close to many artists' hearts, whether as captives themselves or in imagining the terror of the enemy other, his torture as a detainee, and his plight as a human being reduced to a spoil of war. Eric Kennington's *Bringing in Prisoners* (from



Otto Dix
Der Krieg (War) 10: *Fliehender Verwundeter*
(*Sommeschlacht* 1916) (Wounded Man Fleeing – Battle of
the Somme, 1916) 1924

the *Making Soldiers* series, 1917) focuses less on the British soldier in the foreground than on the rag-tag group of exhausted and wounded German captives in the background. A century later, Richard Serra transformed the horrific, mass-circulated image of torture into a lithograph of the faceless, nameless Iraqi prisoner in *Abu Ghraib* 2004 (p.142).

Pietro Morando's charcoal sketches of life inside an Austro-Hungarian POW camp (pp.136–141), however, sear into our imagination the sensory horror of incarceration and the tortures inflicted on captives. Through the lens of Goya's *Disasters of War* and his own experiences, Morando's terrible sketches seem to foreshadow the Holocaust of European Jewry, as documented in Leslie Cole's *Belsen Camp: the Compound for Women* 1945 (p.144) and the barely-alive naked survivors in Doris Zinkeisen's *Human Laundry: Belsen, April 1945* 1945 (p.145). In Britain, we know little about the Italian Front in WW1, fought on the mountainous borderlands between Austro-Hungary and Italy. In freezing conditions, this front was soon bogged down in trench stalemate and thousands of civilians were interned to die of malnutrition. Morando was captured during the retreat from the Piave River in 1918. His charcoal sketches (from an album dated 1915–1918) describe the torture, executions, cholera and starvation he witnessed while imprisoned in the Hungarian camp of Nagymegyér and in the city of Komárom.

Bombing, Burning and Distant War

The French artist George Leroux entraps the viewer in the terrifying sensation of bombing and burning, literally a fiery hell (*L'enfer* 1921). The artist Harold Sandys Williamson described the sensory assault of a frontline bombardment as a 'fury', 'unbroken and terrible':

Overhead the sky was riven by perpetual uproar, by the throbbing and moaning of great shells



Georges Leroux
L'enfer (Hell) 1921

on their way, while the ceaseless flickering of countless explosions, Very lights and rockets broke the darkness... Suddenly we became aware that through the incredible din a yet more frightful sound was coming. Bombardment by heavy trench mortar had been added. The air trembled as if a gigantic drum were beating, and the ground shook and heaved beneath our feet.¹³

Williamson's *A Crump: A Shell Exploding* 1918 (p.149) depicts the shell shattering the ground and sending the earth skyward; the men below huddling in the sides of the trench in hopeless efforts to find safety from the fallout. It captures the sensation of rising and falling earth from the explosive force. The surrounding landscape is barren and the burnt trees in the distance still smoulder with the recent devastating effect of shellfire.

This exhibition, however, is not just focused on the power of military technology to annihilate cities and soldiers. It is also concerned with civilians. Käthe Kollwitz is perhaps one of the most powerful artists of the twentieth century in her capacity to show the plight of women and children as victims of war, starvation, and grief. After the death of her son Peter, Kollwitz spent twenty years struggling with her own mourning and how to commemorate it. The war continues

at home in Kollwitz' eyes. The death of her son, and all sons, was the mother's sacrifice, a feeling she bore deep in her heart for the rest of her life. Kollwitz was dreaming of him in haunted traumatic nightmares; she was not able to even visit his Belgian gravesite until 1926.¹⁴ The searing pain of the bereavement she could not heal marks her work. Six woodcuts from the *Der Krieg* series 1922–23 (pp.170–173) depict the plight of mothers, widows and children on the home front in her dark, expressive style. In *Das Opfer* (*The War: The Sacrifice*), the cadaverous, naked woman lifts her baby heavenward, as though it were an offering.¹⁵ In *Die Eltern III* (*The War: The Parents*), the kneeling parents crouch in sorrow, the father grips his face, and the mother buries her head in her husband's arm. In *Die Witwe I* (*The Widow I*), the widow is almost dead herself with grief, and in *Die Witwe II* (*The War: The Widow II*), she lies prostrate, her dead baby lying across her chest. *Das Volk* (*The War: The People*) brings together the emaciated townsfolk, the starving child, almost enveloped by the widow's shroud. Soldiers are not common motifs for Kollwitz. Hence even *The Volunteers* (*Die*



Käthe Kollwitz
Der Krieg: Die Witwe I (*The War: The Widow I*) 1922–23

Freiwilligen) are viewed through the eyes of the grieving mother. The figures are jammed together, like in a mass grave; some are corpses with arms laid across their bodies, but others writhe in painful death-throes, with grimacing faces and gripping hands. The cut of the wood arouses the sensation of brutalised flesh and raw emotional pain.

Far afield from the First World War, the horrific endpoint of modern technological warfare and its impact on civilians is seen in Japan, where survivors of the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima – the so-called *hibakusha* (bomb-exposed people) (pp.161–169) – were asked to record their memories of the event in the 1970s; over 1,000 responded. Their pain was evidently still raw; their visions of hell still fresh and unprocessed. Many of them were children or youths at the time; as adults they depicted the scenes still locked in their minds. This is visual art at the raw edge – traumatic, mnemonic, striving to be witnessed, precariously therapeutic. Using a variety of media on paper, and occasionally using text, these witnesses convey a humble message about the total destructive power of nuclear weapons and yet also the hopes of survivors to educate future generations. We are fortunate to be able to share their personal history, and see first-hand what they witnessed and what they wanted to communicate to us through images that reveal the extreme sensory trauma of Atomic war. These fragile artworks made some decades after 1945 force us to examine the endpoint of total war and total annihilation.

Many of these artists scrawled the time of the bomb on the paper, perhaps to document its personal truth; it was the darkest minute of modern war as total sensory annihilation. The artists depicted the after effects of a city razed to the ground (Kojiri Tsutomu, *Downtown Ruins*); the crimson fireball following the mushroom cloud, and the razed city with just a few lights



Masato Yamashita (age 52 at the time of drawing)
Charred Body 1973

flickering (Goro Kiyoyoshi, *City burning, Black cloud in the background*; Gisaku Tanaka, *Lights blinking on in the atomic desert*); the unbelievable effect of the blast on vulnerable flesh (Akiko Takakura, *Melting Hand*; Kichisuke Yoshimura, *Riverbank near Hiroshima Railway Station, their clothes ripped to shreds, their skin hanging down*); women in tatters drenched by the black rain they drank and from which they died (Satoshi Yoshimoto, *Black Rain: Something slimy covered my body*); a young girl in shredded clothes running possibly to water (Sadako Kimura, *Running Girl*); the thousands of civilians who jumped into the river, their bodies floating in the current (Masahiko Nakata, *Bloated Bodies in the River over Yokogawa Bridge*); the makeshift hospital struggling to contain the flow of wounded (Fumiko Yamaoka, *Red Cross Hospital*); the crazed search for friends and family (Yoshiko Michitsuji, *I ran toward my house through a sea of flames*); the horrifying sight of bodies burned to cinders, and the infamous image of the fleeing woman and child vaporised into a statue (Yasuko Yamagata, *Woman and Child Statue*; Masato Yamashita, *Charred Body*).

The image of the fleeing woman cradling her infant is a recurring theme in thousands of similar drawings. We see it in Nancy Spero's 1970s drawings and 1980s printed collages, such

as *El Salvador* 1986 (p.160). Spero's reaction to the Vietnam War is often about the female victim, as seen in *Bombs and Victims* 1966 (p.160) and *Helicopter, Eagle* (*Magnet*), *Victim* 1968 (p.159). These two gouaches are from her famous *War Series* 1966–70, which has been described as fragile 'notes jotted from nightmares'. As well, the 'swarming' helicopters may also bring to mind the future technology of sensory war conducted by bee-like buzzing predator drones.¹⁶

While pop art of this period celebrated consumer culture, it was also part of a wider protest culture that actively opposed the Vietnam War and anticipated an end to the world in an imminent nuclear holocaust. Colin Self's *Nude* 1971 (p.158) seems to reference the infamous imprint that vaporised bodies made onto Hiroshima's urban terrain. The artist transforms a profile of a hedonistic disco-dancer into a symbol of protest against nuclear war. The threat of nuclear war informed the counter-culture movement as a 'bomb culture', as Jeff Nuttall argued in 1970.¹⁷ Roy Lichtenstein's anti-aircraft training in the Second World War, and his critical use of wartime comics as tools of propaganda, were critical to his pop art. The impact is particularly evident in the three-dimensional enamel and steel relief *Wall Explosion II* 1965 (p.156), which gives the impression of a blast hole through a building. Lichtenstein's work reflected the period in which the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 continued to cast a shadow and public opinion was shifting against the Vietnam War. Indeed, the Cold War was a war of the mind, and these fears pervaded the society to which artists responded. Atomic bombs were also part of the historic military aim that war could be fought and won remotely. It is therefore timely to remember that the mushroom cloud was seen from above and at a distance, but that ordinary people felt the total annihilation on the ground.

In Omer Fast's thirty-minute film *5,000 Feet is the Best* 2011 (p.157) he brought the historic

fiction of distant war and virtual warfare into the contemporary context of digital technology. The film is set in a fictional city under occupation, where a predator drone inadvertently massacres a suburban family going on holiday. The seemingly absurd plot plays with the reality of civilians becoming collateral damage during strikes on military targets. In a later scene, the camera circles and roams over the night-sky of Las Vegas, illuminated by the glitter of colourful city-lights. But fact and fiction, the virtual and the real, continually come in and out of focus in the film.



Leon Underwood
*Concrete Observation Post, Mount Kemmel.
Three Gunners and a Signal Officer Observing
Fire for a Brigade Shoot 1919*

We hear the testimony of a former Predator drone operator describing his bombing operations while serving in the military. All the while, beauty and destruction are contrasted in the macabre spectacle and allure of military laser-beams. The young man speaks about the 'The Light of God', the Marines' vernacular for laser-targeting markers that enable the strike of a Hellfire: it 'looks like it's coming from heaven... pwuh... right on the spot... coming out of nowhere from the sky – it's quite beautiful'. The camera cuts from the Las Vegas scene to a blurred image of the documentary interview. Continuing on the journey over the

dazzling city, we hear how from the military base 'right up to the Pentagon' the strikes are viewed on screens projected from camera feeds. And we learn that this distant war – from above, from long-range, from a computer screen – continually returns to the pilot's dreams. The peptic pill-chewing actor indicates that these dreams are traumatic nightmares. The fantasy of distant war is that it remains distant. What Fast shows is that the war eventually comes home – into the minds of men – and never goes away. But it is the civilians who are annihilated.

This is a much older story. Long-range shellfire and the first aerial war promised greater destructive power and fewer own-casualties. Science and art came together in the First World War, as the illusion of distant war underscored its modernity. New forms of visuality were intrinsic to the conduct of modern warfare, involving new ways of seeing and concealing, as detailed in Leon Underwood's *Concrete Observation Post, Mount Kemmel. Three Gunners and a Signal Officer Observing Fire for a Brigade Shoot 1919*. Attached to military units as camouflage artists, Leon Underwood and Charles Pears developed techniques of disguise and deception for military purposes, such as deterring enemy U-boats. The creation of 'dazzle ships' drew on modernism and avant-garde techniques to rupture the coherence of sight. Vorticist Edward Wadsworth's *Dazzle Camouflage, Ship in Dry Dock 1918* (p153) demonstrates how black and white geometric and zigzagging lines confused the eye. By contrast to Vorticism's masculine edges, Pears' *Camouflaged Merchant Steamer Aground 1918* (p.152) highlights the use of delicate hues such as pink, blue, and green. These works remind us that the historic prosecution of modern war relies on what Costas Douzinas describes as 'regimes of visibility', toying with our senses, and reminding us that artists have been implicated in the prosecution of war: as responsive to it, as well as struggling for justice through aesthetic means.¹⁸

Chemical War and the Toxic Imaginary

The First World War was the first global war when vast quantities of chemical agents were used on large numbers of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. At the time, poison gas – as the various chemicals of chlorine, phosgene and mustard gas were called – was regarded as a shocking indictment on the brutality of modern war. At Languemarck, Ypres, on April 22 1915 6,000 steel cylinders containing 160 tons of pressurised liquid chlorine gas were released wounding 4,000 and killing over 1,000 French and Algerian soldiers. Like Fast's description of 5,000 feet being 'the best' height for a drone strike, the liquid gas was installed three weeks before being detonated in order to have 'the best' wind conditions to maximise the impact. The release was assisted by German meteorologists' studies of wind patterns, and within ten minutes drifted over the French troops downwind. The German, British and French use of chemical war produced 1,240,000 casualties and 90,000 deaths, and many more psychologically scarred for life.

Artists created an iconography of gas warfare, capturing the impact on soldiers, which helped to produce a toxic imagination that lasted throughout the twentieth century, generating a culture of anxiety about chemicals and modernity. Blinding, choking, slow death became common tropes of the gassed body. The artistic and literary response to chemical war was a cultural response that formed an important canon of imagery and cultural memory through the interwar period. Cultural material produced on gas warfare came to stand in for the meaning of the war itself. Audiences craved understanding of this radical new mode of warfare, and cultural forms provided some way of confronting the violence while assigning it the meaningfulness of remembrance.

The way in which the body succumbed to gas attack was a major aspect of the artistic response. Anti-German activist in neutral Holland, the

painter and cartoonist Louis Raemaekers became a refugee artist in London when the German authorities put a bounty on his head. Depicting the attack on the Canadians in Flanders on 24 April 1915, the themes of suffering but also heroic duty and care for one another are seen in this original drawing, which was published in *The Graphic*, on 3 August 1918. Indeed, graphic art was a crucial medium during the war and afterwards, and especially among postwar artists in Germany, such as Otto Dix in his iconic *Der Krieg* series of prints, which depicted the results of Allied chemical attacks on German-held areas. In *The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)* (p.177) (a scene from the infamous Battle of Verdun) we fear these



Baktash Sarang
Untitled (gas mask) 2012

dead men will return as haunting spirits. Inspired by Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War*, Dix used the etching technique to create a remarkable hallucinatory quality; bodies, gas and the trench's muddy walls are chaotically entwined, almost entombed together.

The advent of chemical war continued through the twentieth century, but there has also been

silence around this subject. The Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) is little known in the West. Since Iran was the enemy of the West, the world was silent about Saddam Hussein's use of chemicals on his Kurdish and Iranian enemies. But it was also a taboo subject for Iranians until recently. The legacy of chemical war – sickly, weak soldiers – did not fit with the masculine purity of the revolutionary martyrs. A new generation of artists are beginning to tackle these difficult subjects.

In the metal sculpture *Untitled (gas mask)* 2012 Bakdash Sarang uses the military technology of chemical war to explore the impact on soldiers. In *COCl₂* 2011 the light box refers both to the alluring cobalt blue colour identified with the chemical phosgene, which was first used in WW1. Phosgene was also used in the Iran-Iraq War, the longest conventional war of the 20th century, involving thousands of miles of machine-gun manned trenches and barbed wire. *Untitled (box)* 2006 (p.180) refers to the box soldiers carry, which, Sarang states, is 'heavy with the memories of war, of the hospital environment and the burial shroud.' The war continues for the families who care for chemically-affected soldiers: 'The legacy of war is with the ones who remain, injured in one way or another, who still suffer long after the wars end; they die the slow death and are often neglected and forgotten.'

Harking back to Otto Dix's 'sleepers', Sam Samiee's *Sleeping Children* 2012 (p.179) are touching in their innocence. Samiee drew on news images of around 5,000 Kurdish civilians in Halabja, who took just a few short hours on 16 March 1988 to be killed or maimed by mustard gas, nerve agents sarin, tabun and VX, and possibly cyanide. Samiee renders an extreme tactility and yet chaos to the image of dead children. We can never truly grasp the experience of this chemical massacre known as 'Bloody Friday'. The truth about the murder of these innocents is also obscured. Decades later, like the *hibakusha* survivors of the Hiroshima

atomic bombing, Halabja's children grew up to have their own children, passing chemically-induced birth defects, cancers, respiratory and skin disorders, on to the next generation.

From 1988 to 1991, Saddam Hussein's use of chemicals against the Kurds caused intense fears among soldiers in the British Army during the First Gulf War. Though this never happened, false alarms and training drills impacted on soldiers' anxieties. Artist John Keane's *An Ecstasy of Fumbling, (Portrait of the Artist in a Gas Alert)* 1991 (p.178) references Wilfred Owen's iconic poem of the First World War, *Dulce et Decorum est* to arouse the historic fear that chemical war induces in the mind and body. Owen described 'coughing like hags', and the panicked response: 'Gas! Gas! Quick boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling, Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time', but the lone soldier who 'before my helpless sight', 'plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning'. An Official War Artist stationed in the Gulf, Keane continued the tradition of art and literature mutually informing the cultural imagination of chemical warfare, its painful effects on human bodies and the panic



Sophie Jodoin
Gas Mask (S/54) 2008

it caused. Keane uses dense paint and frenzied brushstrokes, signifying desperate attempts to protect oneself from imminent attack from this silent weapon of war.

During the First World War, gas was a frontline weapon but civilians also feared chemical attacks. The gas mask was a protective and yet also anxiety-inducing technology, a tension that artists and writers explored. More recently, Canadian artist Sophie Jodoin has explored this symbolism in a series of disturbingly beautiful conté drawings, *Helmets and Gas masks* (105 works, 2007–9). Jodoin morphs faces and masks so that the dehumanising effect is not from the feared chemicals, but from the supposed armour. Distorted and anguished faces of men, women and children put terror into our hearts, and this is particularly effective in her tangible drawing technique. Jodoin explains that the gas mask becomes a skull, representing human beings who are 'trapped physically and mentally', and whose facial expressions and 'suffering eyes' evoke 'tender pain'.¹⁹

Richard Mosse's lurid pink landscape *Poison Glen* 2012 connects the Congolese forests to a longer history of violent conflict fought with chemicals and toxins spread over the European frontline in the first World War, the jungles of Vietnam, and now in the imaginary space of the Congo as it appears under the sickly taint of infra-red. We become like hallucinating travellers, as Mosse transforms 'the landscape's radiant beauty and the volatile, turgid climate' into a psychedelic nightmare reminiscent of the Vietnam era. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* provides the backdrop to the alienating allure of this odyssey through 'an unspeakable destination'.²⁰ In *The Sensory War 1914–2014* our journey ends in the ghostlands of the century's warzones.

Ghostlands: Loss, Memory and Resilience

From the former-Belgian Congo, then, we return to the Belgian battlefield in the aftermath of the First World War. Devastating technologies



Richard Mosse
Poison Glen 2012

assaulted the body and the mind as never before – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell – and yet something extra-sensory was also felt, a sixth unspeakable sense, like perceiving the ghosts of the war dead. Spiritualism rose from the crucible of industrial war and mass death. In 1919, Ian Strang painted *Mount Kemmel* (p.187) enveloped in an ethereal pale-pink mist. This is no mythic Flanders Fields covered in blood-red poppies, but rather the western front haunted by ghosts. In Belgium after the war, Nevinson travelled to Passchendaele and Ypres, where he took sketches to begin his commissioned work, *The Harvest of Battle* 1919 (p.188). The panorama stretches across the sodden battlefield: we see a dead soldier's gaping mouth, a procession of desperately wounded men, and can almost smell the acrid smoke billowing on the horizon. The figures are like phantoms, while a nauseating khaki hue reminiscent of mustard gas permeates the scene, as though the landscapes he visited in 1919 were still filled with the stench of death.

The persistence of memory is heard in Jonty Semper's sound piece *Kenotaphion* 2001, which collates decades of recordings of the minute's silence on Armistice Day, turning them into an aural cenotaph. Since the First World War, artists have often used the theme of absence and presence, the living and the dead, to explore

the impact of war. In Katie Davies' video *The Separation Line* 2012 (p.195), the people who line the streets of Royal Wooten Bassett, are waiting for the repatriation ceremony in which the hearse carrying the coffin of a dead soldier will pass by. Townsfolk of all ages, men and women, are seen along with soldiers in deep reflection; it is a powerful and emotional contemplation on mourning and memory.

Though the impact of war on the senses is damaging, when traumatic symptoms appear after the event, some artists have interpreted this ambiguously. They have seen how great destruction and suffering can also galvanise a society – and eventually even instil faith in human resilience and the determination to reconstruct society in the aftermath of war's devastation. Similar to the *hibakusha* artists in the aftermath of the Atomic bombing of Japan, some contemporary artists found moments of hope in the shadow of trauma. What the Americans called the Vietnam War, and the Vietnamese called the American War, was nevertheless one of the most protracted and violent wars of modern history. Though we are used to understanding this war through the lens of Hollywood cinema, and the politics of traumatic guilt (*Apocalypse Now*) and Reaganite reconstruction (*Rambo*), contemporary artists offer another view of history. Drawing on and subverting the Hollywood tradition, the Vietnamese artist Dinh Q Lê delivers a powerful and complex message in his three-screen video, *The Farmers and the Helicopters* 2006 (p.194). He explores Vietnamese experiences and memories of a war fought with helicopters and chemicals. But the work does not end with that point. Lê was interested in the way people and the environment can recover from the trauma of war. There is the possibility for reconstruction, reconciliation, and social transformation. The once dreaded helicopter is now a symbol of development and improvement in living conditions in Vietnam.



Katie Davies
The Separation Line 2012

In the film, he says, 'when I was young I thought that the helicopter was a magical machine'. Inspired by a farmer and mechanic who built a helicopter from recycled machine parts, Lê wanted his artwork to explore 'the transformation of a war machine into a peaceful, useful object'.²¹

The Sensory War 1914–2014 has touched upon a century of artistic interpretation of the impact of war on the human sensory experience, connecting minds, bodies and environments. It has been a very dark, often-traumatic, journey through different war zones over time. A few elements of dark humour in art – understood as a weapon of the weak – have been present. There is also a glimmer of ambiguous hope in Simon Norfolk's *Balloon Seller outside a former Teahouse* 2001 (p.196), from his *Afghanistan: Chronotopia* series, which explores the layering of time (chronos) and space (topos) from decades of conflict. Among the bombed-out ruins of a Stonehenge-like teahouse appear incongruous dots of pink, green, blue and yellow colour; small signs of life in the return of balloons and kites banned by the Taliban. Colour renders visible the face of ordinary people's suffering that is very often the hidden story of this particular war, and indeed many others. The war-ravaged face of the balloon-seller suggests both the fragility of hope and the resilience of the human – civilian – spirit.

Notes

- 1 CRW Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.), p. 99, 95.
- 2 Lawrence Howard, *The Effect of War Upon Art and Literature*, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1916), pp. 1–15.
- 3 Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, p. 107.
- 4 Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, p.100.
- 5 In Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 170.
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