

Ways of Percieving, Curation Essay

Submission date: 15-March-2022 17:00

Student Number: 2116838

Word count: 1,929

Ciara Louise Williams

BA Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context

Word count: 1,572

My exhibition entitled 'War- Through the Eyes of the Artist' will be held in the Mission Gallery in Swansea and include nine pieces of art from five artists whose respective work expresses their perspective on the wars of their time. In this essay I will explore the artist perception of war and how it manifests within their work. I will also explore Roland Barthes theory of semiotics, as war art relies heavily on visual symbolism to communicate meaning to the viewer.



Fig One

As the viewer enters the Mission Gallery, to their right they will see Martha Rosler's piece 'Red Stripe Kitchen', which is a photomontage of American soldiers rifling through a modern kitchen. I want this piece to be the first the audience sees, as Rosler expressed in an interview with MoMA 'I wanted the viewer to have a place to stand... that you enter the image and see yourself standing there.' ('House Beautiful (Bringing the War Home). 1967-72, SEEING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS', 2019). This piece will help to submerge the viewer not only into this piece, but will set the tone for the rest of the exhibition, making the viewer not just a spectator but a part of each piece in the exhibition. I also include a seating area in front of this piece, as the topic of war is extremely dark and emotionally disturbing, I want to give the viewer the opportunity to sit and fully explore their reactions and feelings towards this piece and its context. This artwork belongs to a series of similar cut-and-stuck pieces entitled 'Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful', which centres around the Vietnam War becoming the first ever living room war; a term that was created to express the heavy television news coverage of its events.

Rosler, as a young person, found her frustration and ultimate inspiration for these pieces in the televised new broadcast's separation of viewer from the consequences of war. In the same video interview for MoMA, Rosler explained how she combatted against the separation; 'I am literally bringing images of the war into spaces having to do with our domestic life.' To start the exhibition with

this piece is like a vehicle of familiarity which allows the viewer to relate to the subjects mixture of domesticity with the stark disruption of war imagery.



Fig Two and Fig Three

The next pieces the viewers will see are 'Rosso Plastica, 1963' and 'Combustione, 1966', two mixed media pieces by Italian post-war artist Alberto Burri, which will be displayed on either side of the circular extension of the gallery space. I decided to have these pieces next in my curation of the space as after putting the viewers into the context of war with Rosler's piece, I want to shake up the audience by showing them gruesome, wound-like imagery. Burri fought for Italy during the Second World War and also worked as a physician for the Italian army. He was captured by British forces and became a prisoner of war in the May 1943 while in Tunisia. Even though these particular pieces of Burri's don't depict

battlefields or bombed buildings, there is no denying the visual connotation of blood and bodily harm. 'From his early exhibitions, Burri was labelled the artist of wounds because of the actual gashes and tears right in the fabric of the picture.' (Fineberg, 2015).



Fig Four

On the wall opposite Rosler, the fourth piece the viewer will encounter is 'The Consequences of War, 1637–38' by *Rubens*, which is a Flemish Baroque painting depicting the harsh environment created by the Thirty Year's War. This piece has strong symbolic value as do many of Rubens' pieces. 'Underneath Mars's feet lie a book and a drawing. These represent the manner in which the arts and letters

are forgotten and destroyed in the chaos and violence of war.’ (Wikipedia (2021) Consequences of War).

Due to this specific use of symbolism, I decided that this piece needed to be included in the exhibition, as even though it isn’t contemporary like the rest of the pieces, the prophetic statement of which the arts could be lost and consumed by the darkness of war is something that would terrify artists and art viewers alike, further showing not just how the lives of people are destroyed but how important elements of our society could be lost. Again, a bench is placed in front of the painting so the viewer can take in its grandeur and can find all the symbols to unravel the deeper purpose of the piece.



Fig Five

Pablo Picasso’s ‘Guernica, 1937’ will be displayed on the entrance wall, its monochromatic palette contrasting with the other pieces. When curating an

exhibition on war, one painting comes to mind and that is Picasso's powerful anti-war painting. The painting shows the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica.

'Although clear as an emotional response to war's senseless violence, the painting, with its mismatched subjects, confounded world's fair viewers.' (Alicja Zelazko, 2018). Art created with the subject of war at the forefront always splits opinions, but its cubist style lends to the use of symbolism, as this piece is full of it. Similar to the Ruben's painting included in this exhibition, a bench is placed in front for a fully immersive and comfortable experience for the viewer.

'...Guernica has become a demonstration tool for countless conflicts around the world, to include anti-war protests in America following the entrance into Iraq in 2003...' (Dean, 2020). I wanted the mural included in this exhibition not only for its fame and prowess in the art world, but because it is a source of inspiration for every piece of anti-war art that comes after 'Guernica'.

'Wherever recreations of the mural appear, the message is typically a cry for peace in the wake of violent conflict.' (Dean, 2020).



Fig Six



Fig Seven



Fig Eight

In the centre of the of the rectangular gallery space, I will have three walls constructed into a triangular shape, so that each Kollwitz print will have its own wall to be displayed upon. After walking anti-clockwise from the entrance to

'Guernica', the Kollwitz prints will centre the viewer physically, in preparation for the final sculptural piece. The prints will also centre the viewer emotionally with the subjects of Kollwitz prints; which is the victims of war and conflict. The first print will be 'The Volunteers (plate 2) from *War, 1921-22*' and will be the beginning of a visual journey and a progression of grief. The next will be 'The Mothers (plate 6) from *War, 1921-22*' and the final piece of Kollwitz will be 'The Parents (plate 3) from *War, 1921-22*'.

The first print shows the direct result of war which is the death of soldiers, the second shows the mothers mourning in a group and the final shows the intimate grief of parents mourning the loss of a child together. While the other pieces shown before the Kollwitz prints can conjure emotional reactions for the viewer, I felt it necessary to show these prints, to show that no matter the country, the conflict, the ones who suffer the most are the innocent.

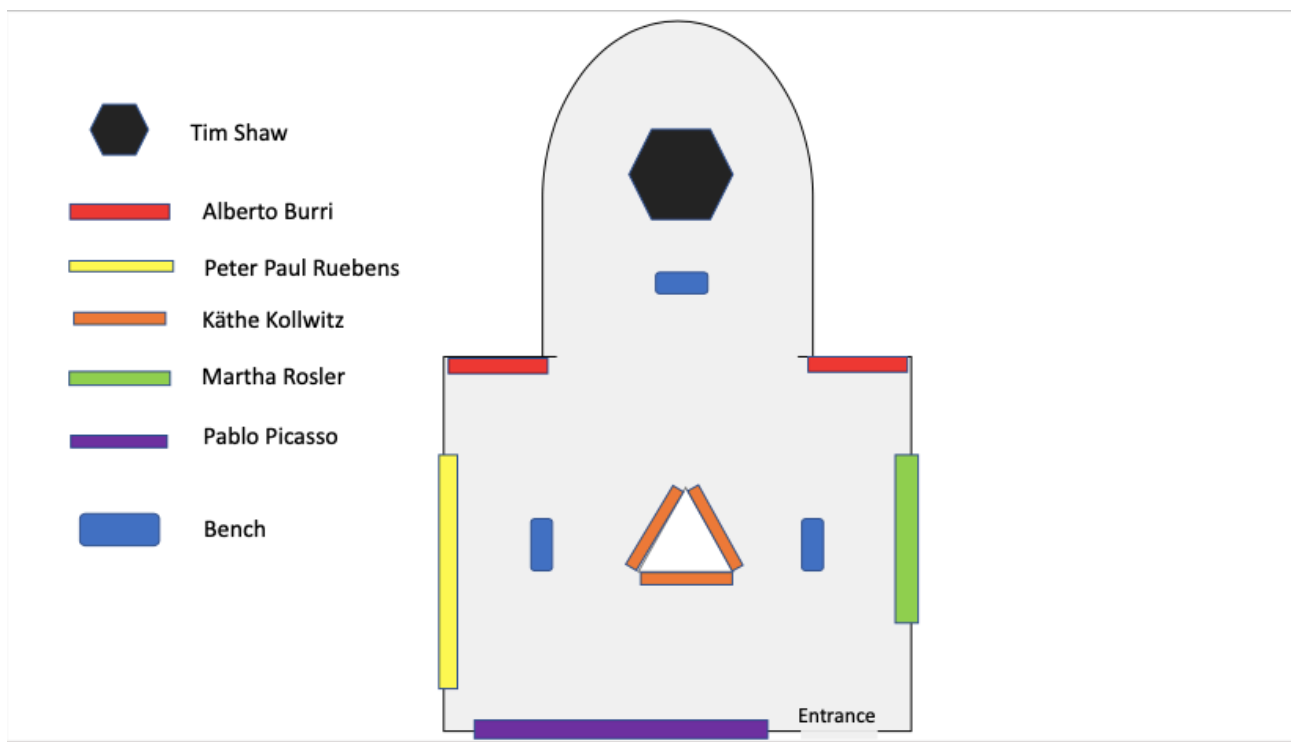
I have given no sitting area for these pieces as I want the viewer to be made to stand and consume the sadness expressed from these prints.



Fig Nine

From the Kollwitz prints, the viewer will walk forward into the rounded gallery space and be met by the seventeen foot sculpture by Tim Shaw entitled 'Casting A Dark Democracy, 2007'. The piece is made from many different materials such as barbed wire, steel and electrical wires and hold the form that is likened to the hood worn by members of the Klu Klux Klan. This visual symbolism is one of terror and violence, and even though this piece's context is not set in racism, the fear the imagery creates in the viewer is that similar to the fear created by war and conflict.

Shaw created this piece as a response to the outrage himself and the British public felt in 2003 when the United Kingdom took part in the Iraq invasion. Shaw was also inspired by a series of images of the inhumane treatment and torture of a prisoner who was wearing a hood. 'Ten years after the photograph which inspired 'Casting a Dark Democracy' was taken, Tim believes '...the image remains potent, as something that trawls just beneath the surface of the collective consciousness.' (RWA, 2014)



Exhibition plan.

As shown in the key coded plan above, I want the viewers to move anti-clockwise from Rosler's 'Red Stripe Kitchen' all the way around to Picasso's 'Guernica'. From Picasso's mural, I want the viewer to actively experience the Kollwitz prints by moving around the walled structure, and finally move from the centre into the rounded gallery space to Shaw's sculpture, as a modern warning, meant to express to the spectator that war and conflict affect those without power the most. Due to the entrance of the Mission Gallery being on the right on the space, moving anti clockwise allows the majority of the space to be used and occupied, and allows a clean flow of movement. After seeing the Burri's I didn't want the spectator to enter into Shaw's perception of war as I felt its size was more appropriate for a final exhibition piece, to round the show off concisely.

Figures

Fig One - Rosler, M. (1967–72) *Red Stripe Kitchen* [Photomontage, printed as a color photograph] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA

Fig Two - Burri, A. (1963) *Rosso Plastica* [Plastic, acrylic, vinavil and combustion on canvas.] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA

Fig Three - Burri, A. (1966) *Combustione* [painting and plastic on panel] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA

Fig Four - Rubens, P.P (1637–38) *Consequences of War* [Oil on canvas] Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence

Fig Five - Picasso, P (1937) *Guernica* [Oil on canvas] Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain

Fig Six - Kollwitz, K (1921) *The Volunteers* [woodcut print on paper]

Fig Seven - Kollwitz, K (1921) *The Mothers* [woodcut print on paper]

Fig Eight - Kollwitz, K (1921) *The Parents* [woodcut print on paper]

Fig Nine - Shaw, T (2007) *Casting a Dark Democracy* [steel, black polythene, oil and sand]

Bibliography

The Museum Of Modern Art (2019). House Beautiful (Bringing the War Home). 1967-72 | SEEING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS. [online] www.youtube.com. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJbR4jXsrXU&t=142s> [Accessed 10 Mar. 2022].

Fineberg, J.D. (2015). "Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting" Review. Wall Street Journal. [online] 9 Dec. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/alberto-burri-the-trauma-of-painting-review-1449698460>.

Wikipedia (2021). Consequences of War. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequences_of_War.

Alicja Zelazko (2018). Guernica | Description, History, & Facts. In: Encyclopædia Britannica. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Guernica-by-Picasso>.

Dean, N.E. (2020). The Art of War: Examining Picasso's Guernica as a Tool for Leader Professional Development. [online] The Strategy Bridge. Available at: <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/7/13/the-art-of-war-examining-picassos-guernica-as-a-tool-for-leader-professional-development>.

RWA (2014). Shock and Awe: Contemporary Artists at War and Peace 19 July – 17 September. [online] RWA: Behind the scenes. Available at: <https://rwabristol.wordpress.com/2014/06/30/shock-and-awe-contemporary-artists-at-war-and-peace-19-july-17-september/>.