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Chosen Question:

Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technology Society?

Throughout this Essay I will be covering 3 examples where photographers & image makers have used digital technology such as, digital photography, repurposing of digital images, projection and 3D rendering, to address Conflict. I will be focussing on Conflict pertaining public and private information and conflict between imagery of war and peace. I will be going into these themes throughout this Essay in great detail to discover the means in which they have visualized these themes and what impact they had on the audience that the works attracted. I will also be using visual prompts such as example images to show some of the works and for one of them, the project being used.

Example 1.

The first example of conflict being addressed through a digital medium is the works created by Uğur Gallenkuş. Gallenkuş wrote a book *Parallel Universes of War & Peace* (Gallenkuş, 2020) which uses photography of war and peace, creating juxtaposed collage images which spring to life a new way of looking at a specific world conflict, War.



Figure 1

Figure 1 is one of the photographs used in Gallenkuş' book (Gallenkuş, 2024) where he has used two different photos which argue with one another in their content and context and then put them together to create an emotionally moving and thought-provoking image. The photograph on the right shows the viewer a glimpse into the horrors that are occurring in Gaza right now, a girl standing in what we could assume is her home, the windows blown open, the floor covered in tattered rugs and rubble, the walls have deep holes which were chipped by flying rocks and glass, then the little girl. Standing on her own watching through her brutally open wall as the world that she knows is torn down. Next to this image is a

calm and clean photograph, taken as if it were a stock photograph being used for a magazine, we see a mother and daughter standing in a spotless white room surrounded by windows, looking out into the city ahead of them and holding hands with joy. They are also standing on a blanket, as if they had just been playing or possibly trying to not scratch their glistening wood floors. This use of collage and juxtaposition is the way that Gallenkuş chooses to portray Conflict. He shows this throughout his book, with different images merged together to create opposing images that illustrate the stunning and terrifying way that War and Conflict affect people around the world.

When looking at these images you may feel that there is a finger being pointed at the general public for enjoying their lives, but this is not what the art is for. It is to visualize the dissonance that modern day civilization creates, allowing some people to suffer and some to thrive. Best said by Anna Zoynova, "Gallenkuş does not cast blame, but instead offers a profound reflection on the nature of peace and war, reminding us that these contrasts exist simultaneously and in parallel" (Zoynova, 2024, para 1). Another interesting fact that makes Gallenkuş stand out from other photographers or image makers that have done anything similar is that his work is still evolving. To this day (01/12/2025) Gallenkuş will post new collage images that he has made using existing photographs, famous and very popular paintings, or new imagery of war to his Instagram page. This allows his works to stay relevant and up to date with the world and the current conflicts happening now, some works are about famine, some about global warming, some about abuse against women and a majority of posts still drawing eyes to the horrendous conflict in Palestine and Gaza. Gallenkuş has not only made a living, breathing, evolving piece of art, but also created a way to use this medium of collage to address unfairness, Conflict and unjust in this world. Something I see as incredibly important and quite amazing.

Example 2.

My Second example is very different from the first, a photographer by the name of Jenny Holzer. The piece that I will be focussing on is her work *For the City* which was presented at the Rockefeller Centre, The New York Public Library and at New York University's Bobst Library in 2005. In this work she projected pieces of writing such as poems by writers, Wislawa Szymborska, Yehuda Amichai, Henri Cole, Mahmoud Darwish among other esteemed writers on the fronts of the Rockefeller Centre and The New York Public Library. But then did something different for the University Library, instead of poetry, Holzer projected declassified government documents which were made public when the Freedom of Information Act was passed. By doing this, Holzer has highlighted a conflict in America around what information should and shouldn't be kept secret, a "struggle to achieve an

equitable balance between transparency and secrecy, public and private.”
(creativetime.org, 2005, para 2).



Figure 2

Figure 2 is a photograph taken of the poetry being displayed onto The New York Public Library, the light wrapping around the architecture, seeping into the pours of the cement, almost as an attempt to stain the building with the light. The particular writing that you see now on the building is an excerpt from the poem *Love Lies Sleeping* (1936) by Elizabeth Bishop. This is a poem that speaks in profound detail about the transition from night to day in a city, juxtaposing the stars at night with city trains, forming an unseen connection between the mundane and celestial. Her choice of poems for this exhibition came from the want to bring challenging and particularly important sociopolitical issues into the public realm, which would hopefully inspire the general public to start looking into these things themselves, to make their own ideas and opinions. During this and all of the other projections the words would slowly scroll upward as if it were a title screen at the end of a film to reveal the next wall of text. This allowed the projection to go on for hours without there needing to be much intervention on the piece, giving it a feeling of life.

The way that Holzer's work, in comparison to Gallenkus's work addresses conflict is very abstract and isn't immediately obvious to some audiences. Holzer's work talks about conflict with private and public information, how the Government in this instance has decided to release certain articles and writings, but has kept some private. This exhibition allows us to ask, why? And who should decide what is kept behind closed doors? Shouldn't all information that effects people's opinions be public? This fight of privacy makes this exhibition very deep and, in a way, philosophical. I further my point of view with this quote by Jenny Holzer,

I show what I can with words in light and motion in a chosen place, and when I envelop the time needed, the space around, the noise, smells, the people looking at one another and everything before them, I have given what I know. (Holzer, 1998, quoted in Creativetime, 2005, para 3)

Example 3.

My third and final choice for artists that have used digital media to address conflict is Lisa Barnard and her work *Virtual Iraq*. This work addresses the War in Iraq and the effects it has on the people who fought in it, through the use of VR headsets which, in 2008, were used and developed for the U.S. military. Another main point of this work is addressing the type of imagery that is shown to these men, both before and after they go to War. Barnard worked with Albert 'skip' Rizza and Jarrel Pair to create this system so that it could also be used as a tool for the U.S. military to administer Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PET), also known as Immersion Therapy during sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Barnard (2025) mentions in her website that this programme is now known as 'Bravemind', has been equipped with far superior visuals along with the inclusion of Afghan cities, and is now instated into more than 50 sites including VA hospitals, military bases and University Centres.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Figure 3 and Figure 4 are depictions of the work that she developed. Figure 3 is what the VR headset that was used at the time looked like when worn, a small screen fixed to the head of the wearer and wired up to a computer that would then run the programme, this allowed the participants to move and look around to experience the Virtual Reality with their whole bodies. This was one of the key parts to making an immersive programme. Figure 4 is a photograph that was taken inside the programme. It shows a man wearing the uniform of a U.S. military sergeant as he stands at attention in a dark looming hallway, there is also a small light above his head which slightly illuminates the room he is in. I feel that this image does a great job of showing the atmosphere that this programme would put these men into. The character 'Sergeant Star' that is shown in this image also has the capability to talk to the participants, making an even more immersive experience. Barnard's look into conflict doesn't just come from a photographer's perspective or an Artistic perspective, it comes from a personal perspective too. In an interview with Clara Bolin, Museum Curator for Photography, after being asked about her work Barnard states, "I was interested in the topic of PTSD for personal family reasons, as my grandfather served in both the First and Second World Wars and ended his own life due to PTSD when he was already quite old." (Lisa Barnard,

2024, para5). This personal attachment to the work has allowed the work to be carried into its own life where it now lives on, being used by people with PTSD so that they may go on to live normal and fulfilling lives due to her work. This is an amazing example of art that changes people's lives and also art that affects the way people perceive world conflicts.



Figure 5

Figure 5 is a 3D model which was used in the programme. It is a model of what looks to be a bloodied and beaten man, possibly dead, who has had his wounds minorly tended to. He is wearing torn clothing from head to toe and half of his face is covered with bandages, along with his torso beneath his shirt. I am including this image due to its brutal nature, and its use in the programme, this model is shown to veterans and to men that have yet to be deployed, one is being shown so that they may be prepared for the horrors they will see whilst at war. And the other is being shown so that they may rationalise and put past the things that they have experienced. Next to this (Figure 5) a man named Gordan MacDonald wrote "Help save the youth of America, Help save the youth of the world, Help save the boys in uniform, Their mothers and their faithful girls, Billy Bragg, Help Save the Youth of America, **Bang, Bang, You're Dead**" (MacDonald, 2012, para 2). This being written in response to this piece tells volumes on how this work was received by the public. People like MacDonald have used Barnard's work to express their own feelings towards war and violence. Whilst she documents this abstract look into the world of veterans and soon to be veterans, people can take inspiration and start making their own addresses on conflict. A truly influential piece of work which details conflict in a superbly personal and relatable way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all of the photographers and image makers that I have mentioned in this essay have, I feel, used digital mediums to display and create their works, and have sufficiently addressed different types of conflict in their own unique ways.

Uğur Gallenkuş, an amazing photographer that used his skills in collage and photography to put together a living piece of work that to this day still evolves and is added to very often. Finding new photographers and painters to work with to make his punchy, unapologetic and emotionally driven works. Focussing on the War happening in Gaza and on other world problems such as famine, global warming and political unfairness. Jenny Holzer is in my opinion a really great example of the baseline for the intervention style of projection work. Instead of projecting onto walls in an exhibition or making videos and posting them on the internet, she took her works to some of the most important buildings in those areas and projected what she felt was important, the conflict between private and public information. Along with projecting profound poems which address their own kinds of conflicts. I find her work as a stand-out from the lineup I have shown in this essay due to its massively public display. And last but definitely not least, Lisa Barnard. An amazing digital artist who has used her photography skills to make impactful and moving photographs within a programme that she made to help Veterans deal with their PTSD, and the U.S. military prepare men for deployment. A project which has grown into something which can still be used today to help people that need it, much like her grandfather.

Digital art has changed how people consume information, art and history. These are three of the cases where the digital medium had been used to change art for good.

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Figures:

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- Figure 3: Lisa Barnard. (2012) *head gear*. Available at: <https://gordonmacdonalddotorg.wordpress.com/2012/05/07/lisa-barnards-virtual-iraq-text-by-gordon-macdonald/> (Accessed: 9th December 2025)
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