

Levin, the Ukrainian war and the ethics of violence in art.



February 24, 2022. REUTERS/Maksim Levin

The ethics of violence in art and especially photography is subjective to the viewer, as annie besant said “ morality is utility” meaning our morals and ethics are dictated by the surroundings of the one individual.

Is one wrong to say that robert capa was wrong to show the man's death in the falling soldier or Maksim levin show the fallen ukrainian? One person is to say nowhere as to another person saying it needs to be shown. In the eyes of Capa himself he did not

question the morals or ethics of the photo and called it his greatest work. This resonates with the message of Mr Levin's work, he is sending a message to the rest of the world, informing us of what is to be seen.

Levin's work is important especially as he isn't around anymore because of the work he did. Levin tragically lost his life in 2022 while covering the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Born in Kyiv in 1981, Levin is currently known for his striking and deeply traumatic photography that captured the harshness of war and its impact on everyday people. His images, to me, are raw and poignant and have brought global attention to the struggles faced by the Ukrainian people.

Levin's work as a photojournalist spanned over a decade, during which he captured powerful images from conflicts in both Ukraine and the Middle East. His most memorable and haunting work focused on the current criminal Russian invasion into Ukraine that started in 2022. His photographs of fallen soldiers and war-torn landscapes told the story of a nation at war and a deeply troubled and small nation too. One not apt to face war with Russia. His images not only reflected the brutality of the conflict but also conveyed the resilience of the human spirit. One of the reasons I believe his work is important

Some people see the image as important for one to do, as it's a conflict that makes me feel conflicted with the concept of war, as of my age the Ukrainian war is the first one to affect me personally, with threats of violence and now political standings of the country affect me. I think gaining a further understanding of the wars and soldiers in general is important, returning to Capa and the falling soldier and as Yigal Tamarkin talks about Capa's image "it shows that freedom is not free" and believed it so much he made a sculpture of the famous image titled 'freedom is not free' a sculpture that stands in Israel as a message to the people there about war. I am on the side of Besant and believe that the utilitarian nature of art is important for the world. It spreads meaning and message to the people of the world and anyone who sees the image understands

something greater, because of the controversial nature of an image like that. If an artwork shows violence for the sake of violence however, that could be seen as ethically wrong, but is it really, Romero Britto said “all art is too important not to share” and I believe that too, as all people are important, so is the visualization of violence upon people unimportant? Well of course not, because people are important, it's important to show the violence placed upon people, if it's done by other people or something else. Weegee for instance. A photojournalist who famously had work compiled of pure detestable violence put onto people, including dead bodies and murders. But his journalism showed the world the violence found on streets that you and I roam. It's an important message because it's a message we all as people understand. Violence is wrong but is the work produced around it wrong? Is showing it as art wrong? Where is the ethical line? Or even if there is one? It's an argument made by people who want answers. But there isn't a straight cut one. If there was a simple yes no answer to it then where lies the importance. Is it or isn't it? It's not that simple. But if we step back from the artwork and just look at it as it is, take away context, take away everything we understand about ethics and morals and just look at the work. When you look at the dead soldier, that tank, that landscape, what do you feel? Sad? Angry? Inspired?

It may not be one of those but you experience something, and that is what art is for the viewer to see and feel something. Taking your own knowledge from the world, your own experiences and your own anecdotes and emoting something. That's art. And violence shown or not, it's all the same, art is subjective and so is the morals behind them. It's not simple but it's palpable to grasp and it's why as a species we need art, all forms of it. It's important to tell these stories no matter the controversy.

Levin was a photojournalist born in Ukraine but not only stationed in Ukraine but for a while had always been, if we take the image for its photographic prowess it is a very well shot image. It has an intriguing composition with the corpse on the bottom of the frame, the sunlight glowing down onto the warzone and the tank is on the side of the frame with a car in the top right quadrant, following the rule of thirds. Artistically it is a well shot image with interesting choice in composition and placement. There's also the

fact of it being shot on what appears to be a higher iso as the sky is blooming at bit, making the image feel noisy a little and adding the uneasiness to the image of the dead soldier. It's a terribly upsetting and unsettling image and the way he had chosen to take the image is showing that in many ways. Unfortunately Levin was murdered by the Russians during the ongoing war. But his work spread awareness of the horrors happening in ukraine.

In the deep question of violence in art being needed I believe when someone dies trying to show the importance that answers the question. Yes it is needed. Not only because Levin died for it but because its history repeating itself as Cesar Cruz said "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."

This quote is saying that art has a purpose in confronting the difficult and unveiling uncomfortable truths, including the subject matter of our topic... violence. In order to challenge those who are complacent and to provide insight into the struggles of others, violence must be shown. It aligns with the idea that depicting violence in art can serve as a catalyst for awareness, understanding, and ultimately change. Just like Levin's work of the ukrainian war. In whole it is a must have for the history of art and the future of it too, if we shy away from showing the must be shown then we are forcing our own eyes to be shut. We won't spread the awareness needed and we will lose sight of the important things in life. Keep the violence shown because its life and death being shown, the core nature of life is that it ends with death. And we must understand the struggles people are experiencing, not only in Ukraine but anywhere, and not only war but domestic violence. Child abuse, verbal abuse. It's all important to be spread. And we should see it. Not because we want to but because we need to be aware of it. And that is why violence in art is necessary. And always will be. For as long as art is in the world.

Quote:

"Morality is utility"

Author: Annie Besant

Source: personal writings now found in Besant diaries available in library

Quote:

"It shows that freedom is not free"

Author: Yigal Tamarkin

Source: This quote refers to the sculpture '*Freedom is Not Free*' inspired by Robert Capa's "Falling Soldier" photograph.

Quote:

"All art is too important not to share"

Author: Romero Britto

Source: known for his public works and statements. Sourced via his speech, on his biography page <https://britto.com/> accessed 1st december

Quote:

"The Falling Soldier is my greatest work"

Author: Robert Capa

Source: This statement is attributed to Robert Capa, reflecting his belief in the significance of his "Falling Soldier" image. Found in magnum collection read on 3rd december

Quote:

Cruz, C. A. *Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable*. [online]

Available at: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/cesar_a_cruz_381437 [Accessed: 10 December 2024].