![1914-1918 Online - International Encyclopedia of the First World War]

Version 1.0 | **Last updated 10 November 2016**

Art

By Sue Malvern

The nature of the First World War put an end to traditions for battle painting. Instead, war art by younger more progressive artists was the best received because it was judged the most authentic. Such work put a new emphasis on the pity of war and human suffering. An avant-garde style or evidence of censorship, however, does not necessarily mean that the work was anti-war. The major centres for modern art were France, Germany and Britain which were also principal protagonists in the war, and it is mainly through study of war art produced in these nations that the effect of the war on art may be evaluated.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The First World War was all-consuming, demanding the complete mobilisation of the belligerent nations, their citizens and culture, as well as a comprehensive industrial and military infrastructure. Inevitably, artists were involved either as practitioners finding themselves with an imperative to record what was seen as momentous and historic or because they were serving soldiers whose careers were disrupted by active service. Although there were established traditions for battle-painting including artists who had depicted the Franco-Prussian War, such as in Germany, Anton von Werner (1843-1915) and Carl Röchling (1855-1920), and in France, Alphonse de Neuville (1835-1885) and Édouard Detaille (1848-1912), and painters of Britain's imperial wars such as Lady Elizabeth Butler (1846-1933), by 1914 battle art had lost credibility. The conditions of modern industrialised warfare involving static battlefields with little visible action and an absence of commanding viewpoints or decisive moments made epic battle paintings anachronistic. As the Great War was the first industrialised conflict with new mechanised weaponry and large-scale slaughter of combatants, artists were under pressure to find new visual forms to manifest war's changed visuality in works of art. Academic art had been increasingly marginalised by the rise of the avant-garde in Europe supported by a small but influential patron class. When war broke out, almost all avant-garde artists welcomed the war as the culmination of radical campaigns for an overhaul of society and the advent of a new modernity. In France, Germany and Britain attempts had been made to modernise national art collections by incorporating acquisitions from modern art movements such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, with varying success. The war would stimulate the favourable reception of modern art and its incorporation into national museums as the most fitting expression of war experience and as the legacy of the generation that had borne the brunt of war's sacrifices.

The war also led to a marked increase in state intervention in all aspects of daily life, and the management of public opinion

became a fundamental task of government accelerating the development of propaganda including censorship of sensitive military data and of dissent. Given the augmentation and centralisation of government powers during the war, the use of art as an instrument of the state seemed highly likely, but in the end, only Britain had fully developed official war artists' schemes, alongside the dominions, Canada and Australia. France developed a programme for authorising artists to visit the war front and purchasing their work; there was no state scheme for commissioning official war artists in Germany although artists visited the front as members of press units to make visual records of war.[1]

Until the 1990s, writing histories of 20th-century art was dominated by modernist accounts, which emphasised avant-garde artists and discussed art as though it was a matter of autonomous formal development. Consequently war art was relatively neglected, particularly art works produced as a consequence of official employment which was assumed to be restrictive, conservative and inimical to artistic autonomy. The First World War was largely viewed as catastrophic for modern art. Major revisions to art history in the 1970s and 1980s, led to the deconstruction of the myth of autonomy and opened up the possibility of rethinking art and war including the use of theoretical approaches such as psychoanalysis, gender and cultural theory. A growth in the literature on art and the First World War also enabled the development of a historiography to debate different approaches to interpretation. Kenneth Silver's *Esprit de corps. Art of the Parisian avant-garde and the First World War* (1989) examined modern artists in Paris and analysed the connections between art, publicity, propaganda and fashion for evidence of the effect of war across the whole field of avant-garde art. Annegret Jürgens-Kirchhoff published *Schreckensbilder: Krieg und Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert* (1993), which discussed the problem of war as an issue of depictability, mainly but not exclusively through the work of German artists. In 1994 the Deutsches Historisches Museum curated *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit. Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges* at the Altes Museum, which covered posters, film, photography and visual culture internationally as well as art. Catalogue essays were written mainly by museum curators. Following closely on unification, the exhibition was linked to debates about foreign policy in Germany as a sovereign participant in Western democracy.[2] The exhibition also took place in the context of an altered world politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was also a factor in an upsurge of interest in histories of war art. A version of *Die letzten Tage* including only modern art works was shown in London and titled *A bitter truth: avant-garde art and the Great War* (1994), produced by the critic Richard Cork. While Cork's exhibition and book of the same title made war art by avant-garde artists newly visible, it did not challenge the idea that the war was catastrophic for modern art. Philip Dagen's *Le silence des peintres: les artistes face à la Grande Guerre* (1996) took issue with both Cork and Silver arguing that the visuality of the First World War presented impossibilities to artists who only realised meaningful war works in retrospect many years after the war's end. Alongside surveys of art and war there have also been major monographs on artists who made significant war works including Otto Dix (1891-1969), Paul Nash (1889-1946) and Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). Smaller-scale studies have investigated thematic concerns such as gender including Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (1997), and Claudia Siebrecht, *The aesthetics of loss: German women's art of the First World War* (2013). British official war art is the subject of an extended monograph by Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* (2004). Since the events of 11 September 2001, there has been an intensification of exhibitions, projects and books on art and war, which sometimes also include artists from the First World War, for example, *At war* (Barcelona, 2004). The exhibition, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Kunst: von der Propaganda zum Widerstand* (Oldenburg, 2008) commemorated the ninetieth anniversary of the war's end. To date, numerous exhibitions have been held as part of centennial commemorations of World War One, such as *The Sensory War*, Manchester, and *Vu du front: représenter la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 2014).

International studies of art and the First World War have tended to discuss avant-garde art in Europe as though it was homogenous. Specific national contexts for art and visual culture have been analysed mostly in discrete essays in exhibition catalogues, usually written by the curators of national collections. *Vue du Front*, like *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit,* is a case in point. National communities hold some cultural matters in common. For example, in victorious nations, the war led to the establishment of a national war museum or a national repository with an art collection. Similarly, there are some common tendencies in forms of remembrance, for example repatriating an unknown soldier or establishing a national day of remembrance. But aspects of remembrance are also culturally specific, such as the significance of red poppies in Britain. Similarly, the British established important official war artists' schemes: the French did not. It is the case, however, that comparative histories of art and war in Europe, which might address questions about why official war artists exist in some communities but not in others, or ask about differences in the making and reception of war art for the victors, on the one hand, and the losers, on the other, remain to be written.

Official artists

Official employment of British war artists originated at a British Propaganda Bureau called Wellington House, headed by the Liberal politician C.F.G Masterman (1873-1927). The Bureau was established at the outbreak of war to disseminate British views of the war to neutral countries, especially the US, and then extended to cover allied countries. Although its programme was directed principally at Allied and neutral nations and home propaganda was not part of its remit, from early on, its publications were provided with the imprint of various British publishers to disguise their official origins, and copies were distributed on the home front. Masterman had a distinctive view of propaganda as an undertaking that needed to be based on facts and reasoned arguments, identifying his targets as the educated classes or those who could influence others. Consequently, although Wellington House was initially involved in promoting the lurid anti-German cartoons of the Dutch illustrator Louis Raemaekers (1869-1956), the works were dropped in 1916 as being unsuitable for the British propaganda approach, although Raemaekers' work and much other violent anti-German imagery continued to be widely published in the British press. The task of official visual propaganda was fulfilled by the Scottish printmaker Muirhead Bone (1876-1953). Bone was effectively Britain's first official war artist, appointed in 1916. His employment was largely a matter of good luck and timing coinciding with a point when the artist had found himself liable for conscription and there was a marked shortage of photographs and other visual material for use in Wellington House's publications.

In France, although the Musée de l'Armée had supported artists at the front as part of a desire to ensure a historical record of the war, the creation of a "*mission aux armées*" for artists, under the État des Beaux-Arts, was only established in 1916.[3] The scheme offered an opportunity for artists to visit the front at their own expense and risk. On their return artists were required to exhibit the work they had produced at the Musée Luxembourg with the state exercising first refusal on purchases for a very low price. As the military would not agree to artists who were serving soldiers being released to make works of art, inevitably most of the work was by older artists associated with less modern styles of painting although some modern painters, such as artists identified with Les Nabis, Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940), Felix Valloton (1865-1925) and Maurice Denis (1870-1943), and two Cubist artists, André Lhote (1885-1962) and Jean Marchand (1883-1941) were given permits to visit the front. In Germany, artists could apply for a permit to tour to the front, often under private or semi-private arrangements, such as Ernst Vollbehr (1876-1960) who published two volumes of drawings and paintings.[4] By contrast, Muirhead Bone was given a salary of £500, a reasonable income but a substantial reduction on his pre-war earnings as an artist, and an honorary commission as a second lieutenant; a selection of his work was to be transferred to the collections of the British Museum.

Muirhead Bone had no experience as a combatant and was unnerved by his first sight of battle, the Somme offensive. His drawings made on his first visit in 1916 reveal the difficulty for an outside observer depicting any action because there was very little to see. Instead, he recorded the battlescape in topographical drawings of panoramic vistas from commanding viewpoints and made sketches of ruins, dugouts and soldiers. On a subsequent visit, Bone focused on the ruins and havoc wrought in the Somme area after the German retreat in 1917. When Wellington House asked the artist to make portraits of military commanders, Bone suggested his brother-in-law Francis Dodd (1874-1949) for the task. Bone's work was published in a series titled *The Western Front* with contextualising essays and notes to the plates by the *Manchester Guardian* journalist and writer, C.E. Montague (1867-1928), then an intelligence officer at the General Headquarters (GHQ). The publication was endorsed by the up-market magazine *Country Life*, although they were not the publishers, in part to disguise its origins as government propaganda and in part to emphasise an appeal to a cultivated audience identified as those who would influence others. When Bone's war drawings were exhibited, the evidence about audiences is contradictory; shows in the fashionable galleries of London West End attracted small audiences whereas very large numbers visited in working-class areas and the provinces.

Bone's drawings from the front were characteristic of work by non-combatant artists in general. Battle fronts were documented through sketches, watercolours or small paintings. There was a common repertoire of subjects – scenes of encampments, troops resting or carrying out everyday tasks, landscapes and views of named buildings and places with evidence of destruction but very rarely images of trenches or any military action. The subjects were similar to those by the "specials", illustrators employed by the illustrated press. The "specials" such as Frederic Villiers (1851-1952) working for the *Illustrated London News* and Georges Scott (1873-1943), working for *L'Illustration* in Paris, produced sketches for news publications which emphasised their newsworthiness and were marketed to a broad middle-class audience. The work of non-combatant artists was aimed at more exclusive audiences, as indicated in Britain by the endorsement of *The Western Front* by *Country Life*. The depiction of fragments and facets of war in sketches usually made quickly *in situ* was an approach that was being superseded by photography, which was also undermining the standing of the "specials". Both the French and German authorities established units for generating photographs for dissemination to the home front and for use in propaganda publications; the French *Section photographique de l'armée français* was established in April 1915, the Germans launched the *Bild- und Filmamt* early in 1917.

The British GHQ was reluctant to authorise press photographers and British official photography was much more limited. The dearth of photographs for use in the British propaganda effort created opportunities for official artists.[5]

Unlike Britain, both France and Germany had traditions and a market for print portfolios and magazines illustrated by fine artists. Felix Vallotton, for example, made a set of woodcuts titled *C'est la Guerre*, 1915-16, that show schematic images of barbed wire at the front and suffering civilians, intended to reveal the horror of war and the barbarity of the Germans. In Berlin, Paul Cassirer (1871-1926) published a weekly four-page magazine, *Kriegszeit- Künstlerflugblatter,* 1914-1916, with lithographs by artists mainly drawn from the Berlin Secession, including Max Liebermann (1847-1935), Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), Max Beckmann (1884-1950), Ernst Barlach (1870-1938), Willy Jaeckel (1888-1944) and Max Slevogt (1868-1932). It was largely patriotic and pro-war, showing enthusiastic crowds on the home front, but also symbolic portrayals of battle and allegories of civilian misery. In 1917, Wellington House published a print portfolio of sixty-seven lithographs titled *Britain's Efforts and Ideals* by eighteen artists, perhaps intended to match similar publications abroad. The portfolio was not well received and the *Ideals*, in particular, were a conspicuous propaganda failure because they were seen in the British press as an obvious attempt to influence popular opinion. *Efforts*, sets of six thematic images by individual artists illustrating aspects of the war effort at home and at sea including women's war work, were more successful because these depicted actualities and not abstract war aims and because some were drawn by younger artists with experience of active service.

Soldier-Artists and Pacifists

The year 1916 was a watershed in the war when there was no significant military breakthrough and civilian populations became increasingly war-weary. Strikes and riots were not uncommon in Germany; resistance to the war and mutinies by troops escalated in Britain during 1917. The 1917 Russian Revolution influenced dissenting groups and organisations, helping to transform social grievances into political action, particularly in Germany.[6] Growing war-weariness and general social unrest affected a broad shift in the focus of propaganda from an earlier emphasis on abstract war aims and diplomatic causes to a concern to motivate populations with the promise of more prosaic incentives and benefits to be had from successfully concluding the conflict. While Wellington House had been set up to target its propaganda at neutral and allied nations, its material was also distributed to the home front, sometimes rationalised as a need to disguise the official origins of publications. The organisation of German propaganda was largely under the control of the military, which tended to be conservative and insensitive to subtle shifts in the management of public opinion. Attempts to establish a central organisation for propaganda to match the British failed. British propaganda was run through the civil service and reorganised early in 1917 with the establishment of a new Department of Information, which also greatly facilitated an expansion in the employment of artists. This was superseded in 1918 by a Ministry of Information headed by Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1974), a politician and newspaper magnate.

As the war became more entrenched and general morale weakened, works of art by younger artists, many of whom had served at the front, began to be available to audiences on the home front. Much of this work started to appear in galleries from around 1916. In part because younger artists tended to be associated with the pre-war avant-garde, their war paintings often offered pictorial representations which were not illustrative but modern in style. This new war painting appeared to correspond to the altered visualities of contemporary war, which was deemed not knowable except by those who had actually served in the military. Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) painted "Self-Portrait as a Soldier" (Allen Memorial Art Museum, USA) in 1915. He depicted himself as a war-weary soldier in the uniform of an artilleryman, a cigarette drooping from his mouth, his left-hand a bloodied stump.[7] In the background, canvases are stacked against the studio wall, the one in the foreground showing a masculinised female nude. Kirchner's military service was brief; he volunteered as a driver in the artillery, but was found unfit for service. Rather than a heroic image of a soldier, the self-portrait suggests that active service might emasculate the artist. Kirchner's painting was exhibited at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden in 1916 and later acquired for the Städelsches Kunstinstitut Frankfurt. By contrast, Otto Dix's "Self-portrait as Mars", 1915 (Städtische Kunstsammlung im Haus der Heimat, Freital) shows the soldier-artist, then training as a machine-gunner, as the god of war embedded in chaos and destruction. Influenced by Italian Futurism, the bold, facetted, head and shoulders of the artist, chin thrust forward, appears in military uniform and *pickelhaube*, his body penetrated by shafts of energy. In England, C.R.W. Nevinson (1889-1946) had exhibited war paintings in London from early in the war, following a brief stint as an ambulance driver on the Western Front. In 1916, he held a solo-exhibition and published a book of reproductions of his war works. His painting "La Mitrailleuse", 1915, depicting French troops cramped into a trench, is faceted and abstracted. Soldiers are reduced to angular automatons, oblivious to the dead

soldier at their feet. The work was exhibited in 1916 and presented to the Tate Gallery in 1917 by the Contemporary Art Society. In Berlin in mid-1916, Paul Kassirer replaced *Kreigszeit-Kunstlerflugblatter* with *Der Bildermann.* The new journal ran for eighteen issues until December 1916 and was less pro-war and more critical of the war effort. Artists who produced illustrations included Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Oscar Kokoschka (1886-1980), Max Pechstein (1881-1955) and Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945), modern artists associated with German expressionism before the war. Kokoschka, who had been seriously wounded, contributed a series of lithographs on the Passion of Christ as an allegory of horror and suffering. In Paris, the *Bulletin des armées de la République* organised an exhibition, *Salon des armées,* at the Jeu de Paume, 1916-1917, showing the work of soldier-artists both amateur and professional. As was the case in London, critics and audiences validated the work of artists who had actually participated in conflict as authentic revelations of the war.[8] Works of art by artists who had seen active service were stylistically different from drawings and illustrations by non-combatant artists. This new war art was modern to match a modern war, and it was often well received by audiences anxious for insights into the frontline. A new war aesthetic was matched by new subjects such as desolate views of ruined trenches, soldiers reduced to mechanised robots in an anonymous war machine, wounded soldiers and the effects of bombardments on landscapes and men. These subjects were also extended to allegories that explored the horror of war.

In Britain, during 1916 Wellington House began to employ younger artists who had served at the front, producing a new publication *British Artists at the Front* to replace *The Western Front* with issues dedicated to the work of C.R.W. Nevinson, Paul Nash, who had been discharged from the army injured, and Eric Kennington (1888-1960), also discharged after a period of war service. These publications emphasised the authenticity of what the artists had depicted and the forms of their representations based on witnessed experience. The paintings of soldier-artists stressed uncompromising realism. Their works were not illustrative but imaginative, inventive expressions of the experience of war. Inevitably, such work gave rise to incidents of censorship.

While it was common to censor documents including news reports, photographs and works of art to exclude the revelation of information that might be useful to an enemy, censorship was also deployed to curtail publications and exhibitions likely to cause disaffection or weaken civilian or military resolve to prosecute the war. In Germany Willy Jaeckel's print portfolio "Memento" 1914/15, published in Berlin by I.B. Neumann showed war as horrifying and corrupting. According to Jaeckel's son, the portfolio was censored and withdrawn in 1916. A notorious incident in Britain was the censorship of Nevinson's painting "Paths of Glory" (Imperial War Museum, London), which the artist exhibited in 1917 with a strip of brown paper labelled "censored" covering the bodies of dead soldiers shown trapped in no man's land. The incident had started when the military censor at GHQ objected to a painting, "A Group of Soldiers" showing war-weary soldiers back home on leave, which Wellington House proposed to publish in the issue of *British Artists at the Front* dedicated to Nevinson's work. When Wellington House objected that this was not a case of the betrayal of military information, GHQ referred the matter to the War Office, who then censored "Paths of Glory" on the ground that images of dead soldiers were not allowed to be shown. Nevinson's display of the canvas with its label ensured it gained wide publicity and as it was obvious what was not allowed to be seen, the censorship machine was discredited. When works of art were censored during the war, however, it was not necessarily the case that such works were intended to be anti-war or that the artist himself was a pacifist. Nevinson, the major English advocate of Futurism, influenced by Futurism's impresario, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), was largely in favour of the war as purgative and as a test of masculinity. However, rather than overt and largely unsuccessful attempts to censor war imagery, much more covert and ultimately more repressive were official campaigns to counteract pacifism particularly that associated with organised labour, in Britain, the Independent Labour Party and in Germany the Gruppe Internationale, later the Spartacusbund.

Artists who opposed the war did so from different political positions. In Britain, Joseph Southall (1861-1944), a Quaker pacifist and member of the Independent Labour Party, illustrated *The Ghosts of the Slain*, 1915, written by R.L. Outhwaite (1868-1930), which was a Christian tract arguing that killing was unbiblical. Southall was active in campaigns to free E.D. Morel (1873-1924), founder of the Union of Democratic Control, the leading pacifist organisation in Britain, who was imprisoned for having banned pacifist literature in his possession. Southall's *Fables and Illustrations* (1918) was a collection of parables parodying war-makers including the short story "The Earth and the Moon" about Morel and a fake advertisement for "the Obliterator" a monstrous machine for destroying the cultures and peoples of cities, towns and villages. While Southall's cartoons were not as acerbic as the anti-war work of artists like George Grosz (1893-1959), his opposition to war is rarely acknowledged in contemporary literature. In Berlin, Wieland Herzfelde (1896-1988), poet, radical publisher, brother of the artist John Heartfield (1891-1968) and a major figure in Berlin Dada at the end of the war, gathered artists including Grosz to publish journals and print portfolios condemning the war. Because war regulations required military approval to found a new newspaper or magazine, Herzfelde

purchased an existing title, *Neue Jugend* and published five issues between 1916 and 1917. When it was banned in mid-1917, and when Herzfelde had been recalled for military service after his dishonourable discharge in 1915, the anarchist and writer Franz Jung (1888-1963) and the artist George Grosz illegally produced two issues in a broadsheet format in May-June 1917. Alongside gatherings of writers and artists held at I.B Neumann's gallery, Herzfelde and his contributors advocated a new radical politically engaged art that was modern, urban and revolutionary.[9] The work of younger artists satisfied a demand for imagery, which could be authenticated because it was produced by someone who had served in the war, but such artists also tackled troublesome subject matter, which could give rise to politically unpredictable responses or transgress standards of decorum in war depiction.

1918 and the Aftermath of War

From early in the war, it was widely understood in all belligerent nations that the First World War was epoch-making and would need to be commemorated in memorials, archives and remembrance rituals. The escalating casualty rate and the tendency, widespread in European nations, not to repatriate the bodies of fallen soldiers added urgency to the impulse to remember the war. In France, Germany and Britain organisations were established to collect contemporary documents and artefacts during the war as a record for future generations. In France, this was the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (BDIC), which began as a private collection and was subsequently transferred to the state. In Germany, the Weltkriegsbücherei was established in Stuttgart based on the collections of the industrialist Richard Franck begun in 1915. The Imperial War Museum in Britain was established in 1917; it inherited all the works of art commissioned by the Ministry of Information as well as employing its own artists to make visual records of the war.

When Beaverbrook became minister of information in Britain in February 1918, one of his first initiatives was to establish a programme to commission a series of commemorative canvases by leading British artists. He had already established a comparable programme in Canada and several artists in the British scheme also completed paintings for Canada. The British programme extended and enlarged on its Canadian predecessor. By the time the scheme was wound up in 1919, seventeen large-scale paintings by artists such as Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), C.R.W. Nevinson, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer and John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) with two large sculptural reliefs and twelve smaller canvases by thirty-one artists had been produced. Artists were either commissioned to make a single canvas or employed full-time for up to ten months. Known as the British War Memorials Committee, the scheme was unique in Europe in its scale and the range of artists employed. As an example of state patronage, it was remarkably progressive for recruiting a high proportion of younger avant-garde artists many of whom had also served in the war, and for excluding the academic establishment. Although the Ministry's activities were ostensibly directed at managing and distributing propaganda during the hostilities, the British War Memorials scheme was intended to commemorate the war with a series of contemporary history paintings and to stand as testimony to Beaverbrook's prestige as an enlightened modern art patron. By recruiting younger artists, many of whom had been active in the pre-war avant-garde and by including only the more progressive artists of the older generation, in effect, the British War Memorials Committee established a canon of modern British war art. Its endorsement of modern artists was influential in the formation of the collections of the Tate Gallery, Britain's national gallery of modern art, which had been enhanced during the war by an extension of its terms of reference, emphasising its role in collecting contemporary British and modern foreign art and by the formation of its own Board of Trustees. Key personnel involved in the reformulated Tate Gallery were also active in the work of the British War Memorials Committee. When the committee's paintings were unveiled at an exhibition titled *The Nation's War Paintings,* winter 1919/1920, it was work by the younger soldier-artists that was acclaimed.

The major canvases in the British scheme were approximately six feet by ten feet (182 cm x 320 cm) based on the dimensions of Paolo Uccello's "Battle of San Romano" c. 1438-40 in the National Gallery, London. As well as forming a national canon of contemporary British art, the War Memorials Committee also underlined a shift in the antecedents of modern war art from an earlier tradition for epic battle painting by artists such as Horace Vernet (1789-1863), Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835) or Benjamin West (1738-1820) towards a more humanist emphasis on the pity of war in the work of artists such as the baroque printmaker Jacques Callot (1592-1635), the Spanish artist Francisco Goya (1746-1848), especially the print series "Los Desastres de la Guerra", 1810, published 1863, and the Russian 19th century realist war artist, Vasily Vereschagin (1842-1904).

In common with art cultures elsewhere, such as Britain and France, there was a comparable reevaluation of the avant-garde in Germany, beginning around 1916. Like avant-garde artists throughout Europe, artists involved in groups such as Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, and known colloquially as German expressionists were excoriated at the outbreak of war for being

influenced by French cubism and therefore for being unpatriotic. The death of the leading expressionist painter Franz Marc (1880-1916) on active service in March 1916 contributed to a reassessment of expressionism as essentially German and rooted in a northern Gothic tradition. It also became more commercially successful.[10] German artists such as George Grosz and John Heartfield, who emerged during the war years to form a new anti-war avant-garde, opposed the escapist and spiritual tendencies of new expressionism with an art that cultivated urban and commercial values; validated American culture, especially its advertising as progressive and energising; and promoted an aesthetic of violence including the brutality of sexual encounters and revolt. When Germany conceded defeat in November 1918, these artists were closely associated with the revolution which followed. The political radicalism of German avant-garde artists marks a major difference between Germany and avant-garde artists in post-war Britain and France.

Hal Foster, in a study of the impact of the war on two avant-garde figures Wyndham Lewis in Britain and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in Italy, has argued that the aftermath of war was marked by two tendencies in modern art. On the one hand, there were returns to the human figure, usually neoclassical which were what he terms "reaction-formations" against the mutilations of male bodies at war as well as the fragmentation of the human body in high modernist art before 1914. On the other hand, there was the emergence of various forms of mechanised bodies which, like the return to neoclassicism, also sought to remake a body image that had been damaged both by the conflict and in its depiction in modern art. The neoclassical body imagined a nostalgic wholeness; the cult of mechanisation understood the mechanical body as a new form of corporeal order.[11] In an earlier essay, the English cultural commentator Raymond Williams (1921-1988) pointed out that radical militant avant-gardes who denounced the bourgeois social order before 1914 did so from markedly different political positions. Under the pressure of actual political crises, such as the war and especially the Russian Revolution, this dynamic gave rise to fundamentally different political positions from Communism to social democracy to the cult of excellence and Fascism.[12] In Britain, Lewis identified with right-wing politics, even briefly German Fascism; in the early 1920s, Nevinson flirted with Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) and Italian fascism. In Germany, some artists aligned with the revolutionary left, others eventually with the fascist right.[13] Importantly, just as the censorship of an artist such as Nevinson during the war does not necessarily mean that the artist or the work was anti-war, so the adoption of a radical avant-garde style does not mean that an artist is necessarily aligned with left-wing politics.

The 1918 November Revolution in Germany fostered the emergence of German Dada as a form of protest not just against war but also against the bourgeois social order that gave rise to war and against bourgeois forms of art. It was more articulate and more compelling than anti-war imagery produced elsewhere in Europe. In 1924, Ernst Friedrich (1894-1976), a pacifist and activist in Free Youth Groups, published *Krieg dem Kriege!* which collected extremely graphic images of war's horrors, often through ironic juxtapositions of, for example, enthusiastic pro-war rallies with corpses on the battlefield. It was one source for Otto Dix's well-known print series "Der Krieg" published 1924 in collaboration with his dealer Karl Nierendorf (1889-1947). Otto Dix had a successful war, and his attitude to war was complicated. "Der Krieg" followed his painting "The Trench" (lost), 1923, which was purchased by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne. After protests against the work it was returned to Nierendorf; the Museum director resigned over the incident. "The Trench" was included in an exhibition called *Nie Wieder Krieg!* and organised by the League for Human Rights. Nierendorf published a selection of the etchings from Dix's print series, "Der Krieg", in a book accompanied by an introduction by the French pacifist and author of *Le feu*, Henri Barbusse (1873-1935).[14] Käthe Kollwitz also produced a poster "Nie Wieder Krieg!" for the Central German Youth Day in Leipzig, as well as her print cycle of seven woodcuts, "War", completed 1922/23 and issued in 1924, one of the best known works from the First World War dealing with the home front and the political position of women and mothers. By contrast, post-war painting in France was dominated by a call for a return to order, after the book of essays, *Le rappel à l'ordre,* 1926, by the French poet, Jean Cocteau (1889-1963). Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), a Spaniard resident in Paris and therefore not involved in the war, was the leading artist with paintings that emphasised neo-classicism and Mediterranean culture. In Italy, the return of classical styles in art was called the "*ritornello al mestiere*" or return to craft after an article published in 1919 by Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978). In Britain while the major paintings by artists such as Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis were acclaimed when they were exhibited in winter 1919-1920, it was a collection of essays by the art critic Roger Fry (1866-1934), *Vision and Design*, 1920 which argued in favour of the autonomy of art and against the influence of social events on artistic practices which was most influential text in Britain during the 1920s. By the late 1920s, Fry's formalism amounted to a critical orthodoxy.

One factor in the relative success of various recalls to order, the return of pastoralism and formalism in the post-war art world was its appeal to audiences anxious to forget the traumas of war. In Britain, Fry's Francophile taste and his promotion of French

post-impressionism also served anti-German sentiment, which was greatly augmented around the time of the Treaty of Versailles. His writing and work influenced the collection of modern art for Britain's national gallery, the Tate, which focused almost entirely on French painting. In the late 1920s, there was a resurgence of interest in the First World War, marked by the publication of war memoirs in Britain, France and Germany, as well as the republication of war poetry. The period also gave rise to new war paintings, made with the benefit of hindsight. For example, Stanley Spencer made his war cycle for the Oratory of All Souls, Burghclere between 1927 and 1932. In 1919, Spencer resigned from official employment for the British Memorials Committee, although it was a guaranteed income, because he claimed he had lost the impulse to work up his war experiences into works of art. The war paintings were the result of reflecting on the war over a long period of time. Otto Dix painted his war triptych "Der Krieg" (Albertinum, Dresden) between 1929 and 1932. The central panel reiterates his earlier painting "The Trench" and the whole reflects Eric Maria Remarque's (1898-1970) *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westerns nicht Neues*) published in 1928 and translated into English in 1929.

Conclusion

The First World War validated the testimony of participant accounts of the war. As a consequence, soldier-artists, whether officially employed as in Britain or working independently, were the most acclaimed. Inevitably, these artists were younger and tended to be modern and avant-garde. The war ended the traditions of battle painting and initiated a new visuality in war art. The precursors of war art were reimagined to emphasise works that showed the pity of war and human suffering as opposed to epic and heroic depictions. The First World War was a crisis in European imperialism and critical in the development of modern nation states. War works by artists, mostly younger and more modern, were incorporated into modern state institutions including museums of modern art and war museums.

Modern styles of war painting, which express the horrors of war, and evidence of censorship do not however provide the key to the politics of a war painting nor to the attitude of its maker. Some works of art, which the contemporary period validates as indictments of the First World War were not received as anti-war paintings during the conflict. Moreover, the story of modern art was once told as one that was ruptured by the war from which it had to recuperate followed by a new start in the making of an avant-garde. Contemporary art history would now trace the period from the pre-war years to the post-war world as a narrative of varying temporalities, discontinuities and overlapping trajectories. Periodising the First World War is no longer compartmentalised as 1914-1918 because much was anticipated before 1914 and its effects and the need to retell its experience continued long after.

Although there is now a growing literature on art and the First World War, both monographs of individual artists and accounts of wider national contexts, there remains a critical need to develop comparative accounts of war art. These studies will need to be sensitive to the nuances of official employment and the contradictions of state propaganda and to the political possibilities of war art.

Sue Malvern, University of Reading

Section Editors: David Welch; Dominik Geppert

Notes

1. ↑ See, Weissbrich, Thomas: Dans les tranche et dans l'atelier. Les peintres de guerre allemands, in: Vu du front: représenter la Grande Guerre, Paris 2014.
2. ↑ See the essay by Stephan, Cora: Der Große Krieg und das kurze Jahrhundert, in: Rother, Rainer (ed.): Die letzten Tage der Menschheit. Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges, Berlin 1994.
3. ↑ See Robichon, François: Les missions d'artistes aux armées en 1917, CERMA Cahiers d'études et de recherces du musée de l'Armée, volume 1, 2000.
4. ↑ See Küster, Bernd (ed.): Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Kunst: von der Propaganda zum Widerstand, Oldenburg 2008, pp. 119-127.
5. ↑ See Carmichael, Jane: First World War photographers, London 1989.
6. ↑ See Welch, David: Germany and propaganda in World War I: pacifism, mobilization and total war, London 2014.

7. ↑ The missing hand is often assumed to be the artist's right hand, but as it was painted using a mirror, it is more likely to be his left hand.

8. ↑ See Maignon, Claire: La Grande Guerre exposée à Paris. 1914-1918, in: Vu du front 1914, p. 114.

9. ↑ See McCloskey, Barbara: George Grosz and the Communist Party: art and radicalism in crisis, 1918 to 1936, Princeton, New Jersey 1997, pp. 19-33; and Beals, Kurt: Text and the City: George Grosz, Neue Jugend, and the Political Power of Popular Media, in: Dada/Surrealism, 19 (2013), n.p. http://ir.uiowa.edu/dadasur/vol19/iss1/16/ (retrieved 13 October 2016),

10. ↑ See McCloskey, George Grosz 1997, pp. 22-23.

11. ↑ Foster, Hal: Prosthetic Gods, in: Modernism/Modernity 4/2 (1997), pp. 6-7.

12. ↑ Williams, Raymond: The Politics of the Avant-Garde, in: Pinkney, Tony (ed.): The Politics of Modernism. Against the New Conformists, London 1989, pp. 49-63.

13. ↑ See Malvern, Sue: Modern Art, Britain and the Great War, New Haven et al. 2004, pp. 145-146.

14. ↑ See Tate Gallery: Otto Dix, 1891-1969, London 1992, pp. 152-153.

Selected Bibliography

Beals, Kurt: **Text and the city. George Grosz, Neue Jugend, and the political power of popular media**, in: Dada/Surrealism 19/1, 2013.

Brockington, Grace: **Above the battlefield. Modernism and the peace movement in Britain, 1900-1918**, New Haven 2010: Yale University Press.

Carmichael, Jane: **First World War photographers**, London; New York 1989: Routledge.

Cork, Richard: **A bitter truth. Avant-garde art and the Great War**, New Haven 1994: Yale University Press.

Foster, Hal: **Prosthetic gods**, in: Modernism/Modernity 4/2, 1997, pp. 5-38.

Jürgens-Kirchhoff, Annegret: **Schreckensbilder. Krieg und Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert**, Berlin 1993: Reimer.

Küster, Bernd (ed.): **Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Kunst. Von der Propaganda zum Widerstand**, Gifkendorf 2008: Merlin-Verlag.

Malvern, Sue: **Modern art, Britain, and the Great War. Witnessing, testimony, and remembrance**, New Haven; London 2004: Yale University Press.

McCloskey, Barbara: **George Grosz and the Communist Party. Art and radicalism in crisis, 1918 to 1936**, Princeton 1997: Princeton University Press.

Monegal, Antonio / Torres, Francesc (eds.): **At war**, Barcelona 2004: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.

Robichon, François: **Les missions d'artistes aux armées en 1917**, in: Cahiers d'études et de recerces du musée de l'Armée 1, 2000.

Rother, Rainer (ed.): **Die letzten Tage der Menschheit. Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges**, Berlin 1994: Das Historische Museum: Ars Nicolai.

Siebrecht, Claudia: **The aesthetics of loss. German women's art of the First World War**, Oxford 2013: Oxford University Press.

Silver, Kenneth E.: **Esprit de corps. The art of the Parisian avant-garde and the First World War, 1914-1925**, Princeton 1989: Princeton University Press.

Tatar, Maria: **Lustmord. Sexual murder in Weimar Germany**, Princeton 1997: Princeton University Press.

Vu du front. Représenter la Grande Guerre, Paris 2014: Somogy

Welch, David: **Germany and propaganda in World War I. Pacifism, mobilization and total war**, London 2014: I. B. Tauris.

Williams, Raymond: **The politics of the avant-garde**, in: Williams, Raymond / Pinkney, Tony (eds.): The politics of modernism. Against the new conformists, London; New York 1989: Verso, pp. 49-63.

Citation

License