

Centenary (Museums)

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This article discusses how European museums – in particular, national war museums – dealt with the centenary of World War I. These museums still tend to tell the story of World War I from a national perspective. However, parallels can be found with regard to the forms of representation: many museums have created large, sometimes room-filling scenes that allow visitors to “experience” the war. In addition, current trends in world war research have been taken into account by many museums which are now turning their attention to the fates of individuals. Numerous special exhibitions also led to an expansion of the topics. Thus, among others, memory-cultural, regional, and global historical approaches were chosen.

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Introduction

Wars play a special role in remembrance culture. In many respects, they mark a break in continuity and represent a turning point for individuals and collectives.^[1] World War I, in particular, had a traumatizing effect in its **total** dimension which went beyond the **memory** left behind by other wars. As a result, the war remained present in peace for many decades.^[2] In many European states, however, the memory of World War II overshadowed that of World War I after 1945, and other historical developments have become much more present in the national cultures of remembrance.^[3] Exceptions can be found, especially in former front regions, such as **Verdun**, where huge military cemeteries have kept the consequences of the war very present to this day. However, this is not the case in all regions: the former battlefields in today's **Ukraine**, **Poland**, the Balkans, the Isonzo, and the Alps are much less visited than those on the former **Western Front**.^[4]

The year 2014 brought a clear increase in **academic** and media discussion of this war in large parts of Europe. The “magic of the round number” was certainly largely responsible for this development. The centenary motivated numerous historians to focus on the subject in new ways,^[5] which certainly influenced the actions of other institutions.^[6] Historians thus made an essential contribution to the creation of “monuments in time.”^[7]

However, this new interest in World War I was also influenced by new research traditions. These led to a paradigm shift: from classical topics of great military powers and the history of operations, and also from social history concentrated on socio-economic structures, to individual experiences and everyday life in war, and to the history of mentalities and cultural history.^[8] In

addition, the influence of the end of the Cold War on the study of the first of the two world wars must not be underestimated, as it has enabled a new and significantly intensified culture of remembrance in many countries.^[9] In [Slovenia](#), for example, this led to many private collectors seizing the chance to exhibit memorabilia that did not fit into the “master narrative” of [Yugoslavia](#).^[10] [Museums](#) and exhibitions served the increased public interest and encouraged it at the same time. They thus acted as media for and storerooms of cultural memory.^[11] In the years 2014 to 2018, an unbelievable variety of exhibitions appeared across the whole of Europe. In the following analysis, following Thomas Thiemeyer’s approach,^[12] the exhibitions themselves are examined in the form in which they are or were accessible to individual visitors, and not the processes that led to them. In addition to an analysis of content, forms of presentation are also taken into account, especially since museums not only serve to provide knowledge, but also, as stated in the International Council of Museums’ definition of the museum, entertainment.^[13] Staged exhibition spaces have been common since the 1970s and 1980s,^[14] when more and more exhibitions were arranged by designers.^[15] These general developments and trends in the museum landscape also affect museums that have specialized in the depiction of wars or military history. Reconstructions even have a special tradition in war exhibitions, as there were already exhibitions during World War I in which scenes from the front and trenches were reconstructed.^[16]

New Permanent Exhibitions in National Military Museums

In contrast to special exhibitions, permanent exhibitions usually deal with a much larger time frame and are intended to show a narrative that is valid for a longer period of time. Thus, they are often less controversial than some special exhibitions.^[17] According to Friedrich Waidacher, the permanent exhibition shows the collection, research, documentation, and communication goals of a museum.^[18] At the same time, such exhibitions must ensure that they present aspects of a topic that both the academic community and the public consider essential. Museums must, therefore, also react to the paradigm shift in military [historiography](#) towards the history of culture and mentalities. For this reason, it is not surprising that numerous museums used the anniversary of 2014 as an opportunity to redesign their permanent exhibitions on World War I.^[19]

Among these is the Imperial War Museum (London) which has a highly staged permanent exhibition on World War I with 1,300 objects. The museum reacted to the increased interest in World War I and developed completely differently than originally expected, as the founders had planned that the museum would close with the death of the last veterans.^[20] The thirteen exhibition areas offer a largely chronological overview with many different thematic focuses.^[21] Although political, social, and economic conditions are presented in the museum, they clearly remain in the background. The focus of the exhibition is on military history and, in particular, on the experiences of British soldiers and [warfare](#) on the Western Front. For example, visitors can learn in detail how camouflage trees were used to scout enemy lines. The very complex design of the exhibition puts various objects in relation to each other, such as gas masks and photos of soldiers wearing them; the consequences of the use of [gas](#) are also illustrated by photos of blinded soldiers. Through numerous quotations (mainly from soldiers and politicians), personal opinions about the war are integrated into the exhibition. Life in the trenches is presented in a particularly precise way, including a reconstruction that is explained to the visitors as follows:

The experience of trench warfare is impossible to recreate. But in the space you are about to enter we have tried to give you a sense of the confinement and exposure to the elements that millions of men endured. The dimensions are those of a typical communication trench, which was used to take goods and troops to and from the front line. You will see silhouettes of soldiers engaged in day-to-day trench activity. You may also hear a thunderstorm, a plane flying over, a tank engine starting up and a flurry of activity caused by a gas attack.^[22]

However, it should be noted that the sound installations in this rather abstractly designed “trench”^[23] are partially overlaid by the other sounds of the museum and the “trench” is very short overall, which hardly makes it possible to get involved in the “historical” scene. Objects on that theme cannot be seen in this reconstruction, but the end is formed by a series of large-format [photographs](#) that are placed in such a way that the walls of the reconstruction merge with those of the historical trenches on the photo.

In the course of the exhibition, it becomes clear that this was a world war, but the perspective taken is entirely British, as can be seen not only from the overwhelming number of objects of British provenance, but especially in the second-to-last exhibition

area “Seizing victory.” Although the [losses](#) of other armies are also discussed, the wounds and deaths among the British troops are dealt with in particular detail. The exhibition does not close with the end of the war in 1918, but in the final chapter “War without end,” it deals with the consequences of World War I and with post-war conflicts, such as the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923.

In the permanent exhibition in the Heeresgeschichtlichen Museum (Museum of Military History) (Vienna), which was also opened in 2014, around 2,000 exhibits are shown in about 1,400 square meters of exhibition space.^[24] The director of the museum, [M. Christian Ortner](#), emphasized during the opening ceremony that the focus of permanent exhibitions always had to do with the personal preferences of the respective museum directors. It seems to have been a deliberate decision by Ortner, a specialist in [equipment](#) and warfare, that the military aspect dominates the exhibition, contrary to current international research priorities. There had been much discussion about the structure, Ortner argued, but the curators had come to the conclusion that the chronological structure had proved its worth. This was realized not only in the form of overview texts and [maps](#), but also by very detailed lists of central events of each year of the war. Cross-sectional themes embedded in the chronology, such as [prisoners of war](#) or voluntary armies, are rarely taken into account, or one might conclude in many places that they were only of significance in a single year of the war – developments during the war remain clear. For example, only a few exhibits are shown in the “Women in War” exhibition area, although the display seems cluttered in most other places. The one-dimensional representation of war from the point of view of the Central Powers is also conspicuous. This is evident because of the large number of objects of Austro-Hungarian provenance, but also because of expressions such as “large parts of Central and Eastern Galicia [have] been lost” or “conquest of the last Belgian forts.” The Heeresgeschichtliche Museum also tries to make the war a tangible experience by reconstructing a trench that can be entered. At the end of the exhibition, particular reference is made to the millions of victims of the war. However, the enormous variety of military equipment in the rest of the exhibition tends to invite visitors to marvel at them and at the war.

The new permanent exhibition on the First World War in the Hadtörténeti Múzeum (Museum of Military History) (Budapest) was completed in 2016.^[25] Seven exhibition rooms offer a chronological overview of World War I, from the [assassination in Sarajevo](#) to the results of this war. The different areas of the front are explained by maps. The presentation focuses on the Hungarian troops, as the title of the exhibition “Hungary in the Great War 1914–1918” indicates. More detailed attention is paid to those military developments in which Hungarian troops were involved, including the siege of Przemyśl. In all the exhibition rooms there is a large three-dimensional installation which illustrates a thematic aspect: in the first room, for example, the farewell of soldiers is portrayed; in a further room, the work of [women in armaments production](#) is portrayed. The museum’s largest installation is a reconstructed trench in the 1917 room, which fills one side of the exhibition space and can be entered by visitors. A small acoustic installation imitates the sounds of battlefields and the showcases contain objects from the battlefields and uniforms and military equipment. The exhibition at the Hadtörténeti Múzeum focuses mainly on military developments. The Portrait Gallery of the Royal Hungarian 29th Infantry Regiment, shown in the museum, showcases the military equipment of various troops ([cavalry](#), [artillery](#), navy, air force), as well as a whole wall with seven showcases displaying eighty-two different Austro-Hungarian [weapon](#) types used in 1914, without further description or contextualization, which corresponds to the approach of classical military historiography; the differences between the various sabres, [rifles](#), and pistols on display are probably only understandable to experts. Also on display are showcases with equipment from the allies of Austria-Hungary, [Germany](#), and the [Ottoman Empire](#). A showcase displaying military equipment from military opponents, namely the [USA](#), [Great Britain](#), [Serbia](#), [Romania](#), [France](#), [Belgium](#), [Russia](#), and [Italy](#), is particularly irritating. In this a sign (presumably a reprint) with the inscription “Österr.-ungar. Beute” (“Austro-Hungarian Booty”) is shown which was probably used in a booty exhibition during the war. Topics such as [artists](#) at the front, war loans, or the railway and postal system in war are not completely ignored, but are much less present in the exhibition. Although there are numerous exhibits about life on the battlefield, these are hardly ever contextualized. Some of the gas masks on display are accompanied by instructions on how to put them on, but there are no exhibits on the devastating consequences of gas war for soldiers. Only in the exhibition area entitled “Prisoners of War” is the fate of individuals in war examined in more detail, using a large reconstruction of a prisoner-of-war camp. Pride in the achievements of the Hungarian troops is, finally, illustrated by numerous military awards. At the end of the exhibition, victims are the main focus, although the Hungarian war [heroes](#) are again celebrated in a portrait gallery.

The Mémorial de Verdun (Verdun Memorial) (Fleury-devant-Douaumont), founded in 1967 by veterans, was also reopened in 2016.^[26] Its multimedia exhibition shows around 2,000 exhibits in 1,800 square meters and is thematically structured. It concentrates – especially on the ground floor – on the [lives and deaths of ordinary soldiers](#) at the front. No distinction is made between German and French soldiers. The message of the exhibition is that suffering, [fear](#), struggle, and death were identical

on both sides of the front. The Mémorial has thus developed from a French into a Franco-German memorial. On the first floor, various topics such as civilian life, postal traffic, front [leave](#), [animals](#) in war, work in military [hospitals](#), and [military justice](#) are examined in more detail. The historical battlefield can be seen from the terraces on the top floor. The design of the entire exhibition space symbolizes a battlefield: it is dark and the showcases are black. The partially transparent glass floor of the ground floor, under which there is soil with ammunition, bones, nails, etc., suggests that visitors are walking across a battlefield. The exhibition's designers included numerous multimedia elements that offer visitors many opportunities to learn more about the subject. For example, the entire course of the battle is projected onto a terrain model on the basis of general staff maps. Photos, [films](#), and post-war works of art by former front soldiers are projected onto a three-part screen measuring over 100 square meters; the projection is accompanied by appropriate sounds. The supply road "voie sacrée" is reconstructed in a separate room with various vehicles and large military equipment or models of it; the ground is so uneven that visitors are warned not to walk on it. The effect of various weapons is also explained in the exhibition: a graphic image illustrates the range and an exploded [grenade](#) can be viewed, demonstrating that the fragments are scattered up to forty meters around the explosion site. At the end of the exhibition, death is not the only topic discussed: the memory of the [Battle of Verdun](#) and the founding of the Mémorial are also themes. Although the exhibition obviously aims to address all the issues relevant to the battle and provide an overview, in many areas the presentation of numerous ego-documents allows a closer look at the fates of individuals. The exhibition thus follows a cultural history approach.

Thus, the newly-designed Mémorial de Verdun has created a new content orientation, which, with its focus on the fates of "ordinary" soldiers at the front, but also on the overall social effects of the war, is oriented towards the World War I research of recent years, taking a transnational view of the war and also referring to research on cultures of remembrance by focusing on the history of its own museum. In contrast, the permanent exhibitions in Budapest, London, and Vienna are much more characterized by a national perspective. It must certainly be taken into account that a historical overview is expected from permanent exhibitions in national war museums, which makes it difficult to set thematic priorities; the necessity to show the exhibits permanently – that is, to have them in one's own collections – also hinders innovative approaches. In terms of exhibition design, it is noticeable that in London and Verdun, all the possibilities of technology are used to make the visit to the exhibition a multimedia experience, while the exhibitions in Budapest and Vienna show larger installations, but overall represent more classic showcase exhibitions.

Focus of Special Exhibitions

Not all military museums were able to create a new permanent exhibition. In some museums a permanent exhibition was only opened a few years before 2014, for example in 2009 in the Musée de l'Armée (Army Museum) (Paris), in 2011 in the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (Military History Museum of the German Armed Forces) (Dresden), and in 2012 in the Musée de la Grande Guerre (Meaux) and the In Flanders Fields Museum (Ypres). The Musée Royal de l'Armée (Royal Army Museum) (Brussels) wanted to redesign its permanent World War I exhibition for the centenary but, due to financial problems, was unable to do so. In 2014 the Armádní muzeum Žižkov (Army Museum Žižkov) (Prague) showed its permanent exhibition on World War I, as redesigned in 2009, but closed for major renovations in 2017.

All these museums and many more, however, showed major special exhibitions on World War I in 2014 and in some cases until 2018. In [Germany](#), for example, over 100 were counted in 2014. In [France](#), many special exhibitions were also held. In 2014, the Musée de l'Armée presented two exhibitions on World War I. The exhibition "Vu du Front. Représenter la Grande Guerre" ("View from the Front. Representing the Great War") dealt with contemporary perception of the war. Among other things, numerous works of art, photographs, and media reports were exhibited there. It became clear that there were quite different perceptions of the war. These differed not only on the basis of national affiliation, but also on a person's function. The photo exhibition "Les Invalides dans La Grande Guerre" ("The Invalids in the Great War") in the Hall of Honour illustrated the role of the Hôtel des Invalides and the Musée de l'Armée between 1914 and 1918. The Musée de l'Armée was one of the few museums open during the war; as the exhibition showed, a special exhibition of the war was already on display in 1915, documenting the course of the war. From 1915 onwards, German army booty was also exhibited in the Ehrenhof. The self-reflexive, commemorative approach to the role of one's own institution during the war pursued in this exhibition brought about an expansion in content of the themes usually shown in military museums. A consideration of the history of one's own institution would also be conceivable and desirable in numerous other museums.

For France and Europe as a whole, it should be noted that the variety of themes presented in the exhibitions was enormous.^[27]

Numerous topics of the so-called cultural history of the war were addressed in exhibitions for the first time, as for example in the exhibition “The Little Man in the Great War” of the National Museum of Military History (Sofia), shown in 2017-2018. It focused on the fates of ordinary soldiers and the lives of people behind the front and also dealt with [refugees](#),^[28] a topic that is currently under-exposed in international world war research. Another example of a subject that has rarely been widely exhibited can be found in the Historial de la Grande Guerre (Museum of the Great War) (Péronne). In the exhibition “Entendre la guerre. Sons, musiques et silence en 14-18” (“Hearing the war. Sounds, music and silence in 14-18”), the museum focused on the one hand on the sounds of war and on the other hand on the war in [music](#). Musical instruments made in the trenches, for example, illustrated the conditions under which music was made. Finally, it is worth mentioning the exhibition “Der gefühlte Krieg” (“Feeling War”) of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (Museum of European Cultures) (Berlin), in which the aim was to show what role [emotions](#) play in war and what decision-making spaces are available for individuals. To this end, original testimonies from World War I and World War II were shown, as well as contemporary artists’ works. In contrast to numerous exhibitions, which have tried to generate emotions in their visitors through experience orientation, here they were invited to reflect on feelings.

Numerous exhibitions have tried to give an overview of the war, although in most the national perspective predominated. In [Switzerland](#), the centenary was seen as an opportunity to present a larger exhibition dealing with the consequences of the war for [Switzerland](#) for the first time. “Die Schweiz und der große Krieg” (“Switzerland and the Great War”) was conceived of as a traveling exhibition and shown at several locations. The focus was on the social aspects of the war, particularly the increasing social tensions. The exhibition followed the chronology of the war, with the themes and changes relevant to Switzerland being explored in greater depth in twenty thematic stations. The national perspective is particularly striking in the exhibition “Az Új világ született – 1914-1922” (“A new world was born – 1914–1922”) in Várkert Bazár (Budapest) which opened in 2015 and has continued beyond 2018.^[29] Throughout the exhibition there are room-filling installations, whereby the original objects are much less highlighted. For example, visitors enter a reconstructed trench in which not only sound effects, but also olfactory installations attempt to simulate the historical situation. The exhibition tries to give an overall view and is therefore less focused on individual fates. Although there are themes, such as mobilization, an entire exhibition level is dedicated to the “Lords of War.” The message at the end of the exhibition – shown in a short documentary on an exhibition wall – is clear: “The greatest losses after the war were suffered by Hungary.” [Hungary](#) is presented here as a victim of history while other perspectives are ignored. The concept of the exhibition “1914–1918. Der Erste Weltkrieg” (“1914–1918. The First World War”), which was shown at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) (Berlin) in 2014, was completely different.^[30] Battlefields such as Verdun, [Tannenberg](#), or [Gallipoli](#), political-cultural centers such as Petrograd or Berlin, as well as [occupied](#) cities and regions such as Brussels or Galicia were thematized. This did not result in a continuous narration. Rather, visitors were able to look more closely at certain aspects of the war. Thus, despite the attempt to overcome the national-historical perspective, the exhibition emphasized national specifics.

Due to the centenary, numerous exhibitions with a regional perspective were also organized, such as at the Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra (Italian War History Museum) (Rovereto), which in 2012-2015 hosted the exhibition “Pasubio 1915–1918.” The main theme was the warfare on this mountain, the summit of which was declared the Zona Sacra in 1922, together with three other mountains that were strongly contested during the war. Along with numerous photos, some finds from this battlefield can be seen. The Kobariski Muzei (Kobarid Museum) (Kobarid) also focused in its special exhibitions on the events in the region and showed two exhibitions: “Austro-Hungarian Aviation on the Isonzo Front” and “We Never Imagined Such a War.”

Partly related to the regional perspective is the focus on battlefield archaeology, as was very much present, for example, in the 2018 exhibition “Traces de la Guerre. L’archéologie de la Grande Guerre” at the In Flanders Fields Museum. On display were the results of more than a decade of archaeological research in the front region. A cultural history approach was taken, focusing on daily life in the trenches, the material relics of the war in the region, and the stories of individual fallen soldiers. This corresponded with other activities in the context of the centenary in Belgium, in which the landscape was given special attention.^[31]

Finally, among the special exhibitions shown from 1914 to 1918, global historical approaches can be found. In the German city of Sebnitz, for example, the exhibition “Der vergessene Krieg? Der Erste Weltkrieg in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika” (“The Forgotten War? The First World War in German Southwest Africa”) was on display. Due to the enormous variety of special exhibitions shown in Europe, only a small selection can be described in more detail here.

Examples of Large Special Exhibitions with Innovative Approaches

In 2014 a large special exhibition on World War I was opened in the Muzeum Wojska Polskiego (Polish Army Museum) (Warsaw): "Wielka Wojna 1914–1918 Prawdziwy koniec Belle Époque" ("The Great War 1914–1918 The True End of the Belle Époque"). In the chronological tour several halls were closed for this new exhibition. Originally, the exhibition was to be shown only until May 2015, but it developed into a more permanent exhibition that was on display until November 2018.^[32] It offered a chronological overview of the war, with individual groups of objects also illustrating special themes, such as the enthusiasm for war in 1914, war [propaganda](#), and the artistic processing of the war. The focus was on Polish soldiers in the various armies, with special attention being paid to high-ranking officers rather than to the fate of the troops. For example, the Austro-Hungarian gala uniform of [Rajmund Baczyński \(1857-1929\)](#), the first commander of the Polish Legion, was shown. The Muzeum Wojska Polskiego also reconstructed a trench which filled an entire exhibition room and offered a sound installation to simulate battles, which was easy to hear due to the significantly lower number of visitors than in the Imperial War Museum. Thus, the approach of experience orientation through staged exhibition spaces could also be found in this exhibition. The reconstructed trench contained numerous showcases with various kinds of military equipment (rifles, pistols, [machine guns](#), grenades, uniforms, helmets, gas masks, and items of everyday use) and, in a small scenery, two "soldiers" sat at a table. In the middle of the room stood two large showcases opposite each other, each with a photo on the back wall, and in front of them corresponding objects, which could also be identified by texts – however, as in the entire exhibition, the texts were exclusively in Polish. In the last part of the exhibition, photographs, posters, clothing, and a collection of everyday objects made of so-called substitute materials were used to describe the lives of the civilian population in more detail. Finally, photographs and badges were used to illustrate the millions of victims of the war, with which, as in many other examples, the fate of the soldiers at the front concluded the exhibition.

The exhibition entitled "14 – Menschen – Krieg" ("14 People – War") at the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr followed a cultural and mentalities history approach.^[33] The exhibition was divided into three large sections. In the first section, the pre-war period was thematized, quite extensively for an exhibition on World War I. The second section was dedicated to the first year of the war, in which the war enthusiasm of the summer of 1914 was analyzed critically, but also the rapid development into a world war was made obvious. The way through the exhibition continued via an outdoor area, in which some vehicles and heavy weapons were exhibited, to an outdoor hall. Warfare on the Western Front was examined here, using the [Alsace](#) war zone as an example. Thus, the focus of the exhibition was clearly on the Franco-German conflict and on the beginning of the war. As in numerous other exhibitions, much less attention was paid to other theaters of war. The exhibition, which showed around 600 exhibits in an area of around 1,000 square meters, was framed by fourteen individual fates, which also formed the basis of the narrative in an eight-part documentary [film](#) series that was shown on television in various European countries and with which the museum cooperated for the purposes of the special exhibition. In the course of the exhibition, visitors met these characters in the showcases in different places and seven people were presented with short biographies on the walls in each of the first two exhibition areas. The exhibition thus clearly showed how individuals were affected by the war. In this way, everyday experiences were much more present in the exhibition than the development of the war as a whole. Despite the focus on the Western Front, the biographies also provided perspectives on other sites of war. Unfortunately, this biographical approach could not be found in the reconstruction of a German section of a trench from the southern end of the Western Front. The Kilianstollen, which collapsed in 1918 due to being hit by the French army, was integrated into the reconstruction. It was excavated from 2011 to 2013 in upper Alsace. With this object and countless other findings from this excavation (broken glasses or combs) the museum not only illustrated trench warfare, but also mentioned the work of battlefield archaeology, which was another innovative approach. The museum thus referred to scientific approaches to reconstructing the war and gave visitors the opportunity to analyze critically the museum's historical narrative.

The largest Austrian special exhibition was shown in the Renaissance castle of Schallaburg, the traditional venue for anniversary exhibitions.^[34] In "Jubel & Elend. Leben mit dem Großen Krieg 1914–1918" ("Cheers & Misery. Living with the Great War 1914–1918"), around 1,000 exhibits were shown, including numerous personal testimonies from private collections that had never before been displayed and were found in the course of a major collection campaign. The 4,500 found exhibits offered new perspectives to the exhibition organizers. The numerous objects that soldiers at the front were equipped with made it possible to portray everyday life there, but also captivity in war, which is otherwise rarely dealt with in such detail in exhibitions on the First World War. In the twenty-four exhibition rooms, each dedicated to a specific topic, the focus was on the individual fates of people. Right at the beginning of the exhibition in the "People of 1914" section, fifteen individual characters were presented, who were then discussed in the exhibition tour and considered again at the end of the exhibition in the "People of 1918" section. In

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addition to “classical” subjects, such as the death of [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#), the exhibition highlighted those that had so far not been the topic of many Austrian exhibitions, such as mutinies and marketing the memories of contemporary witnesses after the war. The designers intended to consciously avoid classical installations and used provocations that would lead visitors to think for themselves. As the title suggests, the focus was on contradictions: for example, in the area “The Great Dying,” weapons and ammunition were placed behind steel grids on one side of the room and objects associated with injuries on the opposite side. The combination of an overview of the war (which, among other things, was carried out in the form of tables on the central events of each war year, as well as through media stations) and an in-depth critical source analysis (such as a comparison of various sources on the battle of [Lviv](#)) was also successful. The exhibit clearly expressed that this was a world war – in many areas of the exhibition a global historical approach was visible. The exhibition was also innovative in the field of [education](#). In addition to the possibility of buying a classic catalogue, visitors could collect slips of paper in the exhibition which could then be put together to form an individual collective volume.^[35] In a conflict laboratory, visitors were taught how conflicts work, whether between individuals or between states, which was also intended to be thought-provoking for visitors.

The Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích (South Bohemian Museum) (České Budějovice), which is located only about forty kilometers from the Austrian-Czech border, attempted a transnational view on World War I in the 2017-2018 exhibition “První světová válka, léta zkázy a bolesti” (“World War I, years of destruction and pain”). The focus of the exhibition was on the effects of the war on people, in particular on the division of the region in 1918. The Austrian view on the end of the war was contrasted with the opinions of Czech students on this topic. However, the chronologically structured exhibition was not limited to the political dimension, but addressed many aspects, such as wounding and death on the fronts as well as life beyond them. The developments after 1918 were also taken into account and the foundation of [Czechoslovakia](#) and the [Spanish flu](#), among other events, were mentioned. Also, in this exhibition a large reconstruction could be found, which filled an entire exhibition room. In this case, visitors crossed a battlefield which a larger missile had just hit. Also on display was a replica of a [medical station](#).

Conclusion

The question of whether the war belongs in museums^[36] can still be discussed, even after the centenary, but it was answered in practice throughout Europe. Exhibitions and museums undoubtedly played a major role in bringing World War I out of storage memory and into functional memory^[37] in many states and regions. However, no European narrative has been established yet. “A European memory still remains political wishful thinking, rather than a proven, existing reality,” as Christine Cadot emphasizes.^[38] The permanent exhibition of the House of European History (Brussels), which opened in 2017, shows that there are few interpretations that are valid throughout Europe. At the beginning of the exhibition area, reference is made to the European states’ striving for power; later, numerous postcards from different regions and phases of the war illustrate how differently people experienced the war – but since the cards cannot be read, visitors cannot interact with the personal stories written on them. One positive aspect is that the exhibition makes it very clear that this was a world war. This is achieved through objects such as the headgear of a French colonial soldier or a dragon figure from a Chinese work corps, which helps explain soldier recruitment in the colonies. The exhibition thus focuses on an aspect of war that is often either not addressed at all, or else only marginally, in national permanent exhibitions. However, it should be noted that many topics are not mentioned in the exhibition in Brussels, while others are over-represented. For example, twenty-two different gas masks are on display in a showcase, but nothing is said about famine in various countries. The lives of soldiers on the fronts are barely discussed.

Finally, the exhibition at the House of European History takes a closer look at the millions of fallen soldiers – a message that also comes at the end of numerous special and permanent exhibitions opened for the centenary. Apart from this lowest common denominator, however, very different approaches can be found in the exhibitions. While the narratives in some exhibitions, such as the permanent exhibition of the Hadtörténeti Múzeum, are still strongly national, other institutions, such as the Mémorial de Verdun, try to take a transnational view. However, the national perspective – at least in permanent exhibitions – cannot be given up so quickly, simply because of the provenance of the objects, and since only a few museums have collected internationally. The Musée Royal de l’Armée (Brussels) would have an opportunity to deviate from a national perspective on the basis of a broad collection representing all the armies involved in the war. But many special exhibitions also focus either on regional history or on the national consequences of the war.

In his comprehensive study of eleven museums in Belgium, Germany, France, and Great Britain, Thiemeyer already stated in 2010 that at the beginning of the 21st century these museums had a strong commitment to experience orientation, were increasingly turning their attention to the fate of individual soldiers, and were increasing the variety of topics beyond the history of military operations.^[39] This can also be confirmed for the exhibitions presented on the occasion of the centenary, though with a few exceptions. Although digital techniques are now increasingly being used to visualize the war,^[40] it is still doubtful that people of the 21st century can feel the emotions of the soldiers of World War I, regardless of the fact that the surroundings have been reconstructed realistically with many effects, as in the exhibition “Az Új világ született – 1914–1922.” Nevertheless, the exhibition design in many of the centenary exhibitions was also geared to experience orientation and emotionalizing; at many locations from London to Moscow reconstructed trenches or battlefields, for example, can be found.

Furthermore, cultural history approaches were dominant in the exhibitions of the centenary, with ego-documents on display in many cases allowing a closer look at the fates of individuals during this war. Concomitantly, the museums fulfilled their moral obligation not to glorify the war.^[41] Here, as well, existing trends were continued, although it should be noted that an expansion of the thematic focus was achieved and thus new findings were also achieved, such as through the exhibition “Entendre la guerre. Sons, musiques et silence en 14-18.” It should also be noted that, on the one hand, the regional history of the war was dealt with intensively in the form of an exhibition for the first time ever in many places and, on the other hand, global historical perspectives were exhibited. Another innovative aspect was the view of the “Musée de l'Armée” on the history of its own institution. The thematization of battlefield archaeology, which took place in several exhibitions, can also be described as particularly innovative.

We will only be able to judge the extent to which the diverse approaches to global, cultural, and commemorative history have found their way into permanent exhibitions after several years have elapsed. It will also be necessary to examine the extent to which further multimedia networking takes place, as has already been attempted in part during the centenary.^[42]

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Notes

1. ↑ Speitkamp, Winfried: Einleitung, in: Berding, Helmut / Heller, Klaus / Speitkamp, Winfried (eds.): Krieg und Erinnerung. Fallstudien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2000, pp. 9-13, here p. 9.
2. ↑ Krumeich, Gerd: Einleitung. Die Präsenz des Krieges im Frieden, in: Dülffer, Jost / Krumeich, Gerd (eds.): Der verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918, Essen 2002, pp. 7-17, here p. 17.
3. ↑ Cf. Bayer, Martin: Der Erste Weltkrieg in der internationalen Erinnerung, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 16-17 (2014), pp. 47-53.
4. ↑ Cf. Haring, Sabine / Kuzmics, Helmut: Erster Weltkrieg und Moderne. Die kollektive Erinnerung an den "Großen Krieg" bei Nachfolgestaaten und ehemaligen Feinden der Habsburgermonarchie, in: Bican, Bianca et al. (eds.): Österreichisch-Siebenbürgische Kulturbeiträge. Ein Sammelband der Österreich-Bibliothek Cluj-Napoca – Klausenburg – Kolozsvár, volume 4, Cluj-Napoca 2012, pp. 183-224, here p. 185.
5. ↑ The most comprehensive international discussion was probably caused by: Clark, Christopher M.: The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914, London 2013.
6. ↑ François, Étienne / Puschner, Uwe: Warum Erinnerungstage, in: François, Étienne / Puschner, Uwe (eds.): Erinnerungstage. Wendepunkte der Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, Munich 2010, pp. 13-24, here p. 23.
7. ↑ Cf. Assmann, Aleida: Jahrestage – Denkmäler in der Zeit, in: Münch, Paul (ed.): Jubiläum, Jubiläum ... Zur Geschichte öffentlicher und privater Erinnerung, Essen 2005, pp. 305-314.
8. ↑ Cf. Überegger, Oswald: Einleitung, in: Überegger, Oswald (ed.): Zwischen Nation und Region. Weltkriegsforschung im interregionalen Vergleich. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven, Innsbruck 2004, pp. 11-15, here p. 11; Cercel, Cristian / Parish, Nina / Rowley, Eleanor: War in the Museum. The Historial of the Great War in Péronne and the Military History Museum in Dresden, in: Journal of War & Culture Studies 2/12 (2019), pp. 194-214, here p. 196.
9. ↑ Cf. Reynolds, David: The Long Shadow. The Great War and the Twentieth Century, New York et al. 2013, p. 377.

10. ↑ Cf. Barth-Scalmani, Gunda: The Memory Landscape of the South-Western Front. Cultural Legacy, Promotion of Tourism, or European Heritage?, in: Bürgschwentner, Joachim / Egger, Matthias / Barth-Scalmani, Gunda (eds.): Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial, Leiden 2014, pp. 461-500, here p. 490.
11. ↑ Cf. Assmann, Aleida: Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses, Munich 1999, pp. 20-21.
12. ↑ Cf. Thiemeyer, Thomas: Geschichtswissenschaft. Das Museum als Quelle, in: Baur, Joachim (ed.): Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 73-94.
13. ↑ Museum Definition, issued by International Council of Museums, online: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> (retrieved: 20 May 2021).
14. ↑ Cf. Dröge, Kurt / Hoffmann, Detlef: Einführung, in: Dröge, Kurt / Hoffmann, Detlef (eds.): Museum Revisited. Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf eine Institution im Wandel, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 9-14, here p. 11.
15. ↑ Cf. Klein, Hans-Joachim / Wüsthoff-Schäfer, Barbara: Inszenierungen an Museen und ihre Wirkung auf Besucher, Berlin 1990, p. 5.
16. ↑ Cf. Beil, Christine: Der ausgestellte Krieg. Präsentationen des Ersten Weltkriegs 1914–1939, Tübingen 2004, p. 371.
17. ↑ Cf. Wegner, Nora: Publikumsmagnet Sonderausstellung – Stiefkind Dauerausstellung? Erfolgsfaktoren einer zielgruppenorientierten Museumsarbeit, Bielefeld 2015.
18. ↑ Cf. Waidacher, Friedrich: Handbuch der Allgemeinen Museologie, Vienna 1999, pp. 239-240.
19. ↑ Cf. Arnold-de Simine, Silke: Mediating Memory in the Museum. Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia, Basingstoke 2013, p. 75.
20. ↑ Cf. Badsey, Stephen: The Great War Since The Great War, in: Historical 1/22 (2002), pp. 37-45, here p. 37; for a historical overview: Wellington, Jennifer: Exhibiting War. The Great War, Museums and Memory in Britain, Canada and Australia, Cambridge 2017.
21. ↑ Cf. Cornish, Paul (ed.): The First World War Galleries, London 2014.
22. ↑ Transcript in the exhibition (3 June 2017).
23. ↑ The current design differs from the naturalistic previous versions of the earlier permanent exhibitions. Cf. Thiemeyer, Thomas: Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln. Die beiden Weltkriege im Museum, Paderborn et al. 2010, p. 73.
24. ↑ Cf. Hatschek, Christoph: "Im Angesicht des Todes ...", in: neues museum 4 (2014), pp. 50-57; Ortner, M. Christian: The Museum of Military History/Institute of Military History in Vienna. History, Organisation and Significance, in: Muchitsch, Wolfgang (ed.): Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 99-103.
25. ↑ Cf. Magyarország a nagy háborúban 1914-1918, issued by Breuerpress International, online: <http://www.breuerpress.com/2016/05/21/magyarorszag-a-nagy-haboruban-1914-1918/> (retrieved: 30 January 2018).
26. ↑ Cf. Desrousseaux Medrano, Edith de (ed.): In der Schlacht. Verdun 1916, Paris 2016; Rezension zu Mémorial von Verdun, issued by H-Soz-Kult, online: www.hsozkult.de/exhibitionreview/id/rezausstellungen-253 (retrieved: 30 October 2019). Cf. also: Petermann, Sandra: Rituale machen Räume. Zum kollektiven Gedenken der Schlacht von Verdun und der Landung in der Normandie, Bielefeld 2007, pp. 112-116.
27. ↑ Cf. Schleper, Thomas: Expositionen über den Ersten Weltkrieg. Zwischenbericht mit Positionierung, in: Geschichte im Westen 29 (2014), pp. 173-206.
28. ↑ Cf. <https://militarymuseum.bg/ekspozitsii/vremenni-izlozhibi/izlozhiba-malkiyat-chovek-v-golyamata-vojna/> (retrieved: 05 October 2021).
29. ↑ Cf. Schmidt, Mária: 1918-1923. The Birth of a New World. An Essay, Budapest 2019.
30. ↑ Cf. Rezension zu 1914–1918. Der Erste Weltkrieg, issued by H-Soz-Kult, online: www.hsozkult.de/exhibitionreview/id/rezausstellungen-193 (retrieved: 28 October 2019).
31. ↑ Cf. Shelby, Karen: Belgian Museums of the Great War. Politics, Memory, and Commerce, London et al. 2019.
32. ↑ Cf. Wystawa "Wielka Wojna 1914 – 1918. Prawdziwy Koniec Belle Époque" tylko do końca listopada!, issued by Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, online: <http://www.muzeumwp.pl/aktualnosci/1020,wystawa-8222-wielka-wojna-1914-8211-1918-prawdziwy-koniec-belle-epoque-8221-tylko-do-konca-listopada.php> (retrieved: 26 October 2019).
33. ↑ Cf. Bauer, Gerhard / Pieken, Gorch / Rogg, Matthias (eds.): 14 – Menschen – Krieg. Katalog zur Ausstellung zum Ersten Weltkrieg, Dresden 2014.
34. ↑ On three other special exhibitions cf. Kühberger, Christoph: Zur geschichtskulturellen Verarbeitung des Ersten Weltkrieges im Jahr 2014 in Österreich, in: Fenn, Monika / Kuller, Christiane (eds.): Auf dem Weg zu einer transnationalen Erinnerungskultur? Konvergenzen, Interferenzen und Differenzen der Erinnerung an den Ersten Weltkrieg im Jubiläumsjahr 2014, Schwalbach 2016, pp. 118-144
35. ↑ Cf. Fritz, Peter / Schallaburg Kulturbetriebsges. m. b. H. (eds.): Jubel & Elend. Leben mit dem Großen Krieg 1914-1918, Schallaburg 2014.
36. ↑ Cf. Muchitsch, Wolfgang: Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions, in: Muchitsch, Wolfgang (ed.): Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 9-12.
37. ↑ Cf. Assmann, Aleida: Funktions- und Speichergedächtnis. Zwei Modi der Erinnerung, in: Platt, Kristin / Dabag, Mihran (eds.): Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und kollektive Identitäten, Opladen 1995, pp. 169-185.

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39. ↑ See Thiemeyer, *Fortsetzung des Krieges* 2010, pp. 318-319.
40. ↑ Cf. Jaeger, Stephan: *Visualizing War in the Museum. Experiential Spaces, Emotions, and Memory Politics*, in: Engberg-Pedersen, Anders / Maurer, Kathrin (eds.): *Visualizing War. Emotions, Technologies, Communities*, New York 2017, pp. 165-181, here p. 168.
41. ↑ Cf. Winter, Jay: *Museums and the Representation of War*, in: Muchitsch, Wolfgang (ed.): *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 21-37, here p. 33.
42. ↑ Cf. Groth, Daniel: *Raum – Waffe – Körper. Der Erste Weltkrieg in deutschen und österreichischen Museen und Ausstellungen*, St. Ingbert 2020, here p. 160.

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