

Perspectives of War

REALITY OF WAR



BY EMMA CUTTING

World War I Artwork

REALITY OF WAR



Reality of War

It is challenging to imagine how something truly poetic and beautiful can emanate from such dire, dismal war and conflict. Yet the First World War initiated some of the most talented and progressive artists, poets and authors of the generation, each routing their individual and collective experiences into their chosen art form, creating interpretations of World War I very much personal to them besides being incredibly relatable to audiences then and now.

The work of poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, Rupert Brooke and Isaac Rosenberg amid others, latches on to a truth we can reminisce, fascinate and interpret in a consoling yet very authentic way. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a physician in the Canadian Army, wrote possibly one of the most famous pieces of war poetry. The memorial poem, 'In Flanders Fields' was written while perceiving the scenes as he sat upon medical field ambulance near an advance

dressing post at Essex Farm, just north of Ypres 1915. Concurrently, reflections of the war from home were recorded by poets including Charlotte Mew, whose prodigious work *The Cenotaph* was published in 1919.

The extent of human sacrifice of war can be evidently seen in art created during, and in the aftermath of, the First World War. Painters such as Paul Nash and Constance Oliver lived through, and vividly captured, their experience of this colossal War.

Here are a collection of interpretations of war, some my own, most by others, which I have then looked into more deeply than that first layer. Looking into what the artist was trying to conceive in the way he painted this, what I call the "Reality of War".

By Emma Cutting

PAUL NASH

Spring in the Trenches



SPRING IN THE TRENCHES

This first picture that you can see across the page, is a painting called “Spring in the Trenches” taken from Ridge Wood in 1917 and produced in 1918 by Paul Nash. The title seems rather ironic in contrast to the painting itself; with “spring” instantly being a word we can easily comprehend therefore planting the idea of crisp grass, fresh flowers – a title seemingly completely contrasting to that we would expect of war. Yet once your eyes are set on the picture the title becomes undoubtedly ironic. The scene is so very much unlike spring; supposed crisp, bright greens and blue are absent, yet divergent typical autumnal colours such as dull umbers dampen the painting. The picture is very dreary and gloomy again conflicting the hopeful, optimistic title. Nash carefully manipulates shapes in his painting to create an angular, barren and very much sharp landscape; showing this penetrating edge to war, which is often expected. Two soldiers are stood at the front of the painting, hunched and visibly weary. They are dressed in murky, algae like colour; their exhaustion shown through the monotonous atmosphere of their clothes and surroundings. Yet despite the very much dampened and dreary atmosphere, the painting has an odd air of peace. This is due merely to the fact that there is no fighting, and no apparent violence present – very atypical as violence is the stereotypical picture of war.

JOHN SINGER

The Interior of a Hospital Tent



THE INTERIOR OF A HOSPITAL TENT

As you progress through onto the next painting, this painting is again very different to what you would expect from a World War I painting. This painting goes under the title "The Interior of a Hospital Tent" and is by John Singer RA. This painting has an incredibly personal story alongside it. On September 24, Sergeant Singer was near Peronne where they held the Prisoners taken from the front before sending them further back. Here Singer made sketches, but while doing so caught a bad case of influenza. The message in this painting appears quite peaceful; not much blood and gore. People appear to be lying down injured yet they seem content in that a lot of

them are either peacefully reading or sleeping. This mellow atmosphere that Singer has created is owing to the sedate, serene watercolors he uses. In the background there are noticeable empty beds, this could indicate a feeling of hope or a very contrasting feeling of despondence depending on how the viewer interprets the piece. The painting here depicts a haunting calmness of morning—shown by the light, white colors—with the wounded men which shared his tent. Yet in a letter Singer writes he expresses his sting in the horrific fitful nights . . . "the accompaniment of groans of wounded, and the choking and coughing of gassed men, which was a nightmare - it always seemed strange on opening one's eyes the next morning to see the level cots and the dimly lit long tent looking so calm, when one was dozing in pandemonium." This very much more ghastly perspective of the hospital tent may be shown in the slight detail of blankets on beds. When examined carefully, it can be noted that the front four beds in the hospital have red blankets, the others are all clearly green. The interpretation of this an entirely down to personal opinion; whether the red blankets are just a taste of the cost of war, or merely Singer uses artistic licence to give the picture a boost of colour to make it more interesting for observers. There is a strong sense of hope when you first glance at the picture, yet this is dampened by the red blankets possibly representing the red blood of war.

Gassed and Wounded



GASSED AND WOUNDED

As you look on, the outlook of war seems to dramatically change. The next picture inline for interpretation is "Gassed and Wounded" by Eric Kennington a painting from 1918. Even reading the title seems to weigh you down, almost in anticipation for the heavy material to follow.

This is an interior scene of a field hospital showing "gassed and wounded" soldiers lying on stretchers. The picture is a shade of murky, algae green stating a clear air of despair or misery. In the foreground there is a soldier with his eyes bandaged and his mouth open in pain; an orderly carries his stretcher. A smoking stove stands in the left foreground the smoke possibly comparable to the muggy confusion of the soldiers. Kennington crafts the light to shine in from the right onto the faces of the blinded men making them glow very pink to show that these people are alive and are human. He uses the light to illuminate up the faces of the wounded and lift the soldiers of the hunched "no body" blocking his face in shadow to accentuate this. The whole interior is incredibly cramped with stretchers so close they could be overlapping; yet again emphasising that confusion and muddle of the individuals. This picture really indicates the "pain" that soldiers have, and are, going through; mouths slightly open in a frozen scream. There is a man in the background, who could be another 'orderly'; he is very hunched, his arms and head hanging from his body so notably. This is possibly depicting the sense of continual reality, that over and over again impression. This is the first "injured" painting in the display and corresponds to so well.

ERIC KENNINGTON

The Kensington's



THE KENSINGTON'S

Another very different painting follows, with a significantly different approach to any seen so far. However this painting follows from that before it in that it is by Eric Kennington. Contrasting greatly to those before it, this painting has been created using very bright, strong colours. The whole picture is fairly animated, with a cartoon like affect being applied.

This painting depicts men in Kennington's unit; a platoon of British soldiers standing in a village street. He shows a moment when his squad, exhausted and entirely shattered from four days and sleepless nights in the fire trench in twenty degrees of frost and almost continuous snow, have made their way through the deep mud of a communications trench to the comparative protection of the ruined village at Laventie. Here, the men are waiting for the next part of the journey: a march of five miles. There is an exterior whitewashed wall in the background, snow on the ground, and a lot of debris scattered around, especially towards the right, and above, a Calvary cross is entangled into the top corner of the composition. Figures are loosely grouped on the left, with one man lying sprawled on the ground below, and another standing off to the right. Each man stares off in a different direction, in sense of much distance and detached, -helped by the animated feel- possibly implying the impact of war. Metal objects, a helmet, a fork and a belt-buckle are picked out in gold metallic paint, possibly intentionally 'sharp' and obvious. In reality this whole scene would have been a lot more horrible, with mud, gore and blood. Kennington may have made it animated to give more relief, make it less real, less able for those observing it to comprehend the reality of it.

C NEVISON

Road from Arras

This painting by Nevison, likely to have been from around 1917 is a painting, evidently after reading the title, of the road from Arras. Described as the view down onto the road "Arras-Bapaume" road which extends out towards the horizon. The surrounding environment features a bare, wasted landscape, with no vegetation in sight. This flat, undistinguished landscape surrounds the road, with bollard like tree stumps distinguishing the mud fields from the mocha brown road. Vehicles and some figures can be perceived, with the suggestion that they are in transit. The back of vehicles can be seen on the right hand side, and the front of vehicles that are approaching on the left, indicating a country, (if the painter has been accurate) somewhere other than England; which here is very much the case as the "Road from Arras" is in France. In fact, Nevison actually painted the traffic on this road incorrectly, originally placing the vehicles facing the wrong way suggesting a country such as England which was incorrect. However, Nevison immediately attended to this and corrected the painting to make it accurate.

To the upper right is an encampment of eight tents. Figures and vehicles can be seen in transit on the left and right of the road. The clouded, grey sky and wet road surface indicates recent heavy rainfall. This painting exhibits a journey - both literally and metaphorically. A trip that had to be taken in order for supplies and people to be taken to the front line, and the "long way to the end of the road. Yet also shows the personal "war journey" particularly that of the soldiers - in what they have witnessed and experienced.



ROAD FROM ARRAS

EMMA CUTTING

Consequence

Death.Fear.Pain.Destruction.Hate.Sorrow.Terror.Panic.Throbbing.Grief.Anxiety.Hatred.Anger.Horror.Obliteration.Kill.Loss.Destruction.Fighting.Devestation.Rage.Fighting.Misery.Fire.Weapons.Terror.Scared.Injury.Chaos.Ghastly.Shocking.Insane.Grim.Mess.Confusion.Fury.Wild.Daunting.Terrible.Monstro

This is a real representation of the horror soldiers have to go through in order to get those "good" effects of war. On the right hand side of the paper is a face. This mainly represents those soldiers who have fought and are fighting in wars. The grayscale creates a somber and very much dismal feel. With the edges fading into the background to represent those who have lost their lives in the war; disappeared into the revulsion war. The strong, obvious "positive" words show the lighter side of a very weighted argument, with the reality of war "dribbled" over these words in "blood" to really represent the balance of the consequences and whether they are for the greater good. The drips of wax, creating a three dimensional effect, create a believable blood like effect, with the drips adding another dimension both literally in the three dimensional sense as well as the in the meaning of blood being "thicker" than these words; the losses often seeming larger than the gains. The three soldiers then drawn on the bottom show more of the feeling during war. These precise, defined figures give a suggestion of the structure of war. How great the level of accuracy and definition in the uniform of soldiers and the strict orders or commands. Yet this order totally contrasts with the chaotic, turmoil of no man's land. Lost in this blurred, perplexing environment with no sense of direction, totally opposing that rigid structure and order of the soldiers.



CONSEQUENCE

This is my interpretation of war as a painting. I have called my painting "Consequence" as the main theme seen throughout this piece is the effects, and consequences of war. The background is a mix of crimson red amalgamating with musty grey's, to create a murky, muggy atmosphere where the horror and 'blood red' of war meets the fear and sheer terror. Layered onto this are the three words "freedom", "unity" and "hope" - three positive effects of war. Yet there is a twist, as each of these three words is made from text. Text which is full of words which are horrors of war, see the sample across the page:

EMMA CUTTING

Sounds of War

Poets, authors and artists often latch on to our 'senses' of war, capturing what is, and what we imagine, war to be like. Artists in particular, specifically demonstrate this by using techniques such as using contrasting colours, metallic or 3D effects to create a sight that we can relate to and interpret. Museums such as the "Imperial War Museum's" that are scattered, particularly across this country, attempt to engage some of those other senses in 'war like' scenes. Such as smells of mustard gas, trench foot and burning debris with similar harmless smells to give people a chance to connect and sense what war is actually like. However there is one aspect of war that is so significant to soldiers yet not often interpreted. During war sounds cascade into the ears of soldiers, the roaring, deafening resonance of guns, shells and shouting and echo's throughout their brains. Yet we rarely have opportunities to get a sense of this.

Over time, warfare changes. Warfare had certainly changed in the fifty years between 1865 and 1915, and its effects would change the way the world remembered war forever. World War I showed people violence and destruction far different than anything seen before. With technology much developed, fighter planes, bombs, trenches, mustard gas, and automatic machine guns took over, shattering whole countries. Thousands upon thousands of soldiers were injured and killed in this unprecedented mass killing which changed the world. It showed a dark, foreign violent and mysterious side of humans which was dark and deadly yet caused undoubtable chaos.

Similarly to this 'new' war, which dumbfounded people. The music of this time, similarly to other interpretations such as paintings, the music that comes from this period of time has an element of chaos, fear and destruction built in, like layers of a forming a structure. Music about world war one can often be disturbing, unstructured, and terrifying - really representing what society and soldiers felt. I have created a piece of music, called 'Sounds of War', which represents that time society and soldiers went through, those sounds of fear and violence which built up into a deafening resonance. In this piece, you can hear sounds which may be interpreted as representations of real objects such as shells flying into the trenches, yet they may also be interpreted as metaphorical

sounds such as terror building up. This music is indeed a dark reminder of what impact this 'new' kind of war had on the entire world, allowing people to sense the 'Sounds of War'.

Sounds of War
By Emma



Cutting



Click on the sound icon to listen to "Sounds of War".

Sound not available on this "Web" version due to limit on file size

Note: All instruments have been recorded as real instruments. Composed and played by Emma Cutting

References:

Page: Website:

Title pg. All of the following.

1 <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20079>

3 <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20079>

4 <http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-north/saving-lives>

5 <http://www.vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=65961>

6 <http://www.ghostofaflea.com/archives/013105.html>

7 <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/20209>

Sound file <http://caloniedoesart.wordpress.com/memorial-day-artists-the-brave-work-of-military-artists/>