

**Artists, War and the Sensory Imagination, 1914-2014**

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The year 2014 marked the beginning of four plus years of activity to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. In that year, I was involved in curating a major exhibition - *The Sensory War 1914-2014* -- at Manchester Art Gallery, which ran for 5 months from October 2014 to Feb 2015. It and explored the subsequent century of artistic responses to war and conflict. It examines how artists have communicated the impact of war on the body, mind, environment and human senses across the century between 1914 and 2014.

The exhibition took about 3 years to research and prepare, with around 247 works, and was curated by David Morris, Head of Collections, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, Tim Wilcox, Principal Curator, Exhibitions at Manchester Art Gallery, and me from CCHW, and based on my research into WW1 art and culture, with support from the AHRC, which also resulted in my monograph, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power* (Oxford Univ. Press 2014), where two major curated themes of ‘pain and succour’ and ‘rupture and rehabilitation’ were explored through experiences, documents produced by, and representations of, medical personnel (doctors, surgeons, nurses, physios etc) and their patients - medical, surgical and post-operative recovery and living with (often significant) disabilities, all of which has been the subject of artists for centuries but especially in response to WW1. This material informed the exhibition and we were able to borrow some of the key works in my research monograph to put on display in Manchester. The exhibition also drew from the collections of the Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery, and also secured many important historical and contemporary works from public and private collections in Britain, Europe, and the United States, and Iran.

In 1914, Lawrence Haward was appointed director of the gallery and he began collecting directly from the studios of artists who would become part of the British Official War Artists’ scheme established by the War Office and Ministry of Information. Hence MAG has an amazing collection, including of some rare and exquisite Paul Nash pastel drawings – rarely seen.

Haward wrote about modern war not as romantic adventure and heroic make-believe, but bitterness and courage, folly and waste. The artist, he concluded, was in tune with the meaning and impact of war, and ‘will reflect that world and the human emotions it arouses’.

Our aim was to provide new insights into the way modern war represented a rupture in human and technological history, especially in targeting and radically altering sensory experiences. Indeed, many artists were combatants or indeed medics, working as doctors, stretcher bearers, and some were witnesses, and indeed wounded in the war, --they found that artistic practices could communicate - even ameliorate - the sensory and deeply intimate experience of war.

Modern war represented a rupture in human and technological history, especially in targeting and radically altering sensory experiences. But we also should consider the legacies of major wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, comparing and contrasting the past and present, and how artists have shifted from a visual medium such as painting and lithograph to providing a immersive sensory experiences such as using sound and video technologies in their practice. The medium is also a means of expressing sensory war. Etchings of the wounded and dead seem brutally tactile, while pastel drawings evoke the fragility of flesh.

The First World War involved a re-configuration of sensory experience and perception through devastating military technologies and their impact on the environment. Its legacy continued and accelerated in even more radical forms of destruction through the century. Continuing through the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> century, artists struggled to understand the true effect of modern technological warfare. While military and press photography brought a new capacity to coldly document such lethal displays, artists found a different way of seeing.

Trauma and loss – of body, mind, senses and environments – are central themes in artistic responses to war and conflict over the century, we might also consider aspects of beauty, reconstruction and hope for humanity.

The art of war and conflict generates psychological and neurological reactions; sounds of silent mourning stir deep emotions and visual imaginations, and video works immerse us in the sensorial world of postmodern aerial warfare, from the helicopter to the predator drone. From the horrors of the First World War to today's conflicts, artists reveal the trauma of war but also inspire with a recuperative message. In the spirit of peaceful intervention and political challenge, art communicates the worst and best of humanity: abject suffering and the hope of resilience

## CONTEXTS

Modern war began in 1914 with new weapons aimed at armies and civilians. Weapons of attack - aerial warfare and bombing, tanks and submarines, chemicals and gas – were met with instruments of defence like sound-ranging, flash-spotting, low frequency microphones and underwater hydrophones, before sonar and radar were finessed in WW2.

The mass production of armaments was matched only by the mass mobilisation of whole societies across the globe – and the mass disablement of citizen soldiers suffering from new disorders like shellshock and mutilations from which modern medicine ensured they lived rather than died. The impact of war on the human sense was visibly haunting – something to which artists were particularly attuned. Indeed, many artists were themselves physically or emotionally scarred by war, and their work reflects how they became wounded visionaries for the rest of society.

The First World War was the first modern, industrial war that set the tone for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as new wars were fought and new technologies developed from helicopters in Vietnam to drones in Afghanistan. Today, the memory of indiscriminate and mass death in WW1 and the total annihilation of nuclear war in WW2 has been eroded by a myth of virtual war and precision targeting, with predator drones (the Pashtun call them wasps for their buzzing noise) and nano-drones (like killer bees that fly through the window). The mental effect on those who 'pilot' these devices is reflected in works such as Omer Fast's *5,000 Feet is the Best*.

*The Sensory War 1914-2014* encapsulates the industrial process of militarisation and the sensory effect of noise in urban environments of munitions production and sirens, as well as the cacophony of bombs, machine guns and heavy artillery fire on the battlefields. A new language was created to describe the noise of war – 'whizz bang' shells screamed in WW1, as did the wail of the

dive-bombing Stuka aircraft. Noise was often felt as deafening, disorienting and deranging. Many images from the period of The First World War and afterward were dedicated to visualising this penetrating aspect of modern war's industrial noise. The war in the air was both an aural sensation and visual spectacle, but on the ground it was the horror of burning and explosions.

*The Sensory War* explores the violent beauty and luminosity of high-powered weaponry, its atmospheric qualities and nocturnal spectacles, whether seen from the perspective of distance or smelt and witnessed on the ground. In the virtual trick of the first Gulf War, Scud and Patriot missiles were seen with infrared photography, which brought a new sensation of distant war through video-affect. In using infra-red pink stock in his recent work in the Congo (*Infra* 2012 and *Enclave* 2013), Irish artist, Richard Mosse transforms the technology of death into a sensory odyssey through landscapes of pain, revealing what we are not meant to see in the Congo.

The introduction of gas war in WW1 was particularly frightening to the senses – as it burned and choked mouths, lungs, noses and eyes. Mustard gas burns were treated in salt bath wards. Gas weapons created a toxic imagination seen in artistic work of the period. The fear lasted through WW2 and art and science joined together to imagine ways of protecting the senses and their vulnerability, arming citizens with gas masks (it was an offence if refused). The smell of cordite gun propellant and bombs was also a lasting sensory memory – like the petrol smell of napalm in Vietnam or the Kuwaiti oil fields during the Persian Gulf War. Sensory assaults turned into syndromes both psychological and physiological. Artists such as Iranian, Baktash Sarang have tackled the effects of these banned weapons which were used extensively in the Iran-Iraq War.

From the dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 and the horrendous suffering of Japanese civilians and the annihilation of its cityscapes, to the threats that are posed in global wars today, with new weapons of mass destruction, the exhibition turns to the artist as the torchbearer of wisdom, bringing a deep understanding of one hundred years of warfare on the human senses, the body and environment. Artists reveal the trauma of war but also inspire with a recuperative message. In the spirit of peaceful intervention and political challenge, art communicates the worst and best of humanity: abject suffering and the hope of resilience.

We begin the exhibition with CRW Nevinson's key work *Explosion*, 1916. In this painting the artist captured in paint the terrible noise and violence of a bursting shell, its blinding light and lacerating shrapnel. Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson entered the war in November 1914 as an ambulance driver and immediately experienced the horrific effects of modern warfare on the human body. He had studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks and was influenced by the Italian Futurists who had created a strident aesthetic of harsh lines to celebrate every aspect of the Machine Age, including militarism. At the Front, however, he was soon disillusioned with Futurism but found a new use for its aggressive style to express the violence of war.

## SLIDE

THEMES: The impact of war on the sensory, psychological, physical and environmental condition of being human.

- Militarising Bodies, Manufacturing War
- Aerial Warfare and the Sensation of Flight
- Pain and Succour
- The Embodied Ruin: Natural and Material Environments
- Rupture and Rehabilitation: Wounds and Disability
- Bombing, Burning and Distant War

- Chemical War and Toxic Imaginations
- Haunted Ghostlands: Loss, Resilience and Memory

We want to explore the critical perspective artists, their role as storytellers, as well as their agency in challenging the politics of militarism and the violation of human rights in wartime with the values of justice, humanity and peace. But to tell this story of artists responding to modern war, we begin with the significance of technology's sensorial and affective impact.

### **Opening SLIDE**

Nevinson's iconic painting *Explosion* 1916 sets the tone for this major exhibition to be held at the Manchester Art Gallery. The work reverberates the sonic assault of high-powered artillery explosions and bombs that annihilated landscapes and shattered bodies into oblivion. The sheer force of the sensory is captured in the jagged lines and vorticist colour – light ash dirt rise up as the boom of the explosion fragments time, the atmosphere, smell, taste and ear-shattering.

We also paid attention to how the medium (paint, lithography, sculpture, video) incites the human sensorium, not just the visual aspect of art, but also in evoking textures, aural and spatial sensations, and how artists used colour to illicit smell and taste, or to intensify movement

### **SLIDE – Nevinson Howitzer; Clausen gun factory**

**- the noise of industrial warfare was felt on both the front line – and at home**

Siegfried Sassoon said in 1918 – 'you can hear the guns, Hark! Thud, Thud, thud...they never cease...I want to go out and screech at them to stop...Im going stark, staring mad because of the guns'. But munition workers were also overwhelmed by the industrial assault of modern war as their bodies were totally inculcated in the manufacturing of weapons.

### **SLIDE – militarising bodies manufacturing war**

Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson's 1917 series *Britain's Efforts and Ideals*: (including lithographs entitled *Welding*, *Making the Engines*; and *Assembling Parts*) used a Vorticist technique of breaking down spatial elements to imitate motion. This aimed to simulate the vibrating, whirring movement of machines, but also create an affective experience – the deafening noise of industrial spaces reverberating with the production of war machines.

**In the work entitled *Returning to the Trenches* – you can almost hear the sound of machines and men marching with bayonets in a clanging rhythm.**

### **SLIDE – Female Factories**

We also wanted to show the considerable experience of women in munitions - and the use of their bodies and minds in the mass mobilisation of technology for war. And we wanted to make that link between the two world wars – to show the way that artists used visual techniques to convey the sensation of a noisy factory, of sparks flying from the lathe almost singing the skin. You can see Laura Knight's almost homage to the earlier work of Nevinson's *Acetylene Welder* in WW1. The work of *munitionettes* or *Canary girls* as they were called, due to the yellow discolouration of their skin from TNT, was indeed highly dangerous. Some were killed in munitions factory explosions,

such as the one at the National Shell Filling Factory at Chilwell, Nottingham in 1918, which killed 137 workers.

### **SLIDE Aerial warfare and the sensation of flight –**

We were looking at the new spectacle of airwar – but also its sensations depicted in art. And the powerful effect of air power and noise. See the hand of the artist clinging onto the plane.

But also the spectacle of beauty, as seen from the air – the tension between reconnaissance, observation and impending destruction. Nevinson was able to convey this ethereal aspect of air war's beauty, and its distancing effect, in a delicate painting on glass of a view from the ground: a blue sky with distant aircraft surrounded by puffs of anti-aircraft fire ('archies').

### **PAIN and Succour**

Accounting for the medical services in the war, and the physical and psychological impact of wounds, was a key part of the research stemming from my OUP monograph, in which I also used a lot of artwork to explain the recording of not just medical and surgical treatments, but also emergency triaging systems and recovery processes. Two important paintings from the MAG collection included:

#### **Henry Lamb *Advance Dressing Station on the Struma* 1916**

This painting is a scene of medical aid being given to the wounded man on a stretcher, but is also symbolic of the pain and succour of the entire war with its almost religious composition. Lamb does not paint with the clinical distance of the doctor he had trained to be, he paints with the empathy of the humanitarian.

In the First World War Lamb turned away from his art and back to medicine. He was commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps and sent first to Salonika (Thessaloniki) in Greece with the British Salonika Army from August 1916 to March 1917 then from late 1917 to 1918 to Palestine. On his return Lamb, who had won a Military Cross for gallantry, began to turn his experiences into his most important works. The success of his commission to paint *Irish Troops in the Judean Hills Surprised by a Turkish Bombardment* 1919 was followed by the exhibition of a small number of drawings and watercolours at Manchester City Art Gallery in 1920. One of these, *Succouring the Wounded in a Wood on the Doiran Front* prompted the Director, Lawrence Haward, to commission Lamb to turn it into a major painting as the beginning of a war art collection for Manchester.

The River Struma was the site of a little-known campaign by the Allied Armies of the East to repulse the Bulgarian invasion of eastern Greece and to achieve the ultimate liberation of Serbia from Bulgaria and the Central Powers. Lamb arrived just prior to a British push across the river towards the strategic city of Serres in Macedonia. This large scale work was placed on a large wall alongside another large (unfinished) work by Henry Tonks I will discuss shortly.

### **PAUL NASH**

#### ***Wounded, Passchendaele* 1918**

Paul Nash 1889-1946.

The majority of Nash's works from the front depict soldiers at a distance dwarfed by the blasted landscape. Here Nash's pathos at the plight of the soldier is more direct as the stretcher-bearers carry the wounded through a poisoned landscape filled with the colours of gangrene and mustard gas.

## **Henry Tonks 1862-1937 *An Advanced Dressing Station in France* 1918**

Oil on canvas---the largest and unfinished painting in the exhibition.

Tonks here dramatizes his intimate knowledge of shrapnel wounds to the head and body, and the procedures of frontline evacuation medicine under the chaos of military attack. The sensory qualities of this painting are revealed in the lurid glow of burning buildings and the choking haze of smoke-filled air; in patients' grimaces; in their endurance of gripping pains, and in the relief that a drink of water brought to the desperately wounded.

Like Lamb, Tonks was a doctor-turned artist and he was the Director of Drawing at the Slade School of Art, London. He taught Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer and CRW Nevinson, amongst others, and served as a surgeon in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

## ***Human Sacrifice: In an Operating Theatre* 1918**

**Harold Sandys Williamson 1892-1978**

Pencil and watercolour on paper

Harold Sandys Williamson's hospital scene is a more sinister representation of the wounded patient as an experimental subject of unchecked medical science. Incongruously this delicate watercolour is crafted with sharp precision. Fragile flesh is concealed under the clinical aesthetic, as scalpel-like lines render the operating theatre hygienic and surgical. Williamson worked as a theatre orderly at the No. 6 General Hospital where he observed operations closely while recovering from an infected ankle. He wrote to his parents of the lightning speed of operations under pressure with heavy casualties: '*They are very quick. I think they could take you to pieces completely in half an hour*'. In this picture, white-gowned doctors loom over the patient, peering inside his body. He is an anonymous object of modern surgery more than a wounded man in pain.

Tonks' medical training, his understanding of wounds and their treatment and his sensitive use of pastel come together in this study made in northern France. Tonks turns the secular scene into a work with religious overtones, arranging the composition as a Descent from the Cross. Tonks is most well-known for his medical studies of facial wounds in pastel.

We used a collection by the lesser known medical illustrator, Herbert Cole, which were watercolours and quite different in emotional and aesthetic affect from the Tonks pastels.

## **SLIDE**

Indeed, another major theme of the research into sensory war is wounding and disability – which developed as the theme of both rupture and rehabilitation.

- the physical and sensorial impact of war, and how artists have conveyed this aspect of the very real legacy of war for human bodies and for communities.
- **NZ section at Sidcup --Herbert Cole's** medical drawings of the facial wounded contrasted with contemporary wars, seen in

- **Nina Berman's infamous photograph *Marine Wedding***. (Iraq war burns victim) and **Timothy Greenfield Sanders'** photographs of Iraq veterans. (a rare example of an image of a female disabled veteran; female soldiers are largely hidden from view).

#### **SLIDE—Rosine Cahen**

Born in Alsace and trained at the Académie Julian in Paris, Rosine Cahen (who was mostly known as a print-maker) turned to delicate pastel, chalk and charcoal to draw the wounded and disabled soldiers she visited in French hospitals during the war. In her sketches, the observer is so discrete we are never allowed to gawk at the men's wounds, but rather it is their faces in a state of almost serene despair that she portrays. These works exude great calmness both in the men's expression and in the way the artist alludes to the intimate relationship of these captured moments.

Cahen gives these wounded men their dignity – they are never just medical objects. She was 59 years old in 1916 when she began visiting the war hospitals of Paris and Monte Carlo. She continued her visits on numerous occasions over the following three years. The age difference enabled her to build a personal rapport with the soldiers while they 'sat' for her, quietly recovering.

The Hospital Rollin was a temporary hospital in Trudaine Avenue, 9<sup>e</sup> district, Paris - the forlorn patient stares out with hopeless despair from his head-wound bandages. His quiet gaze and clasped hands indicate pain and anxiety, but also the depths of his vulnerability. Cahen conveys intense feeling in the eyes of the patient.

#### **SLIDE Heinrich Hoerle**

In WW1, we note that many artists were wounded themselves, in mind and body, and presented war as violating the body and senses, while also locating anxious hope in the robotic revolution of militarised science. When artists witnessed or were themselves wounded in war, how did they envision the brave new world of machines?

Some artists regarded the prosthetic as the ultimate symbol of war as sheer pain. From Heinrich Hoerle's *Drei Invaliden (Three Invalids)* --explorations of the promise and peril of high-tech prosthetics, artists linked war with what Dada poet Raoul Hausmann described as '***the extension and conquering of every sensory capacity***'.

Prosthetics, newly designed with the prosthetic industry rhetoric of bodily perfection, cinematization, mechanisation, and associated discourses of virility, but also a fantasy of the total replacement of body parts and human sensory capacity, such as that of touch.

We wanted to consider how artists confronted the political rhetoric of scientific fantasy with the reality of living with war disabilities, such as with the lithographic series *Die Kruppelmappe (The Cripples Portfolio)*, 1920) by Heinrich Hoerle, which has a scene of intimacy between a disabled soldier and his lover, in *The Couple* –

----the look of shared suffering on the couple's face, as she gently touches his prosthetic arm, lovingly cradled like a baby, perhaps even gripped with a degree of anguish. Touching the object body – affective sensations - is the poignant motif that contrast

With the help from Dorothy Price, an art historian at Bristol University, we were able to borrow this portfolio, and exhibit the entire 12 plates, which had never before been publicly exhibited in the UK – half the set is dedicated to the dreams and hallucinations of the disabled which is a subject that no other artist has ever attempted, and Dorothy wrote about this in the catalogue we produced, which sold out (10,000 copies).

**Embodied ruin—was another section in the exhibition, which was a theme I had been thinking about for a long time in my encounters with war, bodies and art.** We drew on the Paul Nash collection of rarely seen crayon gouache and pastel drawings from MAG and WAG.

- Discuss: the beauty and destruction of the front
- the Muirhead Bone pastel drawing, which shows the tanker as a body – with intestines spilling out. From WW2.

Nash enlisted in 1914 but only arrived at the front in February 1917. In May he fell into a trench and was injured badly enough to be sent home again. When he returned in late October he witnessed the final stages of the Battle of Passchendaele which was fought over the summer months into November. His regiment, The Hampshires had been almost completely wiped out in the attack on Hill 60 in August. The drawings he made, such as this one, were all begun on site. The landscape of battle debris, churned mud and rancid water-filled craters in the undraining Flanders clay after the heavy summer rains touched Nash deeply. He was able to bring to these landscapes of the aftermath of war a sensibility which makes them metaphors for the human body destroyed by conflict. They contrast so completely with the images of an English Eden Nash had been making before the war.

The ‘embodied ruin’ that artists have been concerned with since the First World War also refers to the way that military technology and the detritus strewn on the battlefield could appear human and bestial. Muirhead Bone was the first Official War Artist commissioned by the Department of Information. *Torpedoed Oil Tanker* is broken open like a flesh wound with its chasm of twisted metal intestines.

### **Shocking the Senses**

But it is not just bodies that are ruined, it is also minds. Many artists such as Otto Dix, were soldiers who also had breakdowns; some ended up in asylums. Modern war brought new sights, smells and sounds as well as confined spaces – tanks, trenches and submarines were spaces that compressed the body and stressed the human mind. ‘Thousand-yard stares’, electrified faces, nervous ticks, and hysterical gaits showed the sensory impact of shellshock. Otto Dix’s famous lithograph series *Der Krieg* (1924 –suggested this – a common theme of the period – and a century later the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon took old medical films of patients with shellshock and used the repeated image of the patient falling down and trying to get up, but never really getting up, to explain the essential sensory experience of shellshock as a repetition of a nightmare that you cannot escape from.

**The First world War was also the beginning of internment camps and POW camps with the use of barbed wire and horrific desecration of human life through torture and starvation. The very important works of Italian artist and POW Pietro Morando was an important work we borrowed. With its Goyaesque references, the artist starkly sketches the Italian Austrian frontier POW camps in harrowing depictions of torture and death, starvation, and misery.**

In recent times, the American artist Richard Serra used a crayon drawing of the infamously anonymous hooded torture victim at the Abu Ghraib prison. We can critique this image as it was originally intended as a protest poster with the caption STOP BUSH. Hundreds of prints were distributed via his studio website, pleasevote.com. The original was used for the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and it is now a large print run available at a price.



Political art? Or a 'ghost', not a person, a symbol of the event, not a victim of abuse we gaze at) –once editioned in a lithographic series, does the victim become a fetishized object of the art market? Disconnected from the political and physical violence? The intention of the artist is not always achieved, sometimes it is diverted and changed. Artists cannot always control the afterlife of their image-making, or the interpretation of its subsequent audiences. The capacity to represent the impact of war and violence on human beings is always partial and mediated.

### **Chemical War and Toxic Imagination x 3 slides**

**Otto Dix – important series *Der Krieg* – which takes the soldier's perspective of trench warfare, and, here, makes the gassed German soldiers look like they are sleeping**

In the First Gulf war or the Persian Gulf War, when Iraq invaded neighbouring Kuwait, John Keane was an official war artist, continuing a tradition begun in Britain in Ww1. Keane used a famous line out of Wilfred Owen's poem to explain the panic that the fear of gas attack and the gas masks themselves caused in soldiers. Something that was also documented in Ww1 – protective clothing could even heighten anxiety as one fumbled to put it on correctly.

Fumbling beyond his control and under huge pressure, the ecstasy Wilfred Owen describes in *Dulce et Decorum est* is sweet and honourable –edited from Horace's words, *pro patria mori* – to die for your country) –points for discussion:

*Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling*

*Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,*

*But someone still was yelling out and stumbling*

*And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—*

*Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,*

*As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.*

### **SLIDE**

Harking back to Otto Dix's *The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)*, Iranian artist Sam Samiee's *Sleeping Children* is heart-breaking. Samiee drew on news images of the 5,000 Kurdish civilians in Halabja, who in just a few short hours on 16 March 1988 were killed or maimed by mustard gas, the nerve agents Sarin, Tabun and VX, and cyanide. The truth about the chemical massacre of these civilians (known as 'Bloody Friday'), and the chemical injury experienced by many soldiers in the protracted trench conflict with Iraq, is still obscured in Iran.

### **SLIDE**

The exhibition also has the work, borrowed from an art gallery in Tehran, of Backtash Sarang – an up and coming Iranian artist who tackles the taboo subject of the Iran Iraq war. *Untitled (box)* 2006 refers to a keepsake box carried by Iranian soldiers which, Sarang states, is 'heavy with the memories of war, of the hospital environment and the burial shroud.' The war continues for the families who care for chemically-affected soldiers: 'The legacy of war is with the ones who remain, injured in one

way or another, who still suffer long after the wars end; they die the slow death and are often neglected and forgotten.'

**RICHARD MOSSE SLIDE....**artists in WW1 often used greens to show the deranging smell of toxic chemicals and immerse the audience in the chaos and fear of gas warfare. But Richard Mosse's recent embedding with a militia in the DRC led him to use old infra red film stock, for night vision, which turned the landscape into a toxic – POISON GLEN – a hallucination landscape reminiscent of psychedelic Vietnam and an era of drugged, psychotropic warfare.

**In BOMBING, BURNING AND DISTANT WAR---**we return to technology to the power of aerial bombing, air power, noise and distant war – war on the ground and war delivered from far away. The First World War triggered a scientific idea of using weapons of great fire power to destroy the built environment – to flatten villages and farmlands –developed in WW2 - to the idea of the incendiary bombs delivered by aircraft that could destroy German homes by spreading fire (according to historian Richard Overy).

**SLIDE In Georg Leroux's Hell *L'Enfer*, 1918.**

We see the impact on the environment of the western front, where Leroux had served with the French Army – the viewer is enveloped in fire and smoke; reminiscent of the phosgene and liquid fire that was used during the Battle of Verdun, it is an imagining of hell on earth – incinerating heat and the vaporising of bodies.

**Harold Sandys Williamson**, a combatant artist wounded twice on the western front, with remarkable economy of the graphic line, showing the shards of earth exploding and falling down in a crump. From the direct hit of the artillery explosion, we retreat to the distance – in WW1 the beginning of distant war, not just bombing from above but observing from a distance the targets and the accomplishments of attack.

Williamson's drawing depicts the shell shattering the ground and sending the earth skyward; the men below huddling in the sides of the trench in hopeless efforts to find safety from the fallout. The surrounding landscape is barren and the burnt trees in the distance still smoulder with the recent devastating effect of shellfire.

Williamson wrote: 'Overhead the sky was riven by perpetual uproar, by the throbbing and moaning of great shells on their way, while the ceaseless flickering of countless explosions, Very lights and rockets broke the darkness...Suddenly we became aware that through the incredible din a yet more frightful sound was coming. Bombardment by heavy trench mortar had been added. The air trembled as if a gigantic drum were beating, and the ground shook and heaved beneath our feet.'

**Leon Underwood** – concrete observation post in Mount Kemmel (West Flanders, Belgium) – the German assault on this strategic hill in 1918 was regarded as a great loss by the French and Belgians at the time. The art of seeing and being seen is captured in this image of soldiers using binoculars and telescopes to observe long-range shell fire. The First World War was a war where ever greater distances were involved in the ability to strike the enemy from afar. Large guns could now fire shells beyond the horizon. Underwood worked in the Camouflage Section of the Royal Engineers. After the

war he was considered as a late war artist and commissioned by the Imperial War Museum. This work was purchased directly by Lawrence Haward for Manchester's collection of war art.

### **Omer Fast**

<https://vimeo.com/34050994>

Brings the historic fiction of distant war and virtual warfare into the contemporary context of digital technology. Fact and fiction, the virtual and the real, continually come in and out of focus in the film. The narrative is chopped up and repeated in different ways. We hear the testimony of a former Predator Drone operator describing his bombing operations while serving in the military, as he constantly chews stomach pills. All the while, beauty and destruction are contrasted in the macabre spectacle and allure of military laser-beams. The operator speaks about the 'The Light of God', the Marines' vernacular for laser-targeting markers that enable the strike of a Hellfire missile from a remotely-operated Predator Drone: 'it looks like it's coming from heaven...pwuh...right on the spot...coming out of nowhere from the sky—it's quite beautiful'. Camera feeds from a Drone strike can be projected onto screens in the Pentagon. This distant war - from above, from long-range, from a computer screen - continually returns to haunt the pilot's dreams. Fast shows us that the war eventually comes home - into the minds of men - and never goes away.

### **SLIDE Finally we turned to the theme of the aftermath in Ghostlands: Grief and Mourning**

#### **Strang—haunted landscapes – bodies and ghosts**

So it was poignant to return to Mount Kemmel set in the mists.

While devastating technologies assaulted the body and the mind as never before – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell - something extra-sensory was also felt, a sixth unspeakable sense, like perceiving the ghosts of the war dead.

### **SIMONNORFOLK**

Despite the historic losses of a century of war and conflict, there are remarkable moments of resilience, whether in video art about Vietnamese farmers and the rebuilding of life, despite the shadow cast by the Vietnam War. Artists also found spaces for the possibility of reconstruction, reconciliation, and social transformation. A former war photographer turned artist, Simon Norfolk has spent a long time in Afghanistan. He emphasises the Orbs of bright-colour held by the weary Afghan balloon-seller to illuminate the dusty ruins and war-ravaged landscape. The fragility of hope encounters the resilience of the human – civilian –spirit.

### **FINAL SLIDES - Katie Davies –**

<https://vimeo.com/46417933>

Closer to home, a poignant observational and intimate work by the Bristol-based sound/video artist Katie Davies. This arresting piece based on recordings of the funerary repatriation at (Royal) Wootton Bassett, *The Separation Line* (2012), which evokes the sensations of borders as artefacts of division to explore the possibility of empathy and communication. Sensory war is also about memory – the body's memory and the imagination of the physical and emotional suffering of others. Video art on

the recent repatriation ceremonies of British Soldiers in the town of at Wootton Bassett (now Royal) provides a deeply mournful reflection on mourning and memory.

Thus the exhibition shows the Trauma, ruin and rupture - the sensory assault - of modern technological war - as major themes of art, ---but there was also space for sensory recovery, beautiful sensations and the hope of healing, and the wide ranging role of medical staff and families in this process.

Exiting the exhibition, the last artwork shown was by British photo artist Simon Norfolk –*The Balloon Seller*, as a glimmer of hope arose from the defeated Taliban in a war-wrecked landscape, scarred from years and years of conflict and strewn with military detritus.

### **Käthe Kollwitz**

Kollwitz had a long talk with her son, Peter, when he decided to volunteer in 1914; and she gave him her blessing, and regretted it for the rest of her life.

Expressing her grief over Peter's death, Kollwitz wrote to a friend: 'There is in our lives a wound which will never heal. Not should it'. As early as December 1914, she thought about creating a memorial to her son. She designed many different versions, but was dissatisfied with them.

Eventually she shifted her focus from the subject of the boy's dead body to the emotion of the parents' grief. This print expresses the intensity of the pain shared between the mother and father. Gripping each other, they are entwined in mutual loss. However, in the sculpture memorial of *Die Eltern*, at Roggevelde German war cemetery, Vladslo, Belgium, the kneeling father and mother appear on two separate plinths. After almost twenty years of working through her bereavement, the memorial was finally completed in April 1931.

In *Widow II* she lies prostrate on the ground dead with her dead baby slumped over her chest, both having died from starvation. The grooves of the wood deliver the harrowing sensation of an emaciated body.

In *Die Volk* – the people - The central figure is of a weary-faced hooded woman, whose gnarled hands protect a small child. Surrounded by grimacing townsfolk, the suffering in war is seen as the wretched fate of ordinary people.

### **SLIDE. Ghostlands: Grief and Mourning**

#### **Ian Strang—haunted landscapes – bodies and ghosts**

Returning to the forgotten geography of Mount Kemmel, set in the mists.

While devastating technologies assaulted the body and the mind as never before – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell - something extra-sensory was also felt, a sixth unspeakable sense, like perceiving the ghosts of the war dead. Spiritualism rose from the crucible of industrial war and mass death. While the war was initially built on the rhetorics of civilisation against barbarity, it was soon seen as science gone mad, rationalism perverted. Emotional and sensual responses were not always deadened

but often heightened. Touch and intimacy became an antidote to the indiscriminate brutality of the war machine.

**So we can turn back to the experience of civilians being bombed in WW2. Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.**

**Hibakusha x 2**---are part of this story – ie JAPAN not just about war in Europe...

*Haunted memories of the Hibakusha*

‘I hear phantom voices crying for help. I cannot forget’

Almost thirty years after the Atomic bomb was dropped, making art enabled survivors to comfort the dead that still haunted them. Some were unable to draw the horrific scenes as they remembered them, placing blankets over the maggot-infested wounds of the dead, which had not been possible at the time. One artist prayed tirelessly before he could dip his brush in red ink. Making art enabled the *Hibakusha* (which is an official identity for ‘bomb-affected people’) to put their ghosts to rest; it became an act of justice and redemption, and a way of resisting the power of the Atomic bomb.

The works are iconic in Japan. As are the work of survivors in Nagasaki (the hibakusha), who made simple works in the early 1970s (and in the context of the rising peace and anti-nuclear movement). The symbol of the Melting Hand – the haptic senses annihilated – human touch melting away. There were three other works on this floor that we had free floating – I felt that there were challenging subjects that are difficult to curate, to contextualise and situate in the field of representation.

So we decided not to curate them as much as possible. Two key works on the Holocaust (where Leslie Cole was part of the British liberating troops in Bergen Belsen) – including *Human Laundry* [more here].

We felt a strong commitment to address the issue of sexual violence as a weapon of war. In this context, we found few available works tackling this subject. However, Peter Howson was a British official war artist during the Bosnian War and his depictions of the conflict are harrowing record of stories he was told, hard to grasp facts of the 20,000 Bosniak Muslim women brutally raped, and scenes he re-imagined, including in a largescale controversial work, *Croatian and Muslim* (1994). [more on this]. Initially, we were going to have a section called Dark Encounters and Human Frailty but decided it was too containing and we let go of this early idea.

One of the largest works, for which we build a dark room with seating, is the cinematic video by American-Vietnamese artist Din Q Le. The Vietnam War or ‘the American War’ as the Vietnamese prefer, is the subject of local and diasporic memory explored through the haunting image and sound of helicopters in the past and present day. In a large-screen and immersive video work, often split into three and two panels of juxtaposed images and oral testimony, the terrifying beasts are seen hovering above and bringing destruction to the villagers below. But the artist also uses the symbol to explore the sense of hope and resilience in the transformation of this weaponry into an agricultural tool and symbol of agricultural renewal and modernity. The artist intercuts documentary footage with scenes from *Apocalypse Now* and interviews with village farmers, who remain traumatised by the long shadow the war casts. Yet, film and sound of dragonflies --sacred symbols in SE Asian cultures - hovering over the rice paddies brings peace and calm to this torrid history.   YOU TUBE: