War Trauma Memory

April 30, 2018 through August 31, 2018

Exhibit Text

Acknowledgment Panel

War, Trauma, Memory was curated by André G. Wenzel, Bibliographer, Literatures of Europe & the Americas; and designed and installed by Patti Gibbons, Head of Collection Management.

We are pleased to acknowledge loans from the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art.

Main Text Panel

War, Trauma, Memory

It seems an understatement to note that war is traumatic to those who experience it in any way, shape or form. The pieces in this exhibit reflect their creators' experiences in wars from the 16th century through the present day. Each of these pieces was published or made public by their creators; by that action the creator invites us into the captured moment. We see, not a moment of trauma itself but a time after that moment, whether that be seconds or years. In this exhibit, the trauma of war is represented by that very absence of trauma, through the experience creators share with viewers, listeners or readers.

Here, photographs by soldiers or journalists at the scene share space with expressions of the effect of war created at a greater remove. Events are recounted at a personal, intimate level as in portraits of families or on a grand scale : the destruction of Dresden. Over time, images retain their power but may no longer serve the purpose for which they were made. For example, some of the items were created to be propaganda and here are displayed as art or as a curiosity. At times an overt intent of the creator or bias of the image is evident, and at others we need to remind ourselves that creators may have emotions hidden even from themselves. With images of war, in particular, the observer's relationships to the conflict will affect the ways in which the object is understood. How many recall the stakes of the 30 Years War?

Anchoring the exhibit is Francisco Goya's *Los desastres de la guerra*, a book of prints etched in the early 19th century, left unpublished until 1863 for fear of censorship. The suite of plates Goya created in response to suffering he witnessed during the Napoleonic wars is considered to contain the first eyewitness images of war reporting. The book is opened to Plate 44 "Yo lo vi" (I saw it).

Indeed "Yo lo vi :" the images, sculpture, poetry, and music here are haunted by the very absence of violence and the persistence of memory.

Case Text

Daily Life Case

Daily Life
No matter what may occur at other times, the mundane acts of daily life continue during war.

Persistence of Memory Case

The Persistence of Memory
It is in absence that war is most keenly felt.

Goya Case

There are three suites of plates in direct dialogue with each other : Callot, Goya and Dix. Jacques Callot's oeuvre *Les Grands misères de la guerre* is known for its complexity as well as for the barbarism of the images depicting the 30 Years War. Goya saw Callot as an influence for his early 19th-century description of the misery brought about by the Napoleonic wars. After serving in World War I, Otto Dix was inspired by Goya when composing his own set of 50 plates. The other suites of plates in the show, one by Jean Forain and the other by Louis Jou, do not directly reference Goya nor Callot, although both printmakers most likely would have been aware of their work.

Long Memories Case

Long Memories
Some conflicts last generations, if not centuries

Communicating Trauma Case

Communicating Trauma
The absence of war as a traumatic moment is represented in this exhibit by wide variety of pieces. In the case of photojournalism or photographs taken at the scene of an event, trauma is viewed through a lens and in the context the photographer brings to the scene. Artistic expression creates pieces that represent and communicate emotions well after the moment of trauma. Nevertheless, in each of these acts the viewer is in communication with the creator. The scandal of the security camera photos published in *Paris Match* on the anniversary of terrorism in Nice is precisely that there is nothing human, nor humane, about these images.