German Art About War Today and a Century Ago: A Curator’s View

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Abstract

The First World War was a true caesura for mankind, also including the world of art. In its beginning, most German artists supported it, similar to many other intellectuals. The realities of the first global war turned artists such as Ernst Barlach into pacifists. Especially in Germany, expressionism was often chosen to address the horrors of war. Today, only a few artists are still well-known, such as Otto Dix, while the majority and their powerful works need to be rediscovered. German pacifism is deeply rooted in the dreadful experiences of both World Wars, and not the least of bearing the responsibility of those wars, the European division of the Cold War, and the Holocaust. 70 years after the end of the Second World War, pacifism is still strong in Germany - even to the extent that people shun away from securitopolitical realities. But while you might not be interested in war, war may be interested in you. Thus, how do German artists cope with war and peace today, which conflicts are addressed and which approaches are used? To what an extent is the Great War still a subject of German art - now, in its centenary that is such a massive issue in countries like Australia, Belgium, France and the UK? How has global terror influenced German art? As perpetual chameleon, war always adapts itself to changing realities. Artists will continue to transform these societal conditions into moving works.

Keywords

9/11; Bundeswehr; contemporary art; cultures of commemoration; First World War; Germany; terrorism

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And a century ago, quintessence of terrorism was an anarchist or (to Americans, at least) perhaps a radical member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the “Wobblies.” The IWW was a radical American labor movement of the early twentieth century that drew inspiration from hardcore European leftists, including the Bolsheviks. To today’s eyes, the document seems rather quaint. There is none of the devotion to the bomb or the Kalashnikov that characterizes the terrorism of the last few decades. The sabotage discussed here is aimed at harming capitalists financially by breaking or slowing down their industrial machinery, or even just bad-mouthing their products. Art and design. A century of Dada: from anti-war artists to mainstream con artists. Jonathan Jones. A tiny but brilliantly subversive protest movement has become the common currency of big-money, mass-audience art – Dada’s founders would feel sick. Marcel Duchamp viewed through glass of his major work The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors. Photograph: Mark Kauffman/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Image. It began in horror. It has ended in farce. A century ago the world was two years into an apocalyptic war: and 1916 saw it turn more murderous yet with the Battle of the Somme, killing almost 20,000 British soldiers on its first day alone. How dada spawned the art of anarchy. Read more.