

The Art of the War

These works, often disturbing in their imagery, are powerful illustrations of the artists' experiences and thoughts about the war. They range from quiet moments of rest, to the mundane mechanics of warfare, to the horrors and desolation inflicted on men and the landscapes they fought over. All are eloquent in depicting the humanity and the inhumanity, the pity and the pain of war.

"It is the first death which infects everyone with the feeling of being threatened. It is impossible to over assess the role played by the first dead man in the kindling of wars. Rulers who want to unleash war know very well that they must procure or invent a first victim. It need not be anyone of particular importance, and can even be someone unknown. Nothing matters except his death; and it must be believed that the enemy is responsible for this. Every possible cause of his death is suppressed except one: his membership in the group to which one belongs oneself."

(Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*)



Max Beckmann, *Declaration of War* 1914

Beckmann served in the medical services in eastern Prussia, then in Flanders and at Strasbourg. He was a witness to the first mustard gas attacks around Ypres. At Courtrai, he was present at operations that surgeons attempted on the wounded and made detailed drawings of them. His self portrait is built around three elements: the eye that scrutinises, the hand that draws, and the red cross. There is hardly any colour. A few months later, Beckmann was sent home to Germany after suffering a serious mental breakdown. He sought refuge in Frankfurt where he slowly took up painting again.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)

"We are unfeeling dead who, through some dangerous trick of magic, are still able to run and kill. A young Frenchman falls behind; they catch up with him and he puts his hands up; in one of them he is still holding his revolver; we cannot tell whether he wants to shoot or to surrender. A stroke with a shovel splits his face in two. Another seeing this tries to escape, but a bayonet whistles into his back. He jumps in the air and, arms outstretched, stumbles screaming as the bayonet moves up and down in his spine."



Albin Egger-Lienz, *Those Who Have Lost Their Names* 1914

(Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*)



Max Oppenheimer,
Bleeding Man 1911



Ernst Barlach, *The Avenger* 1914

Charles Hamilton Sorley, *To Germany*

*You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.
But gropers both through fields of thought confined
We stumble and we do not understand.
You only saw your future bigly planned,
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,
And in each others dearest ways we stand,
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.
When it is peace, then we may view again
With new won eyes each other's truer form
And wonder. Grown more loving kind and warm
We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,
When it is peace. But until peace, the storm,
The darkness and the thunder and the rain.*

British forces first used tanks during the Battle of the Somme in September 1916. They had a dramatic effect on German morale and proved effective in crossing trenches and wire entanglements, but they failed to break through the German lines. The decision of the British commander-in-chief, Sir Douglas Haig, to reveal the secret weapon before large numbers of tanks had become available generated criticism, but the tanks' real problems were slow speed, mechanical failures, and inability to cross soft or heavily cratered ground.

(Canadian War Museum, *Tanks and Armoured Vehicles*)

One hundred years ago, when tanks went into battle for the first time, warfare changed forever. These giant armoured killing machines have been a central feature of combat ever since.

The first tanks were British, and they went into action against the Germans on Sept. 15, 1916, near Flers in northern France, during the Battle of the Somme in World War I.

Just imagine being a German soldier that day 100 years ago: You think you've seen every terror war can offer — machine guns mowing down your comrades, barbed wire traps, artillery blasting whole platoons to oblivion, poison gas torturing your friends who were too slow to put on their gas masks. You're probably a pretty hardened soldier.

Then from off in the distance comes rumbling a giant machine, rolling over craters and ditches and crushing through the barbed wire obstacles that have stopped so many infantry attacks before. Then it starts spitting death from its cannon and machine guns. You attack it with every weapon you have, but it simply can't be stopped. What do you do? You can stay and die, or you can panic and run.

The Germans on the front line ran that day. It was one of the few occasions in all of World War I when any defensive force broke off in terror. One survivor said after the war he thought they would have to retreat all the way to Berlin.

(The World, *The day tanks changed war forever*)



Muirhead Bone, *Tanks* 1918



Peter August Böckstiegel,
Departure of the Youngsters for War 1914

"We left the schoolrooms, the school desks and benches, and the few short weeks of instruction had bonded us into one great body burning with enthusiasm. Having grown up in an age of security, we all had a nostalgia for the unusual great perils. The war thus seized hold of us like strong liquor. It was under a hail of flowers that we left, drunk on roses and blood. Without a doubt, the war offered us grandeur, strength and gravity. It seemed to us like a virile exploit: the joyous combats of infantrymen in the meadows where blood fell like dew on the flowers."

(Ernst Jünger, Storms of Steel)

Ezra Pound, An Immorality

*Sing we for love and idleness,
Naught else is worth the having.
Though I have been in many a land,
There is naught else in living.
And I would rather have my sweet,
Though rose-leaves die of grieving,
Than do high deeds in Hungary
To pass all men's believing.*



Marcel Gromaire, War 1925

Eric Kennington,
An Infantryman Resting 1916



Phillip Larkin, MCMXIV (1914)

*Those long uneven lines
Standing as patiently
As if they were stretched outside
The Oval or Villa Park,
The crowns of hats, the sun
On moustached archaic faces
Grinning as if it were all
An August Bank Holiday lark;*

*And the shut shops, the bleached
Established names on the sunblinds,
The farthings and sovereigns,
And dark-clothed children at play
Called after kings and queens,
The tin advertisements
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs
Wide open all day;
And the countryside not caring:
The place-names all hazed over
With flowering grasses, and fields
Shadowing Domesday lines*

*Under wheat's restless silence;
The differently-dressed servants
With tiny rooms in huge houses,
The dust behind limousines;
Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word – the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages,
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again.*

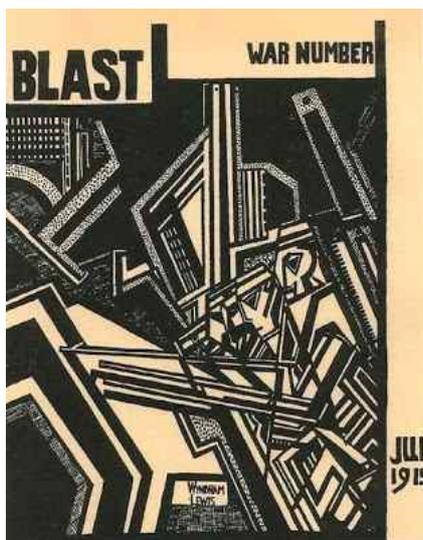
Siegfried Sassoon was decorated for bravery on the Western Front and was nicknamed 'Mad Jack' by his men for his near-suicidal exploits. In 1917, he rebelled against the conduct of the war in a letter to his commanding officer and was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital, where he was officially treated for shell shock. He returned to the Front but was wounded in 1918 when he was shot in the head by a fellow British soldier who had mistaken him for a German. He survived. Sassoon wrote 'The Kiss' in training shortly before the Battle of the Somme.

Siegfried Sassoon, *The Kiss*

*To these I turn, in these I trust;
 Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
 To his blind power I make appeal;
 I guard her beauty clean from rust.
 He spins and burns and loves the air,
 And splits a skull to win my praise;
 But up the nobly marching days
 She glitters naked, cold and fair.
 Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this;
 That in good fury he may feel
 The body where he sets his heel
 Quail from your downward darting kiss.*



C.R.W. Nevinson, *On the Way to the Trenches*



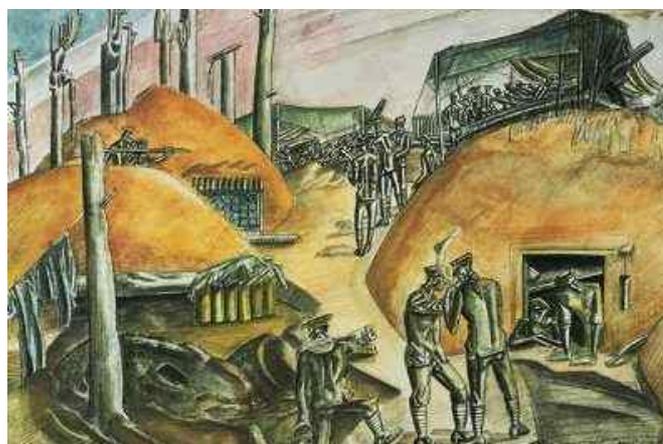
Wyndham Lewis, *BLAST Magazine* 1915

Vorticism was a short-lived but radical movement that emerged in London immediately before the First World War. 'The vortex is the point of maximum energy', wrote the American poet Ezra Pound, who co-founded the Vorticist journal *Blast* with Wyndham Lewis in June 1914. The journal opened with the 'Blast' and 'Bless' manifestos, which celebrate the machine age and Britain as the first industrialised nation... The group's aggressive rhetoric, angular style and focus on the energy of modern life linked it to Italian Futurism, though it did not share the latter's emphasis on speed and dynamism. Artists associated with Vorticism included William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, CRW Nevinson and David Bomberg. The First World War demonstrated the devastating reality of pitting men against machines and Lewis's attempts to revive the movement in 1919 came to nothing.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)

"I am here (in the firing line) since yesterday. Battery split up, and I have come as reinforcements. Whizzing, banging and swishing and thudding completely surround me, and I almost jog up and down on my camp bed as though I were riding in a country wagon or a dilapidated taxi. I am in short, my dear colleague, in the midst of an unusually noisy battle."

(Wyndham Lewis, *letter to Ezra Pound* 6th June, 1917)



Wyndham Lewis, *A battery Position in the Wood* 1918



Wyndham Lewis, *A Canadian Gun Pit* 1919

Siegfried Sassoon *A Memorial Tablet* 1918

*Squire nagged and bullied till I went to fight,
(Under Lord Derby's scheme). I died in hell -
(They called it Passchendaele).*

*My wound was slight,
And I was hobbling back; and then a shell
Burst slick upon the duckboards: so I fell
Into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.*

*At sermon-time, while Squire is in his pew,
He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;
For, though low down upon the list, I'm there;
"In proud and glorious memory" ... that's my due.
Two bleeding years I fought in France, for Squire:
I suffered anguish that he's never guessed.
I came home on leave: and then went west...
What greater glory could a man desire?*

David Bomberg (1890-1957) was one of the major artists of the London avant-garde scene, one of those whose Cubo-Futurist approach led them to invent geometrical signs verging on abstraction. In 1917, he was commissioned by the Canadian authorities to do a painting celebrating an operation in which the sappers successfully blew up a salient of the German defences at Saint-Eloi near Arras. He was told to steer clear of Cubism. Despite this warning, the first version of his painting shows a mixed style in which figurative elements are caught up in a composition dominated by non-imitative colours and the powerfully dynamic rhythms of oblique lines in blue and purple. The painting was rejected by the emissary of the Canadian committee, who criticised Bomberg's 'Futurism' which he found unacceptable.



David Bomberg, *Sappers at Work - A Canadian Tunneling Company*, first version 1918-19

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)



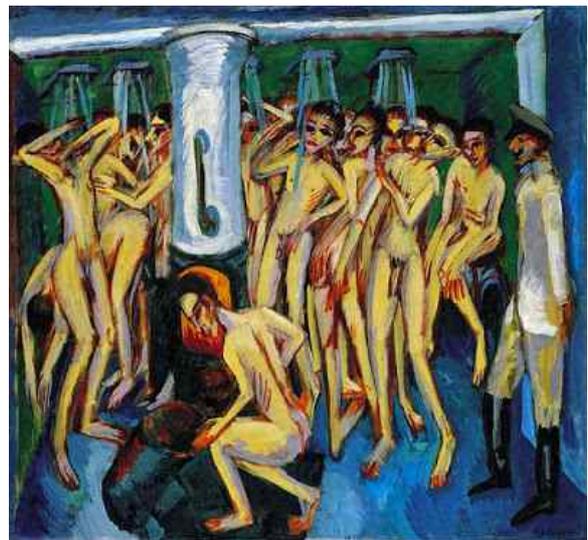
"There were coal seams everywhere under our positions and the French took advantage of this. Not a single day went by without a section of trench blowing up followed by an attack on the still-smoking crater, while we still had mud up to our necks. The first one to the bottom won. We stayed night and day at our posts listening intently in the galleries with our explosives within arm's reach. We often heard the enemy's pick-axes right close to us, and then, within a split second, the race was on to see who would be blown to pieces, them or us. How many times have I stood crouching in a hole with an earpiece listening out for the moment when they would stop digging and start dragging over their cases of dynamite."

(Ernst Jünger, *Lieutenant Sturm*)

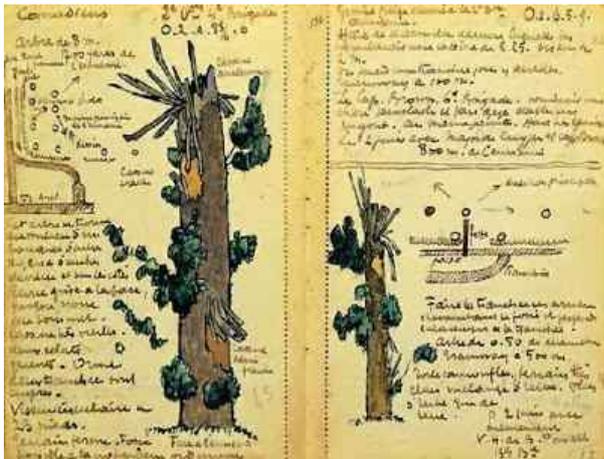
David Bomberg, *Sappers at Work - A Canadian Tunneling Company, Hill 60, St Eloi*

Despite Kirchner's artistic success during the Berlin years, a crisis of identity was brewing within the troubled artist. His neurosis was largely burdened by the impending war, which he had viewed with a tragic sense of foreboding and fear from the outset. In a state of nervous anxiety, and fearing that he would get called up, Kirchner began to drink absinthe and developed an increasing dependency on sleeping pills and morphine. In an effort to avoid conscription into the infantry, he signed on as an artillery driver - "an involuntary volunteer"

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Artillerymen* 1915



André Mare, *Elm at Vermezeele* (Sketchbook)

Camouflage had to fool enemy observers and also allow better and more reliable observation. It was for this reason that imitation trees in metal were produced and painted to look like an actual tree. Being hollow and armour-plated, they allowed a soldier to climb up and look out through slits in them. They were usually set up at night to avoid the enemy detecting the substitution. This technique required as accurate a copy of the tree it was to replace as possible, as is shown in Mare's sketchbook.

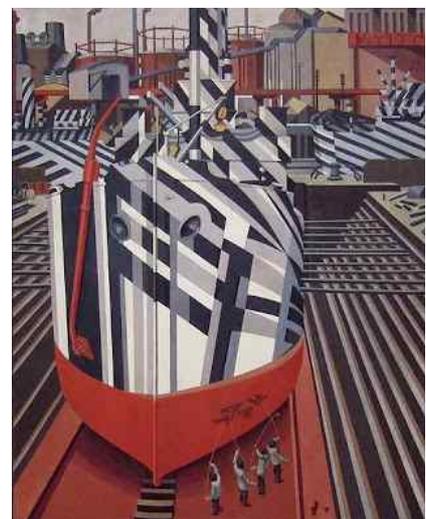
(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)

"I found myself in a huge hayloft (a very nice workshop!) and I painted nine 'Kandinsky's' on tent canvas. This process had a very useful purpose: to make artillery positions invisible to reconnaissance planes and aerial photography by covering them with canvases painted in a roughly pointillist style and in line with observation of the colours of natural camouflage (mimicry). From now on, painting must make the picture that betrays our presence sufficiently blurred and distorted for the position to be unrecognisable. The division is going to provide us with a plane to experiment with some aerial photographs to see how it looks from the air. I'm very interested to see the effect of a Kandinsky from six thousand feet."

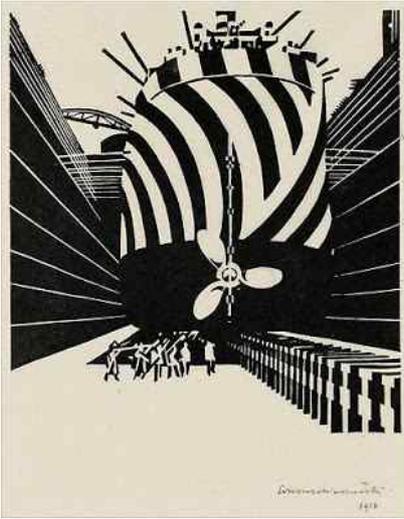
(Franz Marc, *Letters from the Front*, Fourbis, 1996)

Wadsworth spent the war in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on the island of Mudros until invalided out in 1917, designing dazzle camouflage for allied ships. Known as Dazzle ships, these vessels weren't camouflaged to become invisible, but instead used ideas derived from Vorticism and Cubism to confuse enemy U-Boats trying to pinpoint the direction and speed of travel. Always a fan of modern ships, Wadsworth was to utilise nautical themes in his art for the rest of his career.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)



Edward Wadsworth, *Dazzle-ships in Drydock at Liverpool*, 1919



Edward Wadsworth, *Rhythms of Modern Life* 1918

Carl Sandburg, *Iron* 1916

*Guns,
Long, steel guns,
Pointed from the war ships
In the name of the war god.
Straight, shining, polished guns,
Clambered over with jackies in white blouses,
Glory of tan faces, tousled hair, white teeth,
Laughing lithe jackies in white blouses,
Sitting on the guns singing war songs, war chanties
Shovels,
Broad, iron shovels,
Scooping out oblong vaults,
Loosening turf and levelling sod.
I ask you
To witness-
The shovel is brother to the gun.*

Apollinaire, *April Night* 1915

*The sky is starlit with the Boche's shells
The marvellous forest where I live is giving a ball
The machine-gun plays a demisemiquaver tune
Do you have the word
Oh yes! the fateful word
To the breach
To the breach
Leave the picks there
Like a bewildered star looking for its seasons
Heart exploded shell you whistled your romance
And your thousand suns have emptied the caissons
That the gods of my eyes fill in silence*



Frank Brangwyn, *The Gun* 1917

At the outbreak of World War 1, Nevinson joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit and was deeply disturbed by his work tending wounded French and British soldiers. For a very brief period he served as a volunteer ambulance driver before ill health forced his return to Britain. Subsequently, Nevinson volunteered for home service with the Royal Medical Army Corps. He used these experiences as the subject matter for a series of powerful paintings which used the machine aesthetic of Futurism and the influence of Cubism to great effect.



C. R. W. Nevinson, *La Mitrailleuse (Machine-gun)* 1915

Apollinaire praised Nevinson as being one who "translates the mechanical aspect of modern warfare where man and machine combine to form a single force of nature. His painting Machine-gun conveys this idea exactly. Nevinson belongs to the school of the English avant-garde influenced by both the young Italian and French schools."

Walter Sickert wrote at the time that Nevinson's painting *La Mitrailleuse*, "will probably remain the most authoritative and concentrated utterance on the war in the history of painting."

Nevinson aligned himself with the Italian futurists who celebrated and embraced the violence and mechanised speed of the modern age. But his experience as an ambulance driver in the First World

War changed his view. In his paintings of the Front, the soldiers are reduced to a series of angular planes and grey colouring. Here, they appear almost like machines themselves, losing their individuality, even their humanity, as they seem to fuse with the machine gun which gives this painting its title.

(Tate Gallery Display Caption)

"We gingerly crossed the valley of Paddebeek through a hail of bullets, hiding behind the foliage of black poplar trees felled in the bombardment, and using their trunks as bridges. From time to time one of us disappeared up to their waist in the mud, and if our comrades had not come to their rescue, holding out their rifle butt, they would certainly have gone under. We ran along the rims of the shell-holes as if we were on the thin edge of a honeycomb. Traces of blood on the surface of some heavy shell-holes told us that several men had already been swallowed up."

(Ernst Jünger, *Storms of Steel*)



William Roberts,
Gunners Pulling Cannons at Ypres c. 1918

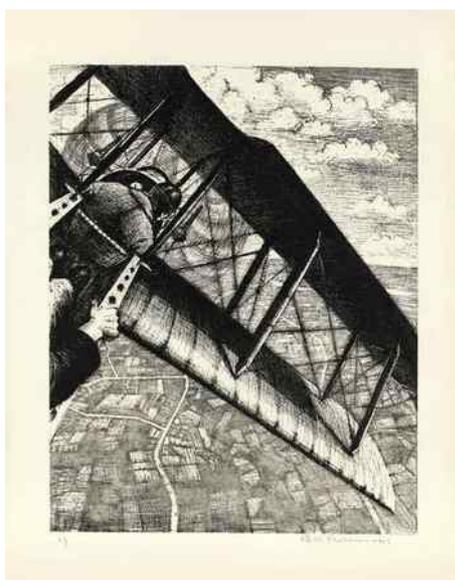
W. B. Yeats, *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*

*I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;*

*My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.*

*Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;*

*I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.*



C.R.W. Nevinson Etching c. 1918

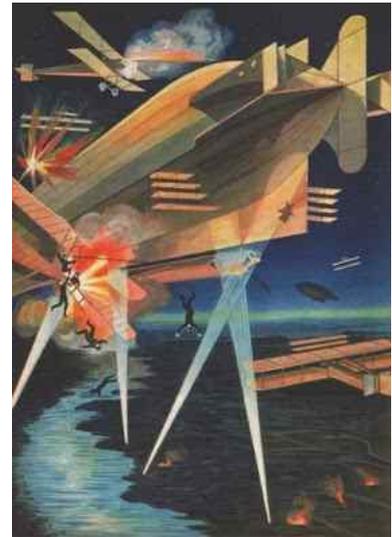
The poem is a soliloquy given by an aviator in the First World War in which the narrator describes the circumstances surrounding his imminent death. The poem is a work that discusses the role of Irish soldiers fighting for the United Kingdom when they were trying to establish independence for Ireland. Wishing to show restraint from publishing political poems during the height of the war, Yeats withheld publication of the poem until after the conflict had ended.

World War 1 was the first major conflict involving the large-scale use of aircraft. Aeroplanes were just coming into military use at the outset of the war. Initially, they were used mostly for reconnaissance. Ace fighter pilots were portrayed as modern knights, and many became popular heroes.

Due to the static nature of trench warfare, aircraft were the only means of gathering information beyond enemy trenches, so they were essential for discovering where the enemy was based and what they were doing.

"Still today, I envision the grand reveries of these pilots who enveloped their nerves with the white soft mat of anaesthesia and who, under the delusive shield of an artificial painlessness, infinitely alone with all the thousand images and thoughts surging out of ecstasy, drew their lonely circles high above the clouds. Maybe he fired his shots, if the encounter took place, with a sentiment of unconcern, as if this had to be done. Maybe, while he was lying in a steep curve and the wires were howling, a world of strange insights opened before him and he disposed of an endless time to finish his thoughts before he came in a position to fire again. Yes, and maybe the chain of his imaginations had just run back as the projectile hit him with that enigmatic necessity which marks the intersection of dream, sleep and awakening."

(Ernst Jünger, *Das Abenteuerliche Herz, The Adventurous Heart*)



Russian Lithograph, 1914



Gino Severini, *Armoured Train* 1915

Futurism is an avant-garde movement founded in Milan in 1909 by the Italian poet Filippo Marinetti.

Marinetti expressed a passionate loathing of everything old, especially political and artistic tradition. "We want no part of it, the past", he wrote, "we the young and strong *Futurists!*" The Futurists admired speed, technology, youth and violence, the car, the airplane and the industrial city, all that represented the technological triumph of humanity over nature, and they were passionate nationalists. They repudiated the cult of the past and all imitation, praised originality, "however daring, however violent", bore proudly "the smear of madness", dismissed art critics as useless, rebelled against harmony and good taste, swept away all the themes and subjects of all previous art, and gloried in science.

Futurism had from the outset admired violence and was intensely patriotic. The *Futurist Manifesto* had declared, "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman."

Edith Cavell (4 December 1865 – 12 October 1915) was a British nurse and humanitarian. She is celebrated for helping some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium during World War I, for which she was executed. This led to worldwide sympathetic press coverage of her.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)



George Bellows, *Edith Cavell* 1918

The American poet, Alan Seager, volunteered to fight for the French Foreign Legion in 1914 and died at the Battle of the Somme on the fourth of July, 1916. Seager was reported to have been cheering on the second wave of advance as he lay dying from his wounds. *'I have a rendezvous with Death'* was published posthumously.



Walter Gramatté, *Self-Portrait as Soldier (Detail)* 1917

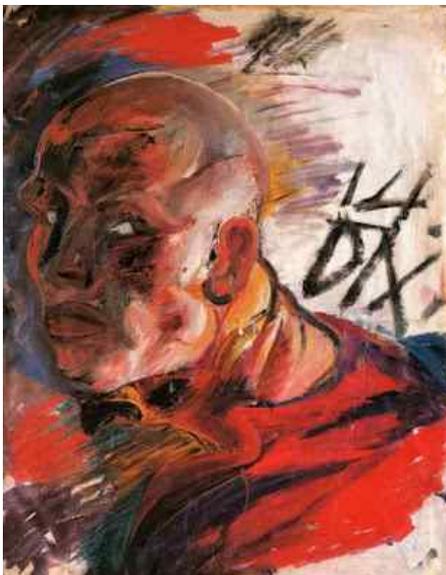
William Blake, *A Poison Tree* 1794

*I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.*

*And I watered it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.*

*And it grew both day and night.
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.*

*And into my garden stole,
When the night had veild the pole;
In the morning glad I see;
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.*



Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait* 1914

Alan Seeger, *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*

*I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air –
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.
It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath –
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.
God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.*



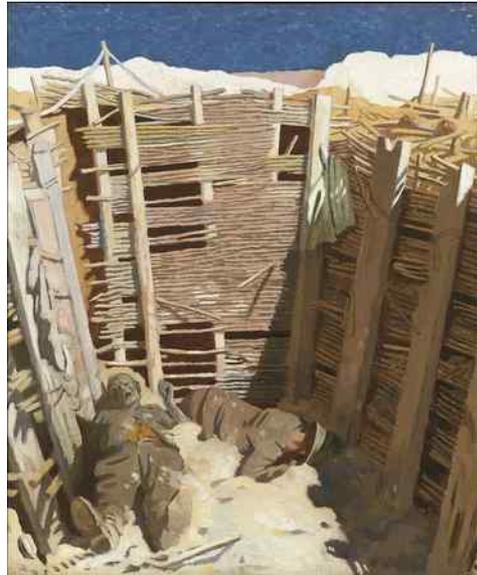
Oskar Kokoschka, *Self-Portrait as a Warrior* 1909

When the First World War erupted 1914, Dix enthusiastically volunteered for the German Army. He was assigned to a field artillery regiment in Dresden. In the fall of 1915 he was assigned as a non-commissioned officer of a machine-gun unit in the Western front and took part of the Battle of the Somme. He was seriously wounded several times. In 1917, his unit was transferred to the Eastern front until the end of hostilities with Russia. Back to the western front in 1918, he fought in the German Spring offensive. He earned the Iron Cross (second class) and reached the rank of vice-sergeant-major.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)

Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Vigil*

*A whole night long
crouched close
to one of our men
butchered
with his clenched
mouth
grinning at the full moon
with the congestion
of his hands
thrust right
into my silence
I've written
letters filled with love
I have never been
so
coupled to life*



William Orpen, *Dead Germans in a Trench* 1918



William Orpen, *Zonnebeke* 1918

A Soldier's Cemetery by John William Streets (killed and missing in action on 1 July 1916 aged 31)

*Behind that long and lonely trenched line
To which men come and go, where brave men die,
There is a yet unmarked and unknown shrine,
A broken plot, a soldier's cemetery.*

*There lie the flower of youth, the men who scorn'd
To live (so died) when languished Liberty:
Across their graves flowerless and unadorned
Still scream the shells of each artillery.*

*When war shall cease this lonely unknown spot
Of many a pilgrimage will be the end,
And flowers will shine in this now barren plot
And fame upon it through the years descend:
But many a heart upon each simple cross
Will hang the grief, the memory of its loss.*

Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields* 1915

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead.
Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*



**Fortunino Matania,
*Transport of wounded from bombed town. Wellcome***

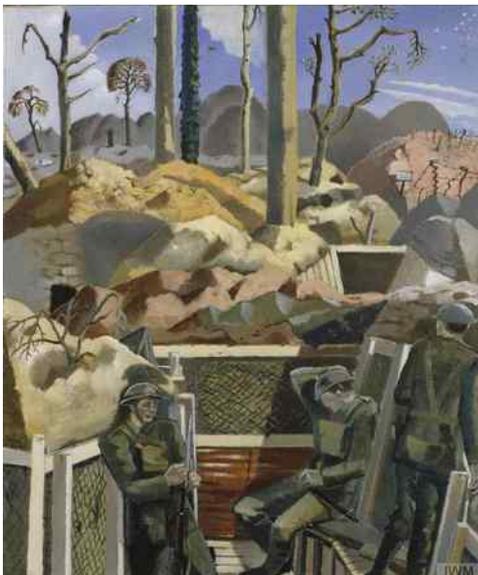
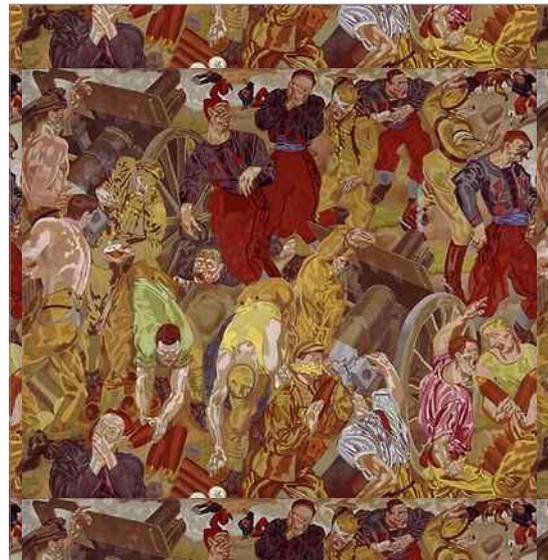
Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est* 1917-18

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed
through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all
blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.*

*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.
In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

*If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

**William Roberts,
The First German Gas Attack at Ypres
1918**



**Paul Nash,
Spring in the Trenches, Ridge Wood, 1917
1918**

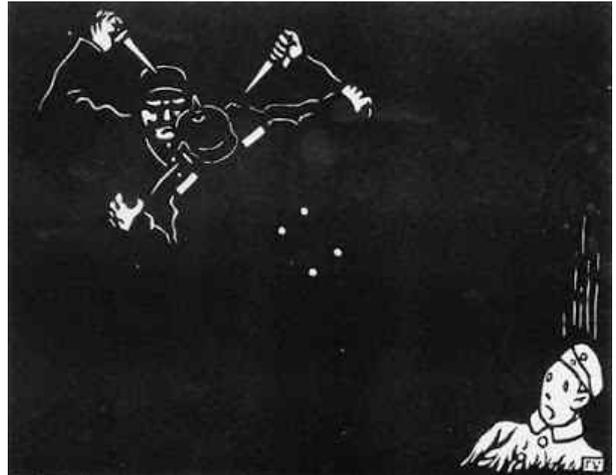
Vera Britton, *Perhaps* 1915

*Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of You.
Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of spring seem gay,
And I shall find the white May-blossoms sweet,
Though you have passed away.
Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although you are not there.
Perhaps some day I shall not shrink in pain
To see the passing of the dying year,
And listen to Christmas songs again,
Although You cannot hear.
But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of you
Was broken, long ago.*

Perhaps is dedicated to Vera Britton's fiancé Roland Leighton, who was killed at the age of 20 by a sniper in 1915, four months after she had accepted his marriage proposal.

Thomas Hardy, *The Man He Killed*
from "The Dynasts" 1915

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!
"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.
"I shot him dead because—
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although
"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like—just as I—
Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why.
"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat, if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.



Félix Vallotton, *In the Shadows* 1916



Stanley Spencer, *Travoys Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916* 1919

A dressing station seen from an elevated position. Four travoys pulled by mules wait in line outside the dressing station. Each holds a wounded soldier covered in a blanket and they are attended by medical orderlies. In the background is the bright glow of an operating theatre, where surgery is taking place. In the lower right corner a man with his arm in a sling walks away from the scene, looking back over his shoulder.

Among the dressing stations was an old Greek church which Spencer drew such that, with the animal and human onlookers surrounding it, it would recall depictions of the birth of Christ, but to Spencer the wounded figures on the stretchers spoke of Christ on the Cross while the lifesaving work of the surgeons represented the Resurrection.

(Imperial War Museum, exhibition Label)

In a letter to his wife, Hilda, Stanley Spencer wrote:

"About the middle of September 1916 the 22nd Division made an attack on Machine Gun Hill on the Doiran Vardar Sector and held it for a few nights. During these nights the wounded passed through the dressing stations in a never-ending stream."

"I meant it not a scene of horror but a scene of redemption....One would have thought that the scene was a sordid one...but I felt there was grandeur...all those wounded men were calm and at peace with everything, so the pain seemed a small thing with them."

Spencer spent two and a half years on the front line in Macedonia, facing both German and Bulgarian troops, before he was invalided out of the Army following persistent bouts of malaria. His survival of the war that killed so many of his fellows, including his elder brother Sydney, who died in action in September 1918, indelibly marked Spencer's attitude to life and death. Such preoccupations came through time and again in his subsequent works.

Travoys Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing Station is a large work commissioned by the British War Memorials committee, and is clearly the consequence of his experience in the medical corps.

"A great movement of earth and sky through our burning eyelids, wet and cold; things you find in the pale dawn, one after another and all of them; nobody killed in the darkness, nobody even buried despite the relentless shell attack, the same earth and the same corpses, all this flesh that trembles as if from internal spasms, which dances, deep and hot, and hurts; no more pictures even, just this burning fatigue frozen skin-deep by the rain; another day dawning over the ridge while the Boche's batteries carry on firing on it and on what remains of us up there, mixed with the mud, the bodies, with the once fertile field, now polluted with poison, dead flesh, incurably affected by our hellish torture."

(Maurice Genevoix, *Ceux de 14 (The Men of 1914)* 1950)



Otto Dix, *Trenches* 1917



Otto Dix, *Flanders* 1934

Dix worked on this large-format (78 x 98") painting from 1934 to 1936. By that point, the National Socialists had already dismissed him from his professorial position at the Dresden Art Academy, and he was living in Randegg bei Singen. The painting shows a field in Flanders where three devastating battles were fought. In contrast to war-time propaganda images, Dix's canvas introduces war in the form of a battlefield where corpses and mud predominate, the one rotting and merging into the other. With this nightmarish tableau, Dix commemorated the victims of one World War in the hopes of preventing another

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)

Because Nevinson was so bold as to paint the bodies of two Tommies in front of the barbed wire, this painting was banned from an exhibition in 1918. Nevinson refused to take it down and covered it with brown paper on which he wrote "Censored". In 1957, Stanley Kubrick used the title *Paths of Glory* for his film which violently denounced the absurdity of the Great War and introduced a theme absent from Nevinson's painting: mutiny and repression of mutiny, which is why for a long time his film was never screened in France.

(Weimar Art Blogspot, *Art of the First World War*)



C. R. W. Nevinson, *Paths of Glory* 1917

*If you want to find the general
I know where he is
I know where he is
I know where he is
If you want to find the general*

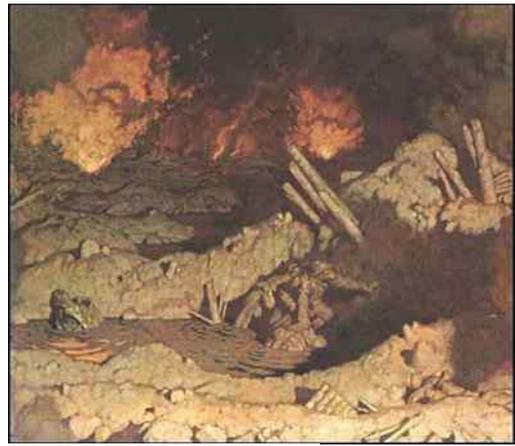
*I know where he is
He's pinning another medal on his chest
I saw him, I saw him
Pinning another medal on his chest
Pinning another medal on his chest*



**Adrian Hill,
Ruins Between Bernafay Wood and Maricour 1918**

*If you want to find the colonel
I know where he is
I know where he is
I know where he is
If you want to find the colonel*

*I know where he is
He's sitting in comfort stuffing his bloody gut
I saw him, I saw him
Sitting in comfort stuffing his bloody gut
Sitting in comfort stuffing his bloody gut*



Georges Leroux, *Hell* 1917

*If you want to find the sergeant
I know where he is
I know where he is
I know where he is
If you want to find the sergeant*

*I know where he is
He's drinking all the company rum
I saw him, I saw him
Drinking all the company rum
Drinking all the company rum*



Wallace Morgan, *Mopping up Cierges* 1918

*If you want to find the private
I know where he is
I know where he is
I know where he is
If you want to find the private*

*I know where he is
He's hanging on the old barbed wire
I saw him, I saw him
Hanging on the old barbed wire
Hanging on the old barbed wire*



Paul Nash, *Wire* 1918-19



Paul Nash, *The Ypres Salient at Night* 1918

"I have just returned, last night from a visit to Brigade Headquarters up the line and I shall not forget it as long as I live. I have seen the most frightful nightmare of a country more conceived by Dante or Poe than by nature, unspeakable, utterly indescribable. In the fifteen drawings I have made I may give you some idea of its horror, but only being in it and of it can ever make you sensible of its dreadful nature and of what our men in France have to face. We all have a vague notion of the terrors of a battle, and can conjure up with the aid of some of the more inspired war correspondents and the pictures in the *Daily Mirror* some vision

of battlefield; but no pen or drawing can convey this country—the normal setting of the battles taking place day and night, month after month. Evil and the incarnate fiend alone can be master of this war, and no glimmer of God's hand is seen anywhere. Sunset and sunrise are blasphemous, they are mockeries to man, only the black rain out of the bruised and swollen clouds all through the bitter black night is fit atmosphere in such a land. The rain drives on, the stinking mud becomes more evilly yellow, the shell holes fill up with green-white water, the roads and tracks are covered in inches of slime, the black dying trees ooze and sweat and the shells never cease. They alone plunge overhead, tearing away the rotting tree stumps, breaking the plank roads, striking down horses and mules, annihilating, maiming, maddening, they plunge into the grave, and cast up on it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless. I am no longer an artist interested and curious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls."

(Letter from Paul Nash to his wife 1917)

The view is across a battlefield undergoing heavy bombardment. The shattered landscape is dissected by an angular duckboard path, along which a mule train is travelling, their small figures just visible in the distance. The animals rear and panic at a nearby explosion as the water from a flooded trench shoots up from the surface. In the sky there are large clouds of yellow and grey coloured smoke, with rubble flying high into the air in the foreground.



Paul Nash,
The Mule Track 1918



Paul Nash,
The Menin Road 1919

The Menin Road depicts a landscape of flooded shell craters and trenches while tree stumps, devoid of any foliage, point towards a sky full of clouds and plumes of smoke, bisected by shafts of sunlight resembling gun barrels. Two soldiers at the centre of the picture attempt to follow the, almost, unrecognisable road but appear to be trapped by the landscape. Nash composed the picture in three broad strips. The foreground is filled with shell craters and debris, which block access to the road in the middle of the picture. The only possible path, to the side of one of the mud pools, is blocked by a fallen board. Across the centre of the picture, shell holes punch into the road at regular intervals, while debris further breaks up the road, as do the shadows from a line of trees alongside it. Beyond the trees, the battlefield stretches to the horizon, with a wood of stunted trees on the right hand side and to the left a series of seven zigzag streams, that also fail to reach the horizon and escape. Nash came to consider this painting to be his finest work.

Dix was profoundly affected by the sights of the war, and would later describe a recurring nightmare in which he crawled through destroyed houses. He represented his traumatic experiences in many subsequent works, including his famous portfolio of fifty etchings called *Der Krieg* (The War), published in 1924.



Henri de Groux, *Gas Masks*

"In the horizontal abyss, extending stretcher after stretcher, gradually getting smaller as far as the eye could see, out towards the pale opening of daylight, in the untidy hall with dim candle flames flickering here and there, glowing red and feverish, and where, from time to time, wings of shadow would pass over, and for no obvious reason, a sudden stir. You saw the bric-a-brac of limbs and heads moving, you heard cries and moans waking one another and spreading like invisible ghosts. The prostrate bodies rippled, curled up and turned over."

(Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu*)



Otto Dix, *Stormtroopers during a Gas Attack* 1924

This etching seems to have been designed especially to illustrate the passage where another painter, Jacques-Emile Blanche, recounts what he saw at the cinema one day in March 1916: "Today", he wrote in his diary, "we went down into these troglodyte dwellings where warring monks, officers aged between 50 and 60, good men who have bidden farewell to worldly things, did their 'dirty work' with the ingenuous, childish and methodical spirit of Benedictine monks. We saw the monstrous, grotesque masks of the gas masks, those fearsome goggled snouts which men with such paternal, such gentle faces, so ill-fitted for war, adjust with all the care demanded by the insidious poison."



Eric Kennington, *Gassed and Wounded* 1918



Eric Kennington, *The Kensingtons at Laventie* 1915

At the start of the war Kennington enlisted. He fought on the Western Front, but was injured while attempting to clear a friend's jammed rifle and he lost one toe and evacuated back to England. During his convalescence, he spent six months painting *The Kensingtons at Laventie*, a group portrait of his own infantry platoon. Kennington himself is the figure third from the left, wearing a balaclava. When exhibited in the spring of 1916, its portrayal of exhausted soldiers caused a sensation. Painted in reverse on glass, it was widely praised for its technical virtuosity, iconic colour scheme, and its "stately presentation of human endurance, of the quiet heroism of the rank and file".

The authorities had hoped that Kennington would make more paintings to rival his pin-sharp, quietly devastating depiction of his unit – knackered, wounded, each soldier caught in a moment of reflection after their march back to billets from the trenches. But he couldn't do it "the war was just too big" he said after he had completed the painting

"Next to the black, waxen heads like Egyptian mummies, lumpy with insect larvae and debris, where white teeth appeared the hollows; next to poor darkened stumps which were numerous here, like a field of bare roots, we discovered yellow skulls, stripped clean, still wearing a red fez with a grey cover as brittle as papyrus. There were thighbones protruding from mounds of rags stuck together in the red mud, or a fragment of spine emerged from a hole filled with frayed material coated with a kind of tar. There were ribs scattered all over the ground like broken old cages, and nearby blackened pieces of leather, pierced and flattened beakers and mess tins had risen to the surface. Here and there, a longish bulge - for all these unburied dead finish up going into the ground - only a scrap of material sticks out, indicating that a human being was annihilated on this particular point of the globe."

(Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu*



Otto Dix, *A Skull*, 1924



"We finally halted, after how many hours? our exhausted flesh, drained of blood, shaken about in other people's arms. I had to comb my fingers over my face as sticky traces stiffened my skin as they dried. I'm going to be a fine sight by the time they get to me, those two slow-moving nurses walking along the foot of the stretchers and bending for a moment over each wounded man. A hand stuck my new Verdun képi on my head, my velvety blue 'flower pot'. How I looked like Pierrot, so pale and blood-smeared in my beautiful new képi! There is a nauseating smell, of coal-tar, bleach and the sickly smell of blood. "A lieutenant from the 106ths, doctor." They touched me and another needle pricked me. I could see the dark tunic of the major between two white nurses. They were talking to me. I answered "Yes, yes...". And the doctor's voice said, "Can't be evacuated. Military hospital."

(Maurice Genevoix, *Ceux de 14 (The Men of 1914)*, 1950)

Otto Dix, *Transplantation*, 1924

Wilfred Owen, *Mental Cases* 1917

*Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jays that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' teeth wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,- but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?
-These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.*

*Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.*



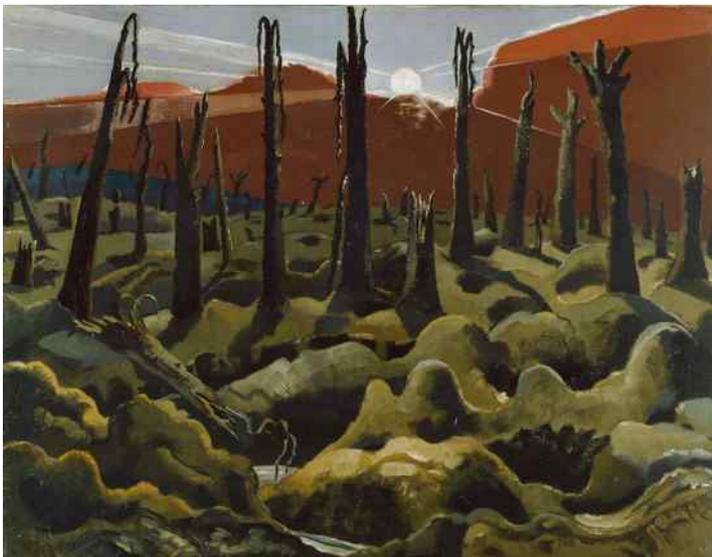
Conrad Felixmüller,
Soldier in the Madhouse, 1918

*Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
 Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
 Always they must see these things and hear them,
 Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
 Carnage incomparable, and human squander
 Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.
 Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
 Back into their brains, because on their sense
 Sunlight seems a blood-smear; night comes blood-black;
 Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.
 -Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
 Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
 -Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
 Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
 Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
 Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.*



**Olive Mudie-Cooke,
*In an Ambulance: a VAD lighting
 a cigarette for a patient c. 1916-18***

The First World War broke out in 1914 and Nash enlisted in the army later that year. He worked with the Home Service during the first London air raids and later trained as an officer.



Paul Nash, *We Are Making a New World* 1918

In spring 1917 Nash arrived on the battlefields of the Ypres Salient in Northern France. Initially he wrote that he was 'as excited as a schoolboy' and thought the landscape looked 'not unlike Sussex'.

He was impressed by the powerful continuity of nature in the midst of the bombed and battered countryside. His early drawings used a bright, even colourful, palette and he painted natural scenes which appeared undisturbed by war. After only three months at the front Nash was injured after falling into a trench and invaded back to England. A week later his division was virtually annihilated in the infamous Battle of Hill 60.

(Tate Gallery Label)

....The optimistic title contrasts with Nash's depiction of a scarred landscape created by a battle of the First World War, with shell-holes, mounds of earth, and leafless tree trunks. Nash's first major painting and his most famous work, it has been described as one of the best British paintings of the 20th century, and compared to [Picasso's *Guernica*](#).....

The work was among the first oil paintings produced by Nash. It was based on his 1918 pen-and-ink drawing *Sunrise, Inverness Copse*, which depicts the remains of a small group of trees at Inverness Copse, near Ypres in Belgium.....

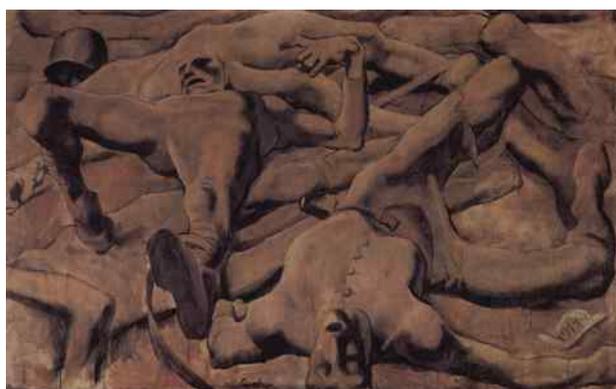
Nash had... a passionate attachment to the natural world and regarded with horror the deformation brought about by the war.

In 1917 Nash returned to England having broken several ribs in a fall into a trench. Soon afterwards the Battle of Passchendaele took place which left 200,000 British killed or wounded. Nash lobbied the Foreign Office to be allowed to return to the front as an official war artist. He wrote to his wife Margaret: "I am no longer an artist...I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever..."

The painting...depicts a bright white sun rising above ruddy brown clouds, shining beams onto a desolated green landscape below, with unnatural mounds of earth piled up between the skeletal

remains of blasted trees....it is a remarkably pared down composition in colour and structure. Muddy green craters and the spiky stumps of blown-apart trees form a pattern into the distance; above the horizon, the blood-red clouds of dawn part for an abrasively white sun. The scene is backlit. Barely a brushstroke has been wasted. The painting has the confidence and urgency born of outrage....Then there is the title, *We are Making a New World*. Its bitter mockery—like a slogan lifted from an advert—catches you by surprise. Nash seems already to understand and undermine the utopian promise of technology in modernism.

(Ben Lewis, Prospect Magazine)



Albin Egger-Lienz, *Finale*, 1918

Francis Ledwidge, *The Lost Ones*

*Somewhere is music from the linnets' bills,
And thro' the sunny flowers the bee-wings drone,
And white bells of convolvulus on hills
Of quiet May make silent ringing, blown
Hither and thither by the wind of showers,
And somewhere all the wandering birds have flown;
And the brown breath of Autumn chills the flowers.
But where are all the loves of long ago?*

*O little twilight ship blown up the tide,
Where are the faces laughing in the glow
Of morning years, the lost ones scattered wide
Give me your hand, O brother, let us go
Crying about the dark for those who died.*

Wilfred Owen, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*

*What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.*



Paul Nash, *Sunrise, Inverness Copse* 1917



The Way Home is the opening scene in Beckmann's acclaimed graphic cycle *Die Holle* (Hell), a dark and disturbing essay on the collapse of German society in the aftermath of the First World War (1914-18). Set in postwar Berlin, the allegorical scene features Beckmann as a man on his way home who suddenly encounters a horribly disfigured veteran under the light of a street lamp. Bearing the scars of war, the once proud soldier symbolizes the fate of Germany itself, broken and defeated. In the foreground, a menacing black dog warns of the dangers that lie ahead. Beckmann further enhances the tension of the scene by crowding his figures into a shallow pictorial space. Above all, *The Way Home* is a powerful denouncement of war.

(Minneapolis Institute of Art, description)

Max Beckmann, *The Hell 1, The Way Home* 1919

Siegfried Sassoon, *Aftermath* 1919

Have you forgotten yet?...
For the world's events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked while at the crossing of city-ways:
And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow
Like clouds in the lit heaven of life; and you're a man relieved to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.
But the past is just the same—and War's a bloody game...
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz--
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on
parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench--
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?'

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack-
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads--those ashen-grey
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

Have you forgotten yet?...
Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you'll never forget.



Otto Griebel,
Sunday Afternoon 1920

Otto Dix was wounded several times. He was awarded the Iron Cross and reached the rank of Vice Sergeant Major. The brutality of war constantly haunted him.



The Match Seller (1920) is one of four 'pictures of cripples' Otto Dix completed in Dresden as a protest against the senseless brutality of war and the total lack of respect for returning wounded soldiers. The Germany he depicted was economically and socially broken—demoralized, resentful and violent.

A blind, quadruple amputee sits forlornly on a well-kept city pavement. He wears dark glasses and his field cap but no medals or other insignia. His empty sleeves are folded on his threadbare jacket and a wooden tray of matchboxes hangs by tape from his neck. The tray rests on his leg stumps, which are strapped into short wooden peg prostheses. He wears a grimy 'granddad' shirt prudently buttoned up to observe social 'niceties'. His unshaven face features a walrus moustache overhanging a... caries-ridden mouth, which emits the

cry ('Matches, genuine Swedish matches'), scratched in chalky oil paint on the canvas. Behind his head a wooden door tellingly makes the sign of the cross. Fashionable, wealthy ('well heeled'), long-legged, passers-by hurry away to escape embarrassment whilst down at street level a short-legged dachshund (representing the German public) turns his back and with wide-eyed enjoyment urinates on the veteran's left stump. Despite the few crumpled banknotes in the soldier's tray, the gutter is ominously close. This hapless private, is poor, isolated, helpless and vulnerable—a dehumanized outcast created by the machinery of war and abandoned by the technology of peace.

(Mike McKiernan, article Oxford Academic)