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GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS
WORLD WAR I: WAR OF IMAGES, IMAGES OF WAR

100 years after the start of World War I, this exhibition is an original examination of the visual propaganda developed by warring nations as well as modern artists' first-hand accounts

At the Getty Center
November 18, 2014–April 19, 2015



Left: *Kartinki* (Pictures -- The Russian War with the Germans, 1914, Hand-colored lithograph, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Middle: Detail of *I Have You My Captain. You Won't Fall*, 1917, Color lithograph. Paul Iribe (French, 1883-1935). The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Right: Detail of *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1917, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner Sketchbooks, 1917–1932. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES – World War I was both a war of unprecedented mechanized slaughter and a conflict over the cultural dominance and direction of Europe. It was also the first war to be fought and represented by modern artists. On view at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) at the Getty Center from November 18, 2014 through April 19, 2015, ***World War I: War of Images, Images of War*** examines the art and visual culture of the First World War.

Drawn principally from the GRI's Special Collections, and including key loans, the exhibition demonstrates the distinctive ways in which combatant nations utilized visual

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The Trench, Félix Vallotton (Swiss, 1865-1925), woodcut.
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

propaganda against their enemies and explores how individual artists developed their own visual language to convey and cope with the gruesome horrors they witnessed. Featuring the artists Umberto Boccioni, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, George Grosz, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fernand Léger, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Natalia Goncharova, Félix Vallotton, among many others, the exhibition contains 150 objects that represent a range of media, including satirical illustrated journals, print portfolios, postcards, photographs, and firsthand accounts such as a war diary, correspondence from the front, and "trench

art" made by soldiers. The work on view is primarily from Germany, France, Italy, Russia and the United States.

"World War I was as much a war of visual culture as it was a war of geo-politics," said Thomas W. Gaehtgens, director of the Getty Research Institute. "Because our Special Collections are rich in material from Europe at the time, the GRI is uniquely positioned to tell the story of the role that imagery played in the start of World War I as well as the impact of the war on art and artists."

World War I: War of Images, Images of War is curated by Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Director of the GRI; Nancy Perloff, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Collections at the GRI; Anja Foerschner, Research Specialist at the GRI; Gordon Hughes, Mellon Assistant Professor, Department of Art History, Rice University; and Philipp Blom, independent scholar. The exhibition will travel to the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis in fall 2015 and is accompanied by the book *Nothing but the Clouds Unchanged: Artists in World War I*, published by Getty Publications in fall of 2014.

"Through inventive propaganda, the combatant nations elevated their own traits – the Russian bear, Uncle Sam, French classicism – and denigrated each other by turning indigenous symbols into what came to be brilliant caricatures of German barbarism, British imperialism, French decadence, and Russian cowardice," explained curator Nancy Perloff.

War of Images

Although the role of propaganda in World War I remained consistent with previous wars—contrasting a self-image of cultural superiority with a vilified, barbaric enemy—a new dimension began to appear in this distinctively modern war of images. At the start of the 20th century, Europeans were navigating a course between the advancements of industrial modernity, on the one hand, and the loss of the traditional values and ways of life, on the

other. Each of the countries in this exhibition represented their enemy as not just a military threat, but a threat to the very future of European civilization.

The "War of Images" section of the exhibition includes an exploration of satirical journals and visual propaganda. Especially notable are the journals produced by artists, such as *Le Mot* (France), *Simplicissimus* (Germany), and *Lacerba* (Italy).

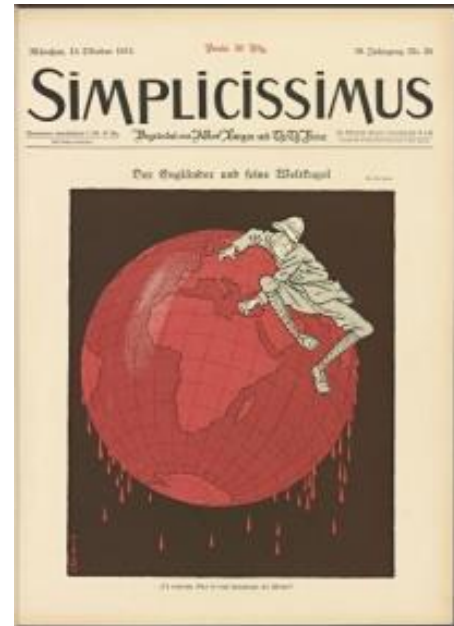
Le Mot, launched by artist Jean Cocteau and designer Paul Iribe, establishes a uniquely French modernist language. One cover portrays Kaiser Wilhelm II as Lohengrin, a knight of the Holy Grail. The elegant swan that Lohengrin rides in the legend is replaced by a crayfish, whose bold red color and aggressive claws symbolize German malignance. Likewise, the German journal *Simplicissimus*, shows an Englishman in a colonial pith helmet sliding off a globe covered in blood, suggesting not only that the British empire aspires to rule the world, but that it has lost control as a result.

The visual codes that countries established for each other afforded easy recognizability and a wealth of source material for propaganda. Some of these codes, for example animal symbols such as the Russian bear or personifications like the French Marianne, have been linked to the respective nation for centuries. Others, especially body types and iconographic attributes, are hyperbolic representations of physical and behavioral stereotypes associated with a certain nation—reducing the enemy to a caricature.

The "War of Images" section of the exhibition also includes rarely seen propaganda postcards and a poster by Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich and poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. In 1914 Malevich and Mayakovsky modeled their printed work on the *lubok*, or Russian popular print, which they considered the most distinctively Russian form of folk art. In the military prints on display, Malevich and Mayakovsky celebrate Russia's national identity with images of peasants in traditional costume symbolically defeating the German and Austro-Hungarian enemy.

Images of War

In contrast to the claims of cultural superiority touted by the warring nations, the reality of war made itself palpable in the hands of individual soldiers and artists. Their unique response, whether in the form of letters, diaries, or artwork, as shown in the "Images of War" section, offers an intriguing insight into the personal encounter with war. A highlight of this



The Englishman and His Globe, Thomas Theodor Heine (1867–1948), Color lithograph *Simplicissimus* vol. 19, no. 28 (October 13, 1914): cover. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



American Helmet Painted in Imitation of a German Camouflage Helmet. Robert McGiffin (American). Lent by Jane A. Kimball, Trench Art Collection

section is the never-before-displayed war diary of the Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni, which contains a detailed account of the artist's experience at the Italian Front in October 1915. The diary captures every step leading toward the front and every echo of gunfire without demonstrating Boccioni's fear or doubt in the face of battle. In this diary and in other firsthand depictions, the gap between the illusion of war, as it was represented in propaganda images aimed at the masses, and the reality of combat for the individual, for which no one was prepared,

becomes clearer.

Boccioni documented the events of several October days in the diary on display, providing onomatopoeic syllables and details about the challenges his battalion faced on the front lines. A sound station in the exhibition offers readings in Italian and in English of a stirring excerpt from the diary. In 1916, while serving in the Italian Army's Field Artillery Unit, Boccioni fell from his horse and perished from his injuries.

Also on view will be rare examples of handmade "trench art," such as helmets, canteens, and shell casings, by anonymous WWI soldiers, some of it made from the actual materials of war. During long stretches of extreme boredom—punctuated by intense violence—soldiers preserved memories of the units in which they served, the battles in which they fought, and images of soldiers and civilians whom they met by making souvenirs or personal messages to loved ones from discarded military detritus.

The final section of the exhibition, entitled "Aftermath," opens with photographs from the French magazine, *L'illustration*, showing jubilant Allied victory parades on Bastille Day, July 14, 1919 and covers of *Le petit journal*, which celebrate the armistice. In a war which ended with a pyrrhic victory, these images provide a sharp contrast to the trauma the war had caused in participants. Prints by Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and George Grosz, and books by Fernand Léger illustrate artists' attempts to come to terms with their experience of war trauma in the conflict's aftermath. At a listening station, visitors can hear Dix recounting his experiences in the war, recorded in 1963. Dix served during nearly the entire war and was wounded several times. He returned to his wartime experiences almost obsessively in work produced throughout his lifetime.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a slate of public programs. After November 7, visitors may go to getty.edu/wwi for more information.

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