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“Glory & Destruction: Reactions to Who Starts and Who Suffers War”

“Glory & Destruction” seeks to highlight perspectives that reckon with the often-striking dichotomies between who starts wars and who ends up suffering a war’s destructive toll, either as a soldier or civilian. The pieces selected showcase different perspectives on the aftermath of battle, the manipulative practices of those in power, and the difference between the stirring images of national heroes and the reality of the everyday soldier. Placed in a modern-feeling space and unobscured by vitrines, the exhibition allows for close examination of and engagement with each piece.

The exhibition’s contents are a mixture of historical objects and works of art, including photographs, paintings, textiles, and armor that reflect different realities. They were selected to point out contradictions between the wartime experiences of powerful individuals and the everyday civilian or soldier that gets wrapped up in fighting and violence, and are arranged as much as possible to contrast the rosy images of glorious leaders with the apocalyptic-feeling reality of battle at the ground-level. The exhibition attempts to include a variety of perspectives from across time and around the world, but focuses more on the impact of war waged by Western states or groups. This isn’t meant to diminish the perspectives of non-Western societies, and if the exhibition could feature more work, non-Western perspectives would *absolutely* be included. With this in mind, the exhibition is not meant to provide a universal set of experiences or ideals. Rather, it is supposed to reflect a subset of the myriad of reactions to the evolving atrocities that come with armed conflict.

I ended up choosing this theme because I’m very concerned about the comfort society (especially American/Western society) has with militarism. Paired with the inequality between the ultra-rich/powerful and the rise of nationalist sentiment across the globe, it creates a paradigm in which ultra-destructive, wide-scale conflict is possible. There also seems to be a lot of glorification of war and the people responsible for it in popular media, which, while not addressed directly, was a consideration when organizing the exhibition. Essentially, the exhibition aims to contradict the sometimes-nostalgic re-creations of war in media and society in an effort to prevent the manipulation of people into senseless campaigns of widespread violence.

List of Exhibition Pieces in Chronological Order

The Bayeux Tapestry (11th century)



This tapestry depicts the Battle of Hastings and the Norman victory against the English armies led by Harold Godwinson in 1066. While there are a several stories told in chapters and scenes across the piece, the tapestry as a whole is a monument to the ascension of William the Conqueror from the Duke of Normandy to the King of England. The tapestry illustrates a reality in which powerful people can pursue war and be immortalized as heroes, at the expense of the armies that fight on their behalf. The piece also provides an interesting commentary on the devastating potential of war in and of itself, since it was in danger of being stolen when the Nazis successfully invaded France during World War II.

Field Armor of King Henry VIII of England – Presumably English armorer (ca. 1544)



As the only primarily historical object in this exhibition, this set of plate armor worn by King Henry VIII of England holds a commanding presence in the exhibition space. The armor, presumably worn by Henry during his last military campaign as the king of England, is adorned with several floral and natural motifs, including dogs and roses. It was also made for Henry during his twilight years, and is designed around his late-life illnesses. As a part of the exhibition, the armor embodies the privilege and power of the people who start and lead war efforts. While this is particularly true for most sets of plate armor from the medieval period (which was rife with feudalism and socioeconomic inequality), this armor in particular is fashioned in such a way that clearly illustrates a gap between a powerful monarch and the rest of his army.

After the Capture of the Taku Forts – Felice Beato (1860)



Perhaps most famous for his photographs that documented the samurai at the end of the feudal period in Japan, Felice Beato is an Italian photographer that attempted to capture the effects and aftermath of war through his work. Often credited as the first war photographer to feature corpses in his photographs, Beato is unafraid of capturing the truly harrowing aftermath of battle. This photo, taken after a French siege of a series of forts in China in an effort to open the country up to Western trade interests. This piece is perhaps the most striking

condemnation of war and violence not only because the medium of photography captures the real world, but also because it highlights the fact that war and conquest are often the manifestation of a nation (or individual's) economic, political, or social aspirations.

***Persephone Returns* – Helen Lundeberg (1944)**



Helen Lundeberg is a 20th century painter from Southern California often credited with establishing the post-Surrealist movement in visual art. Lundeberg was especially active during and after the Second World War, and her piece “Persephone Returns” offers a reflection on the absolute, apocalyptic destruction loosed during the global conflict framed through classical Greek mythology. The painting features Persephone’s return from the Underworld after her forced marriage to Hades, the god of death. Rather than seeing a bountiful vista full of life, Persephone emerges to a barren

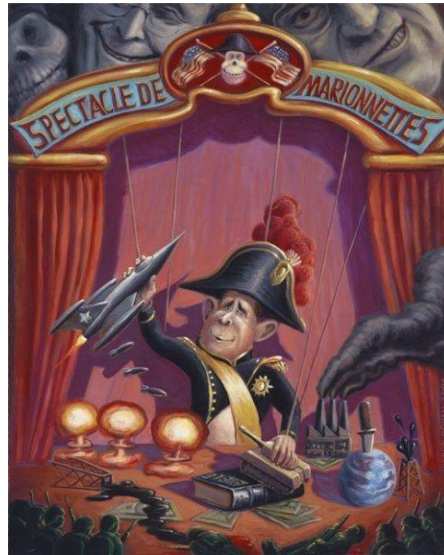
wasteland. This is almost certainly an impression of the world as seen by Lundeberg during the height of World War II, as the painting was finished during 1944.

***V.F.W* – Andrew Wyeth (1964)**



V.F.W. explores a different aspect of the experience of war than any of the other pieces featured in the exhibition. Rather than capturing scenes of desolation and destruction, Andrew Wyeth’s painting features a soldier coming home to an empty homestead. The painting conveys a feeling of emptiness and despair in a soldier making his homecoming, only to find no welcome from his family and neighbors. It captures a different kind of tragedy; soldiers often live through harrowing experiences and are forced to do the unthinkable in many cases, often for a cause they aren’t invested in. Upon their return, they are not acknowledged as victims, and blame is wrongly placed on them, instead of the leaders that started a war in the first place.

***The Puppet Show* – Mark Bryan (2004)**



Mark Bryan's *The Puppet Show* provides scathing critique of the Bush administration and its actions in starting the war in Iraq. The painting itself features George W. Bush dressed in Napoleonic garb, playing with a fighter jet as if it were a child's toy. Bryan's work also offers a wider reflection of how modern leaders are often detached from the destruction and suffering brought about during a war. "The Puppet Show" illustrates a perspective that leaders often see their soldiers – human beings – as nothing more than a means to an end.

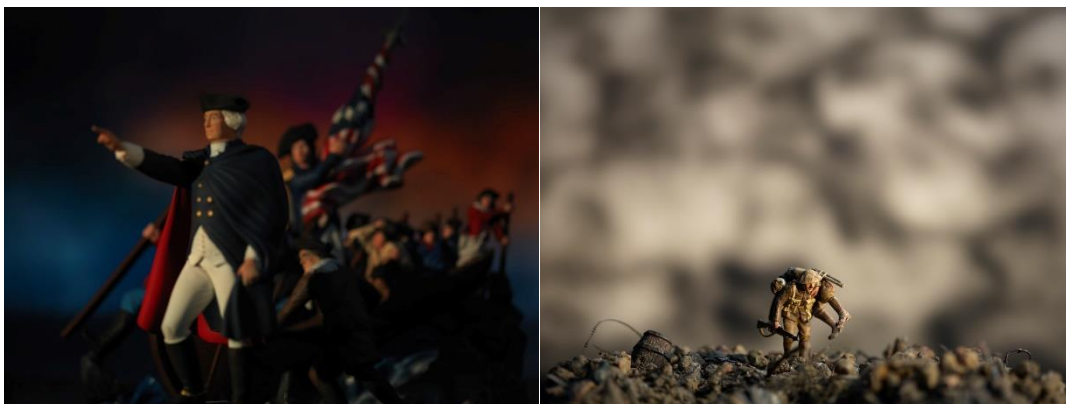
Selected prints from *I.E.D.* – David Levinthal (2008)





As with Levinthal's previous work, his series of prints entitled *I.E.D.* reflects on the realities of war and history. This series, however, is much more focused on the wars pursued by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Levinthal's prints are again of miniatures enduring the chaos and trauma of modern battle, offering a contrast to the tales of triumph touted by the U.S. government during the early years of both wars. The selected prints from the series for this exhibition include a wounded soldier, the destruction of a town, and a soldier pinned down and visibly terrified by the chaos of battle.

Selected prints from *History* – David Levinthal (2010-2018)





David Levinthal's series *History* provides a visual dichotomy between war heroes and the realities of the everyday soldier. The selected prints for this exhibition include soft-focused photographs of miniatures re-enacting famous (and often mythologized) moments during wars throughout American history, cast against some of the grim realities of conflict. Prints included: American Marines raising a flag, Napoleonic figure on horseback, George Washington crossing the Delaware River, a soldier carrying a wounded compatriot across a battlefield, soldiers awaiting the D-Day landings, and a tank crew surveying the ruins of a Nazi-controlled city.