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## The Museum of Modern Art

### MOMA EXAMINED DIVERSE RESPONSES TO WAR AND VIOLENCE IN MODERN ART

#### War

March 16-August 22, 2000

Second Floor

Wars--in particular the two World Wars, as well as civil, class, and colonial conflicts--had an enormous impact on twentieth-century culture. *War*, an exhibition organized by Robert Storr, Senior Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, examines the diverse responses by artists to war and violence. The exhibition is on view from March 16 through August 22, 2000, as part of *Making Choices*, the second cycle of MoMA2000, which focuses on the period 1920 to 1960. *War* comprises some 100 paintings, photographs, drawings, and prints by an international array of artists, including Diane Arbus, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Carlo Carrò, Otto Dix, Natalia Gontcharova, George Grosz, Neil Jenney, Käthe Kollwitz, Alfred Kubin, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, David Smith, Art Spiegelman, Shomei Tomatsu, and Andy Warhol, as well as archival photographs made by on- and off-duty soldiers. Galleries are divided into sections that examine civil strife, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War and postcolonial era.

"Whether artists can fully render the true reality of modern war and whether poetry can survive the knowledge of mass murder are open issues," notes Mr. Storr. "The fact remains that artists have shown us many of war's aspects in ways that are vivid, unforgettable, and sometimes disturbingly beautiful."

The period surrounding World War I produced powerful images of war and equally vigorous condemnations of militarism. The Futurists, for example, glorified the technological advancements of the new machine age, including those employed in World War I. Gino Severini's dynamic painting *Armored Train in Action* (1915) emphasizes the speed and momentum of a moving train filled with armed soldiers. Conversely, Otto Dix's ghastly etchings and Félix Vallotton's woodcuts depict war in all its brutality and chaos. The diverse reactions to World War II and the events leading up to it include premonitions of catastrophe, allegories, documentation of combat, and protests against aggression. In *The Charnel House* (1944-45), a response to Nazi concentration camps, Pablo Picasso depicts a heap of human corpses. His allegorical etchings *Dream and Lie of Franco* are also politically charged, symbolizing Franco's fascist politics with a monstrous soldier. *The Death of a Loyalist Militiaman near Cerro Muirano (Cordoba front)* (c. September 5, 1936), a photograph by Robert Capa, brings forth the reality of death on the battlefield, documenting the exact moment when a republican soldier in the Spanish Civil War was hit by a bullet. David Alfaro Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (1937), an equally powerful image based on a photograph of a child who survived a Japanese bombing in Manchuria, acts as a protest.

Revolutions and civil conflict have also been frequent subjects of modern art. An early example, Carlo Carrò's *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (1910-11), depicts the tumultuous riot that broke out at the funeral of

anarchist Angelo Galli, who had been killed during the general strikes in Milan, Italy, in 1904. Evoking the chaos that ensued, Carrô has rendered the moment at which Galli's red-draped coffin was nearly knocked from the pallbearers' shoulders. Another work, Andy Warhol's screenprint *Birmingham Race Riot* (1964), looks at racial tension in America. Here, news photographs show leashed police dogs viciously attacking civil rights demonstrators protesting racial segregation in Alabama.

The Cold War of the 1950s through the 1980s and the various wars that erupted in the contest between East and West produced art of diverse kinds. Shomei Tomatsu's photograph of a twisted bottle found in the ruins of Hiroshima, *Beer Bottle after the Atomic Bomb Explosion* (1960), and his image of the scarred face of a survivor, *Man with Keloidal Scars* (1960), bring the abstraction of the atom bomb into frightening and painfully specific focus. Other artists cast the Vietnam War as the central event of this period, as seen in a poster by The Art Workers Coalition. An enlarged photograph of the bloody bodies of victims of the My Lai massacre is emblazoned with the question asked of the American officer responsible, "And babies?" and his response, "And babies..." War also presents a number of images that were not intended as works of art, including several snapshots of Cambodian prisoners executed by the Khmer Rouge at the S-21 detention center in the Phnom Penh district of Tuol Sleng. These photographs, originally made by the Khmer Rouge for identification and documentation, are among the most searing images of war.

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