ABOUT This GUIDE
This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for middle school and high school educators bringing their students to view World War I: War of Images, Images of War, on view at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum from September 11, 2015, through January 4, 2016. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, gallery discussions, and postvisit suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and help make meaning of the material presented. Teachers should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful to their students.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION
More than just a military conflict, World War I was a war of culture waged by European nations to determine who would lead Europe into the twentieth century and guide civilization in the face of modernity. It was also the first war to be fought and represented by modern artists. World War I: War of Images, Images of War presents a unique investigation of the art and visual culture of the First World War by examining both the distinctive ways in which combatant nations utilized visual propaganda against their enemies and how individual artists developed their own visual language to convey and cope with the gruesome horrors they witnessed. The exhibition includes over 150 objects in a range of media, including satirical illustrated journals, print portfolios, postcards, photographs, paintings, firsthand accounts, and “trench art” made by soldiers.


INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS
Art, Art History, American History, Cultural Studies, Economics, European History, Folk Art, Geography, Industrialization, Journalism, Literature, Poetry, Political Science, Social Studies, Technology, Urban Studies, Visual Culture Studies, War Studies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Students will explore the visual culture of combatant countries and how cultural symbols and stereotypes were used as propaganda.

Students will examine artists’ personal responses to war.

Students will discuss the destruction of cultural sites and the effect of such actions on the psychology and morale of nations involved.

Students will compare and contrast works in this exhibition with contemporary propaganda, visual culture, and the destruction of cultural sites.

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BEFORE YOU VISIT
Suggested topics to explore, research, and discuss before visiting the exhibition

WORLD WAR I
Research World War I and the various nations that were involved in this conflict. What were some of the causes of the war? What made it a world war? What did the nations involved hope to gain from this conflict? What were some of the new technologies used during the war? What ultimately ended the war?

TRENCH ART
Any decorative item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, or civilians where the manufacture is directly linked to armed conflict or its consequences is considered “trench art.” Trench art is more of a craft than a fine art, the emphasis being placed on the subject or context more than technique or concept. Research trench art from various wars. How does trench art from World War I compare to that of wars before and since? What are some of the objects used by soldiers to make trench art? What are some common themes?

MODERN ART
What is modern art? Investigate the origins of modern art movements represented in the exhibition, notably German Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism. How would you describe the characteristics of these movements? In what ways did World War I influence the development of these art movements?

IN THE GALLERY
Ideas to consider when viewing the exhibition

Divided into three sections, the exhibition charts a path chronologically through World War I—from its exuberant beginning when artists often voluntarily enlisted and sometimes celebrated the violence of the war in their work, to the long years of fighting in the trenches when artists depicted the brutality of the war firsthand, to its aftermath when artists attempted to come to terms with their experience of war trauma.

SECTION ONE: WAR OF IMAGES
This section of the exhibition looks at the role of visual propaganda and how combatant nations used easily recognizable visual codes to elevate their own culture and traits while denigrating those of their enemies by turning cultural symbols into caricatures. These visual codes provided a wealth of source material for propaganda, particularly among the nations of France, Germany, Great Britain, and Russia. For example, the French understood their culture to have ties to classical antiquity and depicted the Germans as barbarians, whereas the Germans viewed themselves as heirs to a sophisticated culture and depicted the French as decadent and effete. For instance, *Lohengrin and the Crayfish*, from the French journal *Le mot*, depicts the German emperor Wilhelm II as Lohengrin, a character from an opera of the same name by Wagner. However, instead of riding a graceful swan in reference to the opera, the emperor here is depicted riding a red crayfish, suggesting German aggression. Across the border, German magazines such as *Simplicissimus* published mocking satirical images like *The Proud Marianne*, in which an exaggeratedly feminine Marianne (symbol of the French republic) appears frivolous and flirtatious. While the causes of WWI might have been political, supporters on each side saw the war as a battle to decide which culture would dominate in the twentieth century.
Discussion Questions

How do different nations depict one another? Do you notice any stereotypes you were not aware of before? Why is the use of stereotypes effective in propaganda? How are visual codes like colors and symbols used in contemporary media or advertising? What are some stereotypes perpetuated about contemporary nations and peoples? What are some stereotypes about the United States?

SECTION TWO: IMAGES OF WAR

This section of the exhibition examines personal experiences of WWI. The reality of war becomes palpable in the hands of individual soldiers and artists who express their unique responses not only in finished easel paintings created in studios but also in smaller-scale drawings and watercolors produced on site, as well as in letters and diaries. Creating trench art was a way for soldiers to pass the time and also to express themselves. Art was created on whatever materials were available, including cigarette packs, scraps of wood, and soldiers’ helmets. One popular subject was the biblical Apocalypse, which was approached by artists from a variety of angles. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, a German artist known for his expressionist style, conceived a series of drawings depicting the Apocalypse while battling a nervous breakdown at a sanatorium in Switzerland. Despite having served only a brief time in the military, Kirchner was haunted by what he called the “bloody carnival” of war. Making art with materials at hand, discarded cigarette packs in this case, helped to express his fears and disillusionments while recovering.

Discussion Questions

How is having an outlet for expression helpful to soldiers in combat? What types of subjects are depicted by soldiers who experienced the war? What is the Apocalypse and why was it a popular subject? How does trench art dispel the illusions of grandeur that war can often evoke? Compare the art in this section with the propagandistic artwork of the first section, considering the audience and the purpose of the artworks. How do depictions of the war made by trained artists differ from trench art made by soldiers or from photographs of the war?

CULTURAL ATROCITIES

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame at Reims, France (1211–75), the site of twenty-five coronations of French kings, was regarded as a Gothic architectural masterpiece. Its bombing by German troops in 1914 provoked a particularly vicious international press campaign, stemming from the two sides’ different narratives about what happened. The German army had proceeded to the French city of Reims following their invasion of neutral Belgium but had to retreat once the French army reentered the city. The cathedral was first shelled on September 4, 1914, and was subsequently bombarded along with the rest of Reims on September 18 and 19. The general view of the French was that the shelling showed the true barbaric nature of German military leaders and the German people, while the German side stated that the French had deliberately used the cathedral for military observation posts, making it a strategic target.

Discussion Questions

Why would the destruction of cathedrals and other monuments evoke such strong reactions? Are there contemporary examples of destruction of cultural or historical objects? What monuments or buildings in the United States could equate to Reims Cathedral?
SECTION THREE: AFTERMATH

The final section of the exhibition explores the extent to which artists confronted their personal experiences of loss and suffering in visual form in the years after the war, even up to the rise of Nazism in Germany and the beginning of World War II. Etchings by Otto Dix, who served throughout nearly the entire war and was wounded several times, reflect the artist’s struggle to make sense of his traumatic experience. The nightmarish imagery, mingling truth and allegory, explores the “bestiality” of the war, which Dix was initially so keen on experiencing firsthand, in haunting detail, and with strong emotional impact. Likewise, Käthe Kollwitz’s prints draw from the lingering pain of World War I. Kollwitz’s youngest son, Peter, was killed early in the war after she grudgingly allowed him to volunteer. Her stark black-and-white woodcuts, picturing desperate, grief-laden family members, express the extensive suffering of the families of fallen soldiers.

Discussion Questions

Why does the exhibition include images made after the war? How do such images help in the understanding of events during the war? Compare images from this section to those of previous sections. What has changed? What is the same?

IN THE CLASSROOM OR AT HOME

Suggested activities to follow your visit to the Museum

WWI MUSEUM IN KANSAS CITY

Visit the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City or explore their online materials. How do the exhibits there compare with the Kemper Art Museum’s exhibition? How does viewing artwork from the World War I era inform your perspective of the time period differently than reading about it?

CURRENT CONFLICTS, PROPAGANDA, AND CULTURAL DESTRUCTION

Research contemporary conflicts, such as the international fight against the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS). How does contemporary propaganda compare to materials seen in the exhibition? What examples of propaganda can be found in the United States? What cultural sites have been destroyed, and by whom? What is the effect of such destruction? How has cultural warfare evolved since World War I?

WORLD WAR I FILMS

Watch a classic World War I film, such as All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) or Paths of Glory (1957). How do the visuals from the film compare to the art and film clips seen in the exhibition? Are these films also a form of propaganda? How or how not?


VOCABULARY

1. Apocalypse – In the book of Revelation, the biblical prophecy of the destruction of the world.
2. Atrocity – An extremely appalling, wicked, or cruel act.
3. Caricature – In art or literature, the exaggeration or distortion of prominent characteristics in the portrayal of individuals or things so as to make them appear ridiculous.
4. Derogatory – Showing a critical or disrespectful attitude toward a person or thing.
5. Effete – A disapproving term meaning decadent, self-indulgent, and weak.
6. Propaganda – Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.
7. Modern art – A loosely defined term referring to the succession of styles and movements in art and architecture that dominated Western culture from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s.
8. Stereotype – A generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, used to describe or distinguish a group.
9. Trench art – Any decorative item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, or civilians where the manufacture is directly linked to armed conflict or its consequences.
10. Visual culture – Cultural production in the form of images rather than words.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Exhibition catalog

Online
http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/ww1/index.html
http://www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/exhibitions/WWI

Trench Art – http://www.trenchart.org/
Modern Art –
https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/what-is-modern-art
http://www.theartstory.org/definition-modern-art.htm
http://arthistory.about.com/od/modernart/f/what_is.-Eoj.htm
National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City – https://theworldwar.org/

Teacher Bibliography

Teacher Glossary

Organized by the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles with works drawn from the GRI’s Special Collections and key loans from across the country, World War I: War of Images, Images of War features art from nine countries across mainland Europe, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The exhibition is curated by Nancy Perloff, curator of modern and contemporary collections at the GRI; Anja Foerschner, research specialist at the GRI; Gordon Hughes, Mellon Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History, Rice University; and Philipp Blom, independent scholar.

The installation in St. Louis is supplemented with paintings from several local private and public collections, including the Kemper Art Museum’s permanent collection, and is curated by Karen K. Butler, associate curator.