

## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### INFORMATION AND DETAILED PROGRAMME

[musee-armee.fr/ExpoVudifront](http://musee-armee.fr/ExpoVudifront)  
Tel: + 33 (0) 810 11 33 99

### GUIDED TOURS

Young audiences: [jeunes@musee-armee.fr](mailto:jeunes@musee-armee.fr)  
Schools and students: [visites.exposition@bdic.fr](mailto:visites.exposition@bdic.fr)  
Adults: [benedicte@cultural.fr](mailto:benedicte@cultural.fr)

### CINEMA

#### From November 8 to 22

Free cinema showings at the Auditorium Austerlitz of the Musée de l'Armée

#### From November 8 to 27

Within the Month of the documentary film, the BDIC organizes showings on the theme of *Letters from war times*

### CONCERTS

From 2014 October 16 to 2015 December 6

### CONFERENCES

From November 4 to December 6

### CATALOGUE



39 €  
Somogy éditions d'Art

### MUSEUM BOOKSHOP

Catalogues and posters of the exhibition, as well as a selection of books and items related to the exhibition are on sale at the museum shop.

### CURATORS

#### Musée de l'Armée

Sylvie Le Ray-Burimi,  
*head of the paintings, drawings, engravings and photographs department*

Anthony Petiteau,  
*head of the photographs collection*

Vincent Giraudier,  
*head of the Historial Charles de Gaulle*

#### Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine

Caroline Fieschi,  
*head of the museum department*

Aldo Battaglia,  
*head of the paintings, drawings and engravings department*

Benjamin Gilles,  
*head of the printed and digital collections*

### DESIGN AND INSTALLATION OF THE EXHIBITION

#### Scenography

MAW/ Philippe Maffre et Maeva Abdelhafid

#### Graphic design

CL DESIGN/ Domitille Pouy

# VIEW FROM THE FRONT REPRESENTING THE GREAT WAR

15 OCTOBER, 2014  
25 JANUARY, 2015

# EXHIBITION

Musée de l'Armée Invalides



BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE DOCUMENTATION INTERNATIONALE CONTEMPORAINE





SECTION 1 **VISUAL CULTURES  
OF THE WAR IN 1914**

The people in Europe did not find out about the war in 1914. For more than 30 years, they have been living with the memory of past and contemporary wars. Thanks to the substantial role played by paintings, engravings and the illustrated press, the 1870-71 war, the Boer War, the Boxer Rebellion, the Balkan wars and the military expeditions in Africa and Asia were brought into the visual culture. Each year, the presence at the exhibition of works portraying the war, at times repeated in engravings, enlivened the discussions. The increasing use of photographs in the press, the rapid development of the cinema and attempts to record sound revive contemporaries' view by asking the question, among others, as to whether reality is portrayed. The new media play a decisive role in an increasingly massive and instantaneous coverage of information, particularly in 1904-1905 during the Russian-Japanese war and in the Balkans in 1912-1913. These two conflicts, which stand out by their modernity, inspire pictorial trends such as futurism and alter how war is portrayed, particularly by not concealing anything of the mass destruction.

Aristarkh Lentoulov (1882-1943) and Vladimir Maïakovski (1893-1930)  
[The Austrian surrendered Lvov to the Russians], 1914. Lithograph in colour. PARIS, MUSÉE DE L'ARMÉE.



**Portraying war**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, military painting as an art form tailed off while continuing to have some success with the public. The fact that wars in Asia and Africa were far away and, perhaps, the difficulty in selling such subjects to private individuals could be an explanation of why French artists lost interest in them. At the same time, photography - amateur or professional - became the symbol of modernity and authenticity and completely changed the way images of war are disseminated to the public. The belligerents themselves appropriated them as a means of establishing an official truth. Nevertheless, historical painting did not disappear and continues to provide dramatic or tragic inspiration. In the press, painting and photography live side-by-side and together show modern war. They mercilessly show cannon, trenches, bodies and acts of violence against the civil population.

Ferdinand I<sup>st</sup> (King of Bulgaria) on the ruins of the Kavala fortress in Greece, December 1912  
Modern print from a silver-gelatine negative on cellulose nitrate PARIS, MUSÉE DE L'ARMÉE.

**From traditional to avant-garde**

The army was still omnipresent in pre-1914 European societies. In France, some painters, often former soldiers from the Franco-Prussian war such as Édouard Detaille and Alphonse de Neuville, specialised in portraying it most often in a patriotic style. The dazzling uniforms and the depiction of glorious episodes in the past were the essence of these works of art. During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, young avant-garde artists such as Jacques Villon or Roger de La Fresnaye used this subject extensively. Interested in the analysis of colours, shapes and movement, they worked on the subject while taking inspiration from the epic sweep of romantic works.



## SECTION 2 **CONFRONTATION WITH THE REALITY OF WAR**

The actual conflict gradually took over from an awaited war, as perceived by the millions of men mobilised. Their view is therefore conditioned by the discovery of combat, the experience of the front, the incredible violence of the battlefield and the spreading out of the trenches.

The soldiers sometimes took sketchbooks or cameras to the front; some of them also used whatever materials were available in the trenches. So the war started to be documented by the accounts of those who fought it, whether they were professional artists, amateur illustrators or photographers.

At the same time, the various warring nations commissioned painters and photographic services to cover the conflict, both to document it and to provide the public with controlled images.

Portrayals were then circulated of a war different from the one that, up to then, artists, newspapers, illustrated magazines and the cinema imagined: they showed the mass destruction, battlefield landscapes laid waste and the confined environment of the trenches.



### **First images of the War**

As there were no documents from those who actually witnessed the conflict, editors used existing pictures in its early days. Without any direct relation to the on-going fighting, they were circulated together with a caption adapted to the current situation. The artists, particularly the press illustrators, also used their imagination, returning to the classic subjects of paintings of battles or reworking previous works. Without any pictures, the praising of heroic characters responded both to for society's need for cohesion with the military, behind their leaders, and to edification, for instance, by putting emphasis on decorated heroes from the ranks or soldiers who fell on the field of honour whose sacrifice was praised in the press.

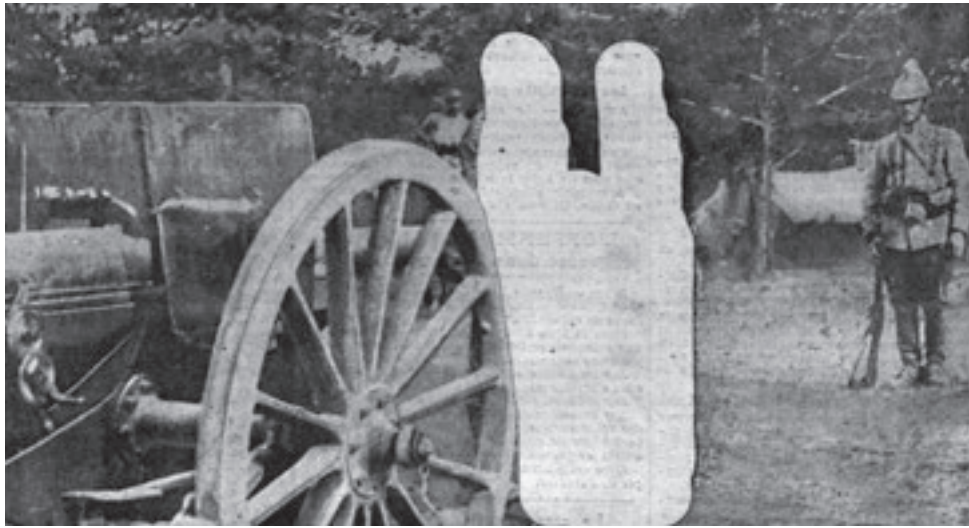
### **First testimonies**

Aware of experiencing an exceptional event, from August and September 1914, the combatants photographed and drew, doing what they frequently did before the war. Once their abilities were noticed, they were sometimes pressed into service to make records and sketches to be used for the conduct of the war.

The gendarmes or photographers in the criminal identification bureau were also sent to the front, portraying ruins and bodies left after the first Battle of the Marne.

Journalists who could get to the front, but often to a very limited degree, tended to report on the war from close up, followed by press photographers, whose number increased with the agencies specifically dedicated to supplying the newspapers with photographs.





## The “right war”

When it was not an object of ridicule, the enemy's brutality was often portrayed: the “right war” themes and the violations of the laws of war were often used for propaganda purposes. The description of the atrocities, such as the execution of children or hands cut off, were above all aimed at awakening public opinion to shape and reinforce a sentiment of patriotic union and, especially, solidarity between the allies in the struggle. In a war considered to be just and with the triumph of law, of culture or civilisation as its goal, the burning of the Rheims cathedral, after being shelled by German artillery on 19 September 1914, became a symbol of this struggle and an enduring theme in anti-German propaganda.

## Circulation of images

Mass produced, the images were circulated in abundance. Through the portrayals of the enemy, common subjects passed from one country to another and symbolised the anticipated victory: columns or groups of prisoners, trophies exhibited in the capital cities, bodies left on the battlefield. Sometimes, the same image may be repeated in the illustrated press of the various warring countries, even circulated in enemy countries. Only the captions changed. Even if censorship and self-censorship existed in fact, they did not manage to limit the portrayals being circulated, even sensitive themes, such as camouflage – since French uniforms, forbidden in France, were published in Germany – or fraternising which made the headlines in Great Britain but did not appear in the illustrated press in France.

[Photograph cut by the censor] Excelsior, No. 1813, 2 November 1915  
Press, bound. NANTERRE, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE DOCUMENTATION INTERNATIONALE CONTEMPORAINE  
(INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION LIBRARY)



## Who portrayed the war?

The authors of the war images were as varied as they were numerous. Amateur photography was widespread from the 1890s, and many of the soldiers owned a camera, often of small size and taking up little space, which they were able to take with them to the front. Painters and illustrators, professionals and amateurs, left with their sketchbooks and their paint boxes. At the same time, official production was developing; technical documents on which the adjustment of artillery fire was based, particularly thanks to aerial photography, or theme reporting produced by the photographers and cinema operators that the various belligerents recruited. Non-combatant painters were also pressed into service, with missions lasting a few days on the front or attached to a unit on a long-term basis.

Félix Vallotton (1865-1925) *The Military Cemetery at Châlons*, 1917  
Oil on canvas. NANTERRE, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE DOCUMENTATION INTERNATIONALE CONTEMPORAINE.  
(INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION LIBRARY)

## Fronts and points of view

The various war fronts spread out across very varied landscapes whose characteristics determined the forms of combat and also the way in which the conflict was portrayed. The western front was characterised by a visual universe reduced to the trench, from which a soldier emerged only with danger to his life. Faced with the impossibility of assessing the landscape in full daylight at shoulder level, the observer looked through the slots slits or used a periscope. Observation and aerial photography developed simultaneously. Views from above and panoramas were possible in mountainous regions such as the Austro-Italian and Eastern fronts (particularly in Macedonia, Albania and Serbia). The war was one of movement on the German-Russian and Near-Eastern fronts (Mesopotamia, Palestine), with their vast expanses, and also where the countrysides were almost empty of any human presence.



SECTION 3 **FACED  
WITH A LONG WAR**

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On the western front, stabilisation of the front transformed the war into a never-ending siege. The intensity of the confrontations only rarely interrupted a daily life marked by a lack of privacy, destitution, suffering and death. Paradoxically, the combats and assaults, experienced or imagined, were still the subjects for those who portrayed the conflict. Very much appreciated behind the lines, works representing the offensive and movement, also responded to the idea that civilians had of the war. Difficult to portray on the spot and to its full extent, the fighting was often conjured up by new weapons whose forms and effects fascinated, by the camouflage devices, and finally, by the destruction. All accounts of the war and its unexpected developments. The images produced in this context are a vehicle for sharing experiences between the combatants and the rear and also between the combatants themselves, preoccupied with transmitting their experience of the front, to share it and overcome it.

Georges Scott (1873-1943) *Effect of a shell during the night or The Breach, April 1915, 1915*  
Ink and pastel with gouache highlights on paper. PARIS, MUSÉE DE L'ARMÉE.

**Portraying the fighting**

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Renewal of technologies had an influence on very concept of the front and how the combatants viewed it. The development of long-range artillery, sophisticated means of communications which enabled joint and co-ordinated actions by the various weapons, and finally aviation, all made their contribution to it. All factors which reinforce the capacity to fire across enemy territory and reach civil targets. Battles became invisible

and the front dissolved thanks to these new forms of combat. As a result, the view is more and more abstract and dehumanised. Primitive, and apparently anachronistic, forms of the confrontation still exist, such as hand-to-hand fighting, often at night. The practical experience of war, multiple and full of contrasts, forced the artists to explore new figurative channels or to move towards the abstract.



#### SECTION 4 **MEMORY OF THE FRONT**

The works produced on the front transposed the immediate experience of the violence and chaos of war into images and stories. Right from the start of the fighting, films where reality and reconstitution are mingled, collections of engravings, private albums or those intended for publishing, exhibitions, the appearance of public or private collections concerning the war, are all proof that combatants and civilians need to put the events back into an individual and collective history.

The multiplicity of points of view on the war are expressed thanks to the techniques inherited from tradition – drawing, engraving, painting – and by photography and film, the modern means of portrayal. On the other hand, poets and artists, painters, photographers and filmmakers are influenced by the countless maps, technical documents and images generated by war and assumed to be objective. They also change their view of the conflict, without providing them with a means to reproduce sounds, odours, taste and feeling, and to enable them to share their experience in all its complexity. When the war was nearing its end, new subjects appeared: the return from the trenches, the victory, the fear of being forgotten, and the refusal of defeat. Then, years, sometimes decades after the conflict, the experience of the front continued to haunt soldiers who had their stories published and works which remained unpublished or which later on returned to the subjects repressed for many years.

Jean Galtier-Boissière (1891-1966) *Victory Celebrations: parade of the disabled servicemen, 1919*  
Oil on board. NANTERRE, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE DOCUMENTATION INTERNATIONALE CONTEMPORAINE.  
(INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION LIBRARY)

The exhibition takes place on two levels. The entrance is located on the ground level, accessible via the Cour d'Honneur. The exhibition follows up on the third level. The signs below will guide your through your visit.

HAVE A GREAT VISIT !

