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Review of
Brandon, Laura. 2007. *Art and War*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Pp. 179, 30 b/w illust. with list of illustrations, abbreviations, acknowledgements, notes, selected bibliography and index. Cloth, $88.50, ISBN 978 1 88511 2370.

> "Memory work" is like any other kind of physical or mental labour, embedded in complex class, gender, and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten) by whom, and for what end.[1]

Art and War is a slender, ambitious and, ultimately, disturbing book. In it, Laura Brandon, an art historian at the Canadian War Museum and a part-time lecturer at the School for Studies and Art and Culture, Carleton University, examines hundreds of objects from a history of visual culture that has been inspired by armed conflict. The author broadens the discussion of war art from media most typically associated with the subject (drawing, painting, etching and monumental sculpture) to include virtually all forms of material culture. Her book includes ancient relics, such as mosaic and tapestry, while contemporary artmaking is represented with photomontage, photo-projection, Internet postings, comic books, posters and multimedia installations. As well, it raises two important, but seldom-discussed issues about war art: total war and war rape. Troubling questions also arise from this book, however, in regard to the author's own understanding of power relations in the business of remembering (and forgetting).

The book, above all, purports to be an art history. It is written by an art curator, but it contains only a few dozen very small images from a history of art dating back some 27,000 years. While all art historical writing is based on a dialectic between words and pictures, the lack of illustrations in *Art and War* necessarily results in an over-reliance on verbal language. This is unfortunate, because too often Brandon's descriptions of art objects are either opaque or illogical, while her analyses come across as insensitive and inappropriate. The book's overall approach raises additional unease. Brandon states that her purpose is to consider war art as reflecting "sociocultural attitudes to conflict over time" (5). The closer I read *Art and War*, however, the more concerns surfaced about the sociocultural attitudes that inform its author. A dissociation of art history from war history, of text from image, and of empathy from art historical writing are among the most significant issues. These are compounded by questions regarding her objectivity.

Dissociation of Art History from War History

The back cover promotes *Art and War* as a "truly encyclopaedic survey," but Brandon admits that it is "geographically limited" (131). "The history of war art is not purely British or American," (2) she acknowledges, but the emphasis throughout her book is on the experiences of the United Kingdom of the past century and, to a lesser extent, those of the United States, with some references to Canada. Nevertheless, an international historical perspective is suggested with the first chapter as she samples the war art of the ancient Middle East, the Mediterranean and parts of Western Europe, as well as Asia (but inexplicably omitting the Byzantine Empire, the culture that links East and West). The Near East, Greece, India and China are raised in this chapter but, with the exception of a few references to art generated by the so-called "War on Terror" in Iraq, none of these cultures reappears in the rest of the book. Instead, the story begins with contemporary "War on Terror" photographs, goes back to Central European fertility carving of 25,000 BCE and proceeds to mosaic and relief sculpture plundered in the past from Iraq and Greece by the British. A meandering narrative with similar gaps and omissions occurs throughout the remaining chapters. Places where significant wars (and war art) occurred, such as Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, are absent in their entirety from the historic survey chapters and almost entirely from the 20th-century sections that form the majority of the book. These and other gaps are neither acknowledged nor explained. The outcome is a narrow and disjunctive rendering of what constitutes war art, both militarily and artistically.

To cite one significant case in point, Brandon devotes some twenty pages to the Great War, a conflict that devastated Central and Eastern Europe even more than Western Europe. One of the greatest war memorials ever built commemorates this fact:

the installation at the small Romanian town of Târgu Jiu by sculptor Constantin Brâncuşi. His memorial of 1938 is a testament to the 1916 battle in which peasant women, children and elderly men of the town fought the invading German army with farm tools. Brâncuşi's response is a vast assemblage of monumental sculptures that turns the whole settlement into a memorial for the dead. Târgu Jiu has left Western art with some of its most unforgettable pieces, including *The Endless Column*, *The Table of Silence* and *The Gate of the Kiss*. In *Art and War*, however, Târgu Jiu rates one paragraph (123-24) and no illustrations. Moreover, aside from a confused and oblique reference to "Russia" (52), Târgu Jiu is the only reference in the book on the direct impact of the First World War to the art of this part of the world. This is no minor oversight in accounts of either war or art. In military terms, the First World War led to the collapse of the German, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, and in the process, changed the map of modern Western civilization. In art historical terms, the First World War and the Soviet Revolution that followed it in the former Russian Empire led to one of the most significant movements in the Western world—Constructivism. No art historical survey (especially one with a focus on the 20th century) would be complete without a discussion of its impact. However, Constructivism and all art movements inspired by revolution are inexplicably absent in *Art and War*. Brandon omits them when she writes that Dadaism (the short-lived, absurdist anti-art movement founded in Switzerland in the mid-1910s by Romanian refugees from the Austro-Hungarian Empire) is "the only art movement born of conflict" (132). She makes no connection between the Dada artists and the war they left behind in their homeland, or the art against which they were reacting. In a similarly decontextualized fashion, Brandon devotes five pages to art inspired by the 1991-2001 break-up of the former Yugoslavia (95-100) (discussed below). These exist without any reference to either the war history of the Yugoslav peoples (such as their conquest by the Ottoman Turks in 1389, or their position in the middle of both World Wars), or to the art history of South Slavs.

Other dissociations of art history from war history are more pointed and no less disconcerting: Brandon calls Picasso's *Guernica* of 1937 "the century's most powerful anti-war statement" (2), and refers to this painting repeatedly (2, 28, 57-58, 77 and 80), but with next to no military context. The Spanish Civil War, which it describes, stands in isolation without reference to other civil wars and revolutions that bracket it in war history and without mention of Spain as the testing ground for the Second World War.

As for the Second World War, Brandon correctly asserts that, "Total war ordered lives completely" and "[t]otal war produced a new iconography" (62). Indeed, as Per Rudling (2008)[2], a Swedish historian at the University of Alberta points out in his analysis of war memorials in contemporary Belarus, the armed conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union constituted the bloodiest war in human history. Hardest hit, in what he calls a total war of racial extermination, were those resident in the territories between Berlin and Moscow. The Holocaust of the Jews was part of this total war that included many others who were killed from 1939-1945. Forty million Soviets, with one-third of the populations of the Belarusian and between one-quarter and one third of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics, died in the Second World War, in addition to one-quarter of Poles and millions more in Romania, Yugoslavia and other parts of occupied Europe. Even today, no visitor can avoid the effect: the heart of the European continent is one in which memorials to the Second World War can be found in every city, town, village or rural crossroads. Surely this is the definition of total war and its art historical aftermath. Yet, aside from several brief and perplexing references to the Holocaust (explored below), Brandon almost wholly neglects the continental experience of total war. Only the British response is cited, and at length (59-67). Total war in Central and Eastern Europe—and the war art of that devastation—is conflated by the author into one country and reduced to a single sentence: "Much of the official Soviet war art was finished after the war and tends to the heroic" (59). It does not rate an illustration.

Brandon's approach to both war history and art history is further cast into doubt with her discussions of the Holocaust Memorials at Berlin and Vienna. In both cases, the Holocaust seems to be removed from the context of total war in the Second World War; at the same time, she seems unaware of the history of sacred space and uncertain about the role art plays as an evoker of memory. For example, in Western art practice, forests and groves of trees have been considered as sacred sites since pre-Classical times. The Berlin Holocaust Memorial continues this practice with a garden of trees designed by American architect

Peter Eisenmann (not illustrated). In Brandon's analysis, however, Eisenmann's "haphazard" plantings are intended "*not* to create a sacred place" (126, emphasis added). Similarly, British artist Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Library)*—the Vienna Holocaust Memorial installed in 2000—appears to be a series of plaster castings of the negative spaces between books on a shelf (not illustrated). The author's explanation is, at best, unclear: "Whiteread has not replicated what the Nazis destroyed, which is the stuff of memory," Brandon writes, "but provided a space for memories to flourish" (125). The reader is left to wonder not only how a grove of trees in a memorial garden "desacralize" it, as at Berlin, or how "destroyed" memories "flourish" in a void, as at Vienna.

Dissociation of Text From Image

In numerous instances, Brandon's content contradicts the stated intention of the book, just as the reproduced images contradict the written word. She declares in the introduction that her book "highlights" the American Civil War photographs of Mathew Brady (3). She has only one paragraph on Brady (109), however, and no illustrations (compared to the many pages and one image devoted to the *Royal Standard of Ur* (14-17) (to be discussed below). To cite another example, she writes, "[f]or the balance of the 20th century, the division between official war art and unofficial, often anti-war art, is *not* ambiguous (58, emphasis added). Yet, on page 132, she concludes that all war art is "hermaphroditic." She adds by way of explanation, "it can, under certain circumstances be both justificatory and oppositional" (132). However, Brandon's partial list of those "certain circumstances" is, in turn, huge. It includes drawings, paintings, sculptures, cemeteries and war memorials (132). Adding to the confusion is the matter of chronology: the opening chapter, "Ten Thousand Years of War Art" begins with Palaeolithic examples. Not only are these not war art, such as the cave paintings of central Europe (ca. 11,000 BCE) (not illustrated) and the "*Venus" of Willendorf*, a fertility carving approximately 25,000 years old (not illustrated), they predate the chapter title by thousands of years. Brandon's discussion of what can be considered war art proper begins with the *Royal Standard,* a didactic, mosaic-covered box from Mesopotamia, dating from ca. 2700 BCE. This object—plundered from Iraq in the 1920s and currently housed in the British Museum—is given pride of place in *Art and War*, with four pages of text and one of the thirty images (15). Accordingly, it would have been an ideal starting point for a discussion of those "sociocultural attitudes" promised in the introduction. The reader might reasonably expect here a critique of the use of war booty as *objets d'arts* in museums, or—given the specifically Anglophile orientation of the book—an examination of the legacy of British imperialism to warmongering and war plundering. Instead, we are told the *Standard* is "like a Toblerone chocolate bar" ... it is "luminous" and "positively glows" (all 14).

Some of the greatest artists in the pantheon of Western art are subject to a similar misreading and misinterpretation. On page 25, Brandon dissects Albrecht Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (ca. 1498) (not illustrated). *Horsemen* is no heroic image of war by this master of the Northern Renaissance, but an unforgettable critique of the anguish caused by it and other catastrophes. Indeed, Brandon correctly notes that it depicts four "terrifying" figures (including War) over whom the "downtrodden lie terrified on the ground" (25). On the next page, however, she contradicts the meaning of this picture and its place in art history with the bald assertion that, "until the 1630s art was not criticizing war; there was no anti-war art." Another example of dissociation of text from image occurs with *And There's Nothing One Can Do About It* of 1810-13 (32) by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. Brandon rightly calls the Spanish master a "virtuoso" on page 31—but this exquisitely-rendered image loses some of its impact when, on page 32, she describes his artistic technique as "rough and coarse." The legacy of Goya continues with the work of contemporary British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman, albeit in distorted form. In 2003, they reworked his oeuvre by adding "happy face" clown heads to his image of tortured corpses, as in their *Insult to Injury* (99). Brandon calls the result, in no uncertain terms, a "desecration" (99). However, that critique is then overturned into an apologia: "by [so doing]" she says in the same sentence, "the Chapmans took ownership of the acts depicted in their own time and thus acknowledged that as humans they are complicit in such tragedies of the past today" (99). Brandon's account gets even more questionable as she continues. "By adding elements of humour," she posits, "[the Chapmans] went further than complicity, and rather, normalized the horrific actions Goya so passionately recorded" (99-100). This confused assessment of the Chapmans concludes, not with

an indictment of these postmodern artists, but with an indictment of the viewer. This position is, at best, reductivist and unconvincing. Indeed, some readers may take exception to being told that, "By understanding [*Insult*] you therefore "know" what is depicted is a part of you" (100).

Viewer "Complicity" and the Dissociation of Empathy From Art Historical Discourse.

While other contemporary Canadian historians of war art, such as the University of Western Ontario's Jonathan Vance (1997) and Carleton University's Maureen Korp (2008),[3] underline that empathy for war's victims is an authentic aesthetic response to war art, this facet of art appreciation is conspicuous by its absence in *Art and War*. Instead, as suggested by her views on the Chapman brothers, Brandon's attitude towards war art centres on an assumption of the "complicity" of its viewers with the perpetrators of war. While this may seem at first to be an overly simplistic critique of her position, the fact remains that she repeatedly puts forward the complicity argument (98-100 and 109-111), does not balance it against any alternative interpretations and consistently presents this idea using the imperative case. The meaning of American artist Jenny Holzer's multimedia work, for example, is reduced to the flat declaration that, "If we can look at evil, we are evil" (98).

Complicity is raised again in the section on war photography. On page 111, Brandon states, the "viewer of the camera's product" is "not an automaton." A few sentences later, though, those same viewers are reduced to automaton like (and collusive) status as she tells us, "by wanting to view tragedy and horror we are complicit in its continuance" (111). In another instance, the author appears to say that complicity encompasses the artist as well as the viewer (albeit in terms that veer toward incomprehensibility):

> Photographs of the returning America war dead [from current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan] or soldiers' hideous injuries do not receive exhibitions like [that of the Abu Ghraib prisoners-of-war did in the mass media] although that may yet come. The former action compounds victims' humiliation, the non-action of the latter lessens our anger, and the photographer is complicit in both reactions. (109)

Many artists, as well as art historians have, in fact, responded to the theme of human misery caused by war with the opposite of complicity. They have shown instead sensitivity and compassion towards war's victims and have done so with great clarity and consistency. Prominent among them are the modern masters in this book, including Goya, Brancuşi and Picasso, and the historians with whose work Brandon is familiar, such as Vance (162). She, by contrast, seems to treat suffering in a cavalier fashion. In attempts at humour, she calls the first chapter a "forced march" through the history of art (14), while the epilogue is entitled, "The Beat Goes On" (131-32). Quotation marks are put around the phrase "ethnic cleansing" in the 1991-2001 wars in the former Yugoslavia, as if to suggest that it did not exist there (96). While *Art and War* includes some renowned female artists, such as Dame Laura Knight and Molly Lamb Bobak (Royal Canadian Academy and Order of Canada), the author's descriptions of war rape seem particularly unsympathetic to the plight of anonymous women caught in contested territories throughout war history. The Rape of the Sabine Women by the Romans in the 3rd century BCE is a well-documented historical event. In Brandon's words, it was not only "mythological," but merely a "breach of hospitality" (28). She raises the issue again with reference to Yugoslavia with Holzer's installation, *Lustmord* (not illustrated) and *Croatian and Muslim*, a painting by Scottish artist, Peter Howson (97) (both of 1994). (China disappears from the narrative after the first chapter: the Rape of Nanking passes without mention.) In her view, *Lustmord* describes "the permeable border between attraction and violence" (98) while Howson's artwork—a nightmarish scene in which the artist imagines a naked female is held down by two men, one of whom puts her head in a toilet whilst the other rapes her from behind—"speaks to the addictive element of violence" (96).

In 1975, American feminist scholar Susan Brownmiller persuasively argued that war rape is nothing less than a war crime in which power is abused by men on the bodies of women. Framed against this historiography, Brandon's analysis that diminishes war rape to something "mythological," a "breach of hospitality" and "addictive"—while it simultaneously eroticizes it as part of the spectrum of sexual "attraction"—can be seen not only as insensitive but as disturbingly *retardataire*.

Objectivity

If some readers of *Art and War* may be led by these quotations to ponder the persistence of misogyny in current Canadian scholarship, others may wish to contemplate the ongoing role of jingoism in military writing, as evidenced by other examples. Brandon's numerous citations of the "War on Terror" omit quotation marks around the phrase (7, 75, 100, 102, 116)—a take on this conflict that seems scarcely credible in a book written in 2007. Similarly, while American investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill demonstrates that the current use of private, denationalized and profit-driven armies by the Americans in Iraq is the most widespread and out-of-control in combat history, in Brandon's words, the four Americans killed in Fallujah on March 31, 2004 were not mercenaries from the notorious Blackwater corporation, but "security guards" (1). Such terminology raises questions about the author's objectivity as a writer of war history. This concern is further underlined by her declaration that military magazines and web sites "remember ... history factually and accurately, stripped perhaps of any judgement call" (117).

Conclusion

The flaws of *Art and War* are far greater than these points of objectivity. The premise of the book is a grand one, but it is fundamentally hampered by the author's choices in remembering and forgetting. What results is a piece of memory work containing oddly limited and highly subjective interpretations of world geography, world history, war history and art history, with significant unexplained gaps and absences. In addition, the art historical language Brandon uses is, in many instances, awkward, unclear, or categorically contradicted by the image it describes. Above all, the author's sociocultural attitude towards gender, class and power is, to put it mildly, disconcerting. Many readers will object to her descriptions of the war experience with the recurring use of expressions that come across as unfeeling and ill-suited to the subject of human loss, trauma and suffering. Brandon's choice of language in the discussion of war rape, to cite one example, reveals a disturbing lack of compassion toward its victims, an ignorance of feminist scholarship and a profound misunderstanding of power relationships involving war, gender and class. Her arguments about "complicity" also call for a rebuttal. For war artists, art historians and art viewers, the will to know about war may arise from painful and conflicting intentions, but surely empathy—not to mention good faith—ought to be assumed to be among them.

War art can take many forms, it can describe many aspects of battle, and it can fulfill many functions, but in Brandon's limited view of total war, her dismissive remarks about the art of those who actually experienced it, her dubious views of war rape and her insistence on the "complicity" of artists and art viewers with war perpetrators, she overlooks important concepts that also affect our understanding of power relations, the history of war and the purposes of war art. The positive and life-affirming aspects of art production and art reception, such as silence-breaking, *katharsis* and empathy, are fit subjects for consideration in any discussion of war art. It is a considerable disappointment to find them missing from *Art and War*. Moreover, the intellectual desire for information about historical events, the belief that visual art can present and interpret that information and the willingness to see art objects—even war art—as empathetic connectors between peoples and events ought not to be confused with outright "complicity" in war-making, as Brandon repeatedly writes. Nor, to extend the argument, is museum-attending or book-reading an act of war crime collusion. If it were, what could then be said of those who knowingly and cynically profit from the business of such complicity, such as curators of war art, as well as those who produce books like *Art and War*? This question is not intended merely to be an *argumentio ad absurdum*, for it goes to the core of this fundamentally misbegotten effort: the moral right of war survivors to describe their experiences if they are able—and the moral obligation of the rest of us to witness the testaments to their suffering without belittlement or sarcasm.

Notes

1. John R. Gillis (1994), as quoted by Laura Brandon in The Canadian War Museum's Art Collection as a Site of Meaning, Memory, and Identity in the 20th Century. PhD diss., Carleton University.
2. Presented in English as The Politics of Memory: The Great Patriotic War and National Identity in Belarus, Third Annual Danylo Seminar, University of Ottawa, October 2007. English translation of draft manuscript courtesy of Rudling, 2007.
3. Draft manuscript courtesy of Korp and read by the author in 2007.

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PETER LATTA

Review of
Tracy, William A. et al., eds. 2005. *In Time and Place: Master Plan 2005 For the Protection, Preservation and Presentation of Alberta's Past.* Edmonton: Alberta Community Development.

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How does an institution make a decision about which artifact to seek out or accept for a collection? How should a government, besieged by requests to take on heritage buildings, collections or to protect landscapes, decide which heritage resource will receive the indefinite support of public funds? The ground seems littered with historic buildings and protected spaces, and museums are stuffed with great things. New levels of understanding about people and their activity, however, define new areas in need of preservation and interpretation. With so much already preserved, how do we know what is missing from the story? This is the problem of a mature society which has enjoyed more than a century of historic preservation.

The Historic Resource Management Branch, Cultural Facilities and Historical Resources Division of Alberta Community Development, has addressed the matter of selecting for collection, exhibition and research squarely and honestly in *Master Plan 2005*. The publication is an excellent step toward helping decision makers—whether volunteer committees, full time curators or civil servants—better understand what heritage resources they have and what is needed to achieve their organizational goals. The purpose of *Master Plan 2005* is to be a "comprehensive guide intended to encourage the preservation of Alberta's heritage resources" (1). To accomplish this, *Master Plan 2005* takes a methodical approach to identifying heritage resources and makes a formerly intuitive process demonstrably rational, precise and, one would hope and expect, supportable by governing and funding authorities.

Using a qualitative research process of managing broad categories of material history which may not immediately seem related, *Master Plan 2005* adopts an approach likely to be acceptable to the intended audience. As a Government of Alberta document, the historical resources of that province are the central focus of the plan but, in truth, these do not seem vastly different in categorization from those of most places.

To establish an understanding of the wealth of material in the province's care, the authors established a thematic framework based on current museological and historical approaches to the preservation and understanding of multiple pasts. Using Alberta's historical resources as a demonstration model, the plan is reasonably adaptable