The Arts of World War I

Books, Prints and Objects Dating to the Period of the “Great War”

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On the March
Volume 1, J.M. Sketchbooks, 1917-1918
University of Victoria Archives

University of Victoria
Legacy Art Galleries, Art History & Visual Studies, Libraries
The Arts of the First World War

The First World War (1914-18) was one of the defining events of the twentieth century. Often known in later years as the ‘Great War’ and the ‘War to end all wars,’ the conflict possessed an international quality not seen in previous centuries. World War I was also the first truly mechanized war, greatly increasing the numbers of fatalities and casualties. The trenches of the Western Front and the employment of poison gas have become lasting emblems of the horrors of modern warfare, but the period was also marked by countless acts of heroism and personal sacrifice. To mark the one hundredth anniversary of the commencement of the war, this exhibition explores the ways in which the varied experiences of soldiers and civilians were expressed through words, images, and objects. These items have been gathered from the collections of the University of Victoria and from private collections on Vancouver Island.

The Home Front

Canada joined World War I with the rest of the British Empire in August 1914. The Canadian Expeditionary Force was involved in numerous important engagements on the Western Front. The most celebrated victory was the capture of Vimy Ridge (9-12 April 1917), an attack that cost in excess of 10,500 Canadian lives. The importance of this event is not merely military; Vimy Ridge was celebrated in later years as a symbol of Canadian national pride and self-identity, much as Gallipoli was for Australia and New Zealand. Canadian forces also suffered massive losses in the Battle of Passchendaele in October 1917.

The human and economic impact of the war was apparent in different ways across Canada. There were patriotic movements supplemented by sermons given in churches. An example of the fervour of the period was the wearing of ‘Knit or Fight’ badges by Canadian women. Disaffection for the war was, however, signalled by the anti-conscription riots in Québec in 1918. The war period directly affected the lives of the inhabitants of Canada. Problems included food and fuel shortages and government restrictions upon union activities and the operation of a free press. The most destructive event in Canada itself was the Halifax explosion of 6 December 1917. A collision in the harbour between a munitions ship and another vessel caused an explosion and tsunami that is estimated to have killed 2,000 and injured another 9,000 in Halifax.
Trench Warfare

This term used to describe military engagements in which opposing armies make use of static lines of trenches as a means to protect themselves from enemy fire. Earthworks have been employed in military contexts from ancient times, but the particular character of modern trench warfare derives from technological advancements in small arms and artillery in the late nineteenth century. These advancements were not matched by increased mobility for the units of fighting men, necessitating the construction of lines of fortified trenches. Between the trenches lay a contested zone commonly known as ‘no man’s land.’ Trench warfare was a dominant feature of World War I, but similar tactics were employed during the American Civil War (1861-65), the Second Boer War (1899-1902), and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

The most extensive networks of military trenches were constructed in northern France and Belgium (i.e. the Western Front). These features were dug in zigzags or stepped patterns. The most common arrangement was to have a front line and behind this a series of complete or partially-complete trenches that could be employed in the case of a retreat. Although they offered some protection for soldiers, the trenches remained vulnerable to artillery bombardment and sniper fire. Life in the trenches was often uncomfortable, unsanitary, and perilous, sometimes leading to physical illness and long-term psychological trauma (such as ‘shell shock’). Trenches were also utilized in the Middle East and other theatres of war.

The War in the Islamic World

On 2 August 1914 a secret Ottoman-German alliance was signed. The Ottoman empire formally joined the war on 29 October of the same year. The Middle Eastern theatre of war stretched from Egypt and Sudan in the west to Iran and Central Asia in the east. Ottoman troops were also involved in the Balkans in 1916. The most important Ottoman victory was the Gallipoli campaign (25 April 1915 – 9 January 1916). Turkish troops successfully repelled the attempt by British, French, and Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) forces to take control of the strait connecting the Aegean to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea.

Other significant campaigns were fought in Iraq and in the Ottoman provinces of Syria
(i.e. those areas now occupied by Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestine Authority). The battles in Iraq were primarily fought around the lands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (the region known as Mesopotamia). The Ottoman Fourth Army contested these lands with troops drawn from the British Empire, particularly the Indian Expeditionary Force. The Sinai and Palestine campaigns lasted from the Ottoman attack on the Suez canal in 1915 to the signing of the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918. This conflict is perhaps best known for the Arab Revolt and the charismatic figure of T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935, known as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’).

The division of the Middle East after World War I created the British Mandate states of Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq, and the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon.

**Personal Possessions**

Soldiers all carried with them personal possessions to remind themselves of family of friends. The painting in the J.M. diary entitled *Little Grey Home in the Wet* depicts an officer’s sleeping quarters. Aside from the maps and other military equipment, the image is notable for a shelf containing family photographs. Other objects were sent to soldiers as charitable donations, and two examples appear in the exhibition. The first is a Christmas tin sent to the front lines Christmas 1914 and bearing the image of Princess Mary. The second is a small volume of soldiers’ poetry that was given to enlisted men.

Soldiers in the trenches showed remarkable ingenuity to create around themselves things that would have given some sense of the familiarity of home life. One example is the manufacture of objects out of spent artillery and other weaponry (i.e. trench art).
Another was the production of newspapers that were circulated among the men. The best known of these is the *Wipers Times* (‘Wipers’ was slang for Ypres), later incorporated into the *B.E.F Times* (B.E.F are the initials of the British Expeditionary Force). These newspapers are remarkable for their satire, particularly of senior officers and the general conduct of the war. Facsimiles of these publications are exhibited along with two original copies of a Canadian trench newspaper known as the *Listening Post*. Another Canadian trench publication of this period went by the name of *The Dead Horse Corner Gazette*.

**Letters Home**

Many soldiers’ letters have survived from the period 1914-18. These pieces of correspondence give historically valuable, and often poignant accounts of the experiences of initial training, travel, active service, injury, and recuperation. They are perhaps one of the best ways to understand the human dimensions of war. One example comes from a letter (dated 13 September 1916) sent by Sergeant Frank Hames to his wife Violet in St. Mary’s, Ontario. He writes:

> ...Poor Charlie was killed on the 9th of Sept. I was by his side when he was killed and I don’t know yet how I escaped the same fate, but one thing, he didn’t suffer as he was killed instantly. A big shell called a nine point, weighing over one hundred pounds hit him so you can see he didn’t stand any chance. But it’s a great blow for me, for we were always together ever since he came out here, and I can tell you I miss him very much. There are no St. Mary’s men in my Platoon now, and I am all on my own again.

It was particularly vital that communications were maintained with prisoners-of-war. In
Britain this was done through the Central Prisoners of War Committee, an organization comprising the British Red Cross and the Order of St John. The committee sent emergency parcels containing food, tea, cocoa, tinned milk, and cigarettes. Over 2.5 million parcels were dispatched to prisoners-of-war between 1914 and 1918. In addition, the Committee sometimes able to send games in order to alleviate the boredom of prolonged confinement. The other role of the Committee was to facilitate the sending of letters to and from the prison camps.

**Trench Art**

The term ‘trench art’ is used to describe a wide variety of objects fashioned from equipment associated with military activities (known as matériel). Soldiers are known to have recycled weaponry and other materials in earlier periods, but it was during the Trench Warfare of 1914-1918 that the practice became most widespread. Spent artillery shells and bullets were particularly popular media during this period. Larger shells were made into many different types of object, including flower vases, tobacco boxes, ashtrays, and lamps. Bullets could be transformed into ornamental knives or letter openers through the addition of a blade set into the tip. Decorative techniques included hammering, chasing (engraving), and inlay. Trench art sometimes incorporates regimental emblems or the names of battles, but it is equally common to find that the ornamentation has no direct connection to warfare.

Trench art continued to be produced after the cessation of hostilities in 1918, and it is often difficult to date objects with certainty (the bases of artillery shells do sometimes carry a date of manufacture, however). The practice of decorating artillery shells was not restricted to the trenches of France and Belgium. Artisans in Damascus and Jerusalem produced lavishly ornamented vases and boxes, sometimes carrying Arabic or Hebrew inscriptions. It is not uncommon for pieces to carry the date of 1 October 1918, signifying the capture of the Syrian capital by British, Australian and Arab forces. Decorated artillery shells were also made to commemorate the siege of the Chinese port of Tsingtao to an Anglo-Japanese force (31 October – 7 November 1914). Art continues to be made from matériel in areas of conflict across the world.
Art and the Avante-Garde

The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of many important movements in the arts. Some of these groups brought together painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, and those involved in the dramatic arts. The major creative figures of this period had a profound impact upon the development of the arts through to the present. Many artists were fascinated by the increasing influence of technology upon everyday life in the Modern Age. This was often seen as a positive phenomenon, although such views were challenged by the huge loss of life to mechanized weaponry during World War I.

Notable champions of the new technology in the pre-war years were the Italian Futurists, led by the poet, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944). He was the author of the Futurist Manifesto, first published in a newspaper in Bologna in 1909. The manifesto seeks for the destruction of museums and libraries and embraces objects associated with modern society including cars, aeroplanes, and machine guns. There is also a glorification of war as ‘the only cure for the world.’ The British response to Futurism was the Vorticist Movement. The central figure of Vorticism was the writer and painter, Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957). He was responsible for the publication of the two issues of Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex (1914 and 1915), each bringing together writings and art by members of the Vorticist Movement.

The experience of serving during the War had a profound impact upon the later careers of Wyndham Lewis and other members of the Vorticist Movement. The same can also be said of German artists such as Otto Dix (1891-1969). Among his statements on the war was a powerful set of fifty etchings, entitled Der Krieg, published in 1924.

Memories of the War

The experiences of warfare between 1914 and 1918 were recorded in many forms by soldiers, doctors, nurses, and civilians. These included memoirs, poetry, paintings, and drawings. Some works were written for publication, but many others seem to have functioned as private recollections meant to be read only by close family and friends.

The most famous English-language memoirs dealing with this period are probably T. E.
Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), Robert Graves’ (1895–1985) *Goodbye to all that* (1929), and Siegfried Sassoon’s (1886–1967), *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930). The war years also play a significant part in Vera Brittain’s (1893–1970) *Testament of Youth* (1933). Sassoon had been awarded the Military Cross in 1916, but in the following year he refused to serve again in the war. Sassoon was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland having been declared unfit for service. During this period he met and mentored the poet, Wilfrid Owen (1893–1918). Other famous poets associated with World War I include Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), Edmund Blunden (1896–1974), and Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918).

The best known German novel to come from this period is Erich Maria Remarque’s (1898–1970), *Im Westen nichts Neues*, first published in 1928. Literally translating as ‘In the West nothing new,’ the work was published in English as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Ernst Jünger (1895–1998) published his war diary privately in 1920, but this work came to wider notice through its republication in 2004. Titled in English, *The Storm of Steel*, the book is one of the most harrowing accounts of the trench warfare. Unlike many of his contemporaries on both sides of the conflict, Jünger seems to have retained his sense of the heroism and necessity of war.

**Children’s Literature**

During and after World War I publications were produced for children of different ages. These included books and journals, such as the issue of *Young Canada* (1917) included in the exhibition. Many of these works stress the heroism of war as well as reflecting upon the ways in which children could contribute to the wider war effort. A prolific author of children’s books before and during the war years was Frederick Sadleir Brereton (1872–1957). He specialized in adventures
with links to the British empire. During the war he served with distinction in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Numerous children’s books dealing with World War I have been published in recent years. Some of these take the stories of real people, combining fictionalized reconstructions with primary source material. The emphasis tends to be upon the experience of children and of younger men and women caught within the conflict. An example of this genre is Charlie’s War (2013), produced for the Imperial War Museum. These books also pay greater attention to the relationships between those on the front lines and the families they left behind (for example, in the form of letters sent between them). The experience of animals have also been the subject of fiction, most notably Michael Morpugo’s, War Horse (published in 1982 and then dramatized for stage in 2007 and for film in 2011).

The Mysterious J. M.

A two-volume collection of drawings and watercolours from the First World War is held in the Special Collections Department of the University Library. These bound albums were acquired by the library in the 1960s or 1970s. No record survives concerning the identity of the seller. Entitled Sketches of the War, the two volumes contain landscapes, interiors, and figure compositions that deal with many aspects of wartime life in France and Belgium during 1917 and 1918. One page of preparatory sketches in pencil survives, indicating that the remainder are to be considered as finished compositions.

Images in the two volumes are all signed with a monogram made up of the letters J and M (perhaps with the addition of a small C or O). More information is provided by the dedication that faces the title page of volume one. The dedication is ‘To my Daughter

Inscription to Daughter Adèle
Volume 1, J.M. Sketchbooks, 1917-1918
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Adèle’ and is signed at the end as ‘J.M.’ The emblem at the top of the page is that of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and one painting in volume one carries the initials, R. H. A. (Royal Horse Artillery). It is known that J. M. survived the war because one painting is dated 1920. The high quality of the draughtsmanship and painting throughout this two volume work indicate that J. M. probably received some training as a painter or illustrator before the war. It is possible that he used these skills in the production maps or reconnaissance drawings.

Further Reading

http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war


For the Futurist manifesto, see: http://vserver1.cscs.lsa.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html

For digitized images from the J.M. diary, see: http://spcoll.library.uvic.ca/Digit/JM%20Web/index.htm


**Acknowledgements**

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**List of Works**

*Scanned images of poems written by Captain H. V. S. Page and attached in: Edmund Candler, The Long Road to Baghdad.*

C. 1919-21
McPherson Library: D568.5 C2
Collection of Mr. H. V. S. Page, formerly Captain in the 125 Napier’s Rifles

“My beloved Poilus.”
Agnes Warner
St. John: N.B. Barnes & co., 1917
McPherson Library: D570.9 M9 1917

*Colin the Scout*
Frederick Sadleir Brereton; illustrated by Cyril Holloway
London: Blackies & Son, c. 1920
McPherson Library: PZ7 B667Col
Collection of Dr. C. Partridge

*Naked Warriors*
Herbert Read; cover illustration by Wyndham Lewis
London: Art & Letters, 1919
McPherson Library, Special Collections: PR6035 E24N35 1919
Collection of C. J. Fox
The Fall of Tsingtau: with a Study of Japan’s Ambitions in China
Jefferson Jones
Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1915
McPherson Library: D571 J6

Negro Combat Troops in the World War: The Story of the 371st Infantry
Chester D. Heywood; pen and ink drawings by D. Lester Dickson
McPherson Library: D570.33 371st H4

The Armoured-Car Scouts: A Tale of the Campaign in the Caucasus
Series Title: Stories of War
Frederick Sadleir Brereton; illustrated by Archibald Webb
London: Blackie, 1918
McPherson Library: PZ7 B667Arm
Collection of Dr. C. Partridge

The Pirate Aeroplane
Captain Gilson; illustrated by Christopher Clark
London: Henry Frowde, 1913
McPherson Library: PZ7 G567Pir
Collection of Dr. C. Partridge

Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex. No. 1, June 20, 1914
Edited by Wyndham Lewis
London; New York; Toronto: John Lane, The Bodley Head; John Lane Company; Bell & Cockburn, 1914
McPherson Library, Special Collections: PR6023 E97Z6129 no. 1
Collection of C. J. Fox

Edited by Wyndham Lewis
London; New York; Toronto: John Lane, The Bodley Head; John Lane Company; Bell & Cockburn, 1915
McPherson Library, Special Collections:

PR6023 E97Z6129 no. 2
Collection of C. J. Fox

The Long Road to Baghdad
Edmund Candler (late official “Eye-witness” in Mesopotamia)
Gift of Mr H. V. S. Page, formerly Captain in the 125 Napier’s Rifles
McPherson Library: D568.5 C2

Compiled from official sources.
Egyptian Expeditionary Force; C. H. C. (Charles Harry Clinton) Pirie-Gordon (1883-1969); Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby (1861-1936)
London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919
McPherson Library: D568.7 G7 1919

Nativity
Siegfried Sassoon; with designs by Paul Nash
London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927
Collection of Marcus Milwright

Revolt in the Desert
Thomas Edward Lawrence
London: Jonathan Cape, 1927
Collection of Marcus Milwright

With Allenby in Palestine
Frederick Sadleir Brereton; illustrated by Frank Gillett
London; Glasgow: Blackie and Son Ltd., c. 1920
McPherson Library: PR6003 R355 W53
Collection of Mr. Hugh Maurice

A Muse at Sea
E. Hilton Young
London: Sidgewick & Jackson Ltd., 1919
Collection of Marcus Milwright
Ashtray in the Form of an Officer’s Cap
Made from a 90mm brass artillery shell casing (dated 1917) with an additional silver strap. 1918 or later.
Collection of Marcus Milwright

Introduction, notes and glossary by Patrick Beaver; foreword by Henry Williamson
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D501 W5 1988

The Wipers Times, including for the first Time in one Volume a Facsimile Reproduction of the complete Series of the famous Wartime Trench Magazines
Editor: Lieut.-Col. F. J. Roberts; sub-editor Major J. H. Pearson; with a foreword by Field Marshall Lord Plumer.
London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1930
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D501 W5 1930

Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography
Robert Graves
London: Jonathan Cape, 1929
Second expurgated issue of the first edition
Collection of Marcus Milwright

Brass Pyxis with Silver and Copper Inlay
Damascus, c. 1918. Made from 110mm brass artillery shell casings, one of which is dated 1911
Collection of Mr. Murray Webb and Mrs. Jean Webb

Young Canada: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys
Thirty-eighth annual volume
Toronto: William Briggs, 1917
McPherson Library: PZ5 Y67 v.38 1917

1914 & Other Poems
Rupert Brooke
London: Sidgewick & Jackson, 1915
Fifteenth Impression (October 1916)
Collection of Marcus Milwright

Wheels
Edited by Edith Sitwell
First Cycle (1916); Second Cycle (1917); Third Cycle (1918); Fifth Cycle (1920)
Oxford: Blackwell, 1916-21
McPherson Library, Special Collections: PR1225 W5182

The Listening Post
Issue no. 2 (30 August 1915)
France: British Expeditionary Force and Canadian Army, 7th Battalion.
Printed by permission of the officer commanding 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion.
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D501 L67

The B. E. F. Times: A Facsimile Reprint of the Trench Magazine
London: H. Jenkins, 1918
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D526.2 B15

Souvenir Belt
C. 1915-18
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Chiari Society of New York
John R. Chiari, M.D.
21 East 27th Street
New York, New York 10016

The Listening Post
Issue no. 2 (30 August 1915)
France: British Expeditionary Force and Canadian Army, 7th Battalion.
Printed by permission of the officer commanding 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion.
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D501 L67

The B. E. F. Times: A Facsimile Reprint of the Trench Magazine
London: H. Jenkins, 1918
McPherson Library, Special Collections: D526.2 B15

Souvenir Belt
C. 1915-18
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Souvenir Belt
C. 1918
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb
Coal Scuttle
after 1915
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Model Biplane
1914-18
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Humidor
c. 1917
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Decorated Artillery Shell
c. 1918
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Decorated Artillery Shell
c. 1914-18
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Decorated Artillery Shell
c. 1917-18
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Decorated Artillery Shell
c. 1918
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Ornamental Case
c. 1918
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Ashtray
c. 1918
Collection of Mr. William Thackeray

Map Showing the Canadian Occupied Zone of Germany
1918
Collection of Mr. William Thackeray

Basilique d’Albert
Marcel Augis
Hand coloured aquatint on paper
1915
Gift of Ian Back
Legacy Art Galleries: U007.32.8-1

Intérieur de la Cathédrale d’Ypres
Marcel Augis
1915
Gift of Ian Back
Legacy Art Galleries: U007.32.8-2

Hand-drawn Intelligence Maps
Drawn by Reginald Hillier
Collection of Christian and Joanne Frappell

Brass Gift Box
Collection of Margaret and Tony Threlfall

The Soldier Poets: Songs of the Fighting Men
London: Erskine MacDonald, 1916
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

The Great War as I Saw It
Brigadier General G. S. Tuxford
Collection of Mrs. Patricia Tuxford Robertson

Letters to and from Sgt. A. F. Burton
Collection Mrs. Sylvia Burton

Gift Box
J. S. Fry and Sons
Collection of Mrs. Sylvia Burton

Canada in Khaki: A Tribute to the Officers and Man Now Serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

Postcard, Journal, and Medal of Antoine Piolet
Collection of Mr. Gerard Dumas

The Gold Stripe: A Tribute to the British Columbia Men who have been killed, crippled and wounded in the Great War
Vancouver: Pacific Printers, c. 1918
Collection of Mr. Stephen Lamb

The Great War: The Standard History of the All-Europe Conflict
Edited by H. W. Wilson
Collection of Marcus Milwright
Young Canada: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys
Thirty-eighth annual volume
Toronto: William Briggs, 1917
McPherson Library: PZ5 Y67 v.38 1917

The War Sketchbooks of J.M.
1917-1920
Special Collections, University of Victoria

Charlie's War, Illustrated: Remembering World War One
Mick Manning and Brita Granström
London and Sydney: Imperial War Museum with Franklin Watts, 2013
Collection of Loukas Milwright

Selection of Aeroplane Photographs covering Operations of Canadian Corps and Sectors held from 1915-1918
Compiled by Lieut. C. C. Brooks, M.C.
Intelligence, General Staff, Canadian Corps
London: Barklay and Fry Ltd, 1919
McPherson Library, Special Collections: MM199

Dear Mable: Love Letters of a Rookie
E. Streeter with illustrations by G. William Breck
New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1918
McPherson Library: D526.2 S85

L'Oeuvre de Guerre de Lucien Jonas
Illustrations by Lucien Jonas and text by A. Brisson
McPherson Library: D527 J68

The Harlem Hellfighters
Max Brooks, illustrated by Caanan White
New York: Broadway Books, 2014
Collection of Marcus Milwright

The Palestine Campaigns
Colonel A. P. Wavell
McPherson Library: D568.7 W3 1929

Not for Fools
H. Dennis Bradley, with designs by Rilette and Jacques D'Or
London : Grant Richards Ltd., 1920
McPherson Library: D525 B73

Earl Kitchener and the Great War: The heroic Career of One whose Memory will live as long as the British Empire, including the comprehensive Story of the Battles and great Events of the World War
Captain Logan Howard-Smith, with additional chapters by Thomas Trusler and Viscount James Bryce
Toronto: The John C. Winston Co., 1916
McPherson Library: D544 H68

Drawing of Trenches
1917
Graphite on Paper
Alexander Young Jackson
Loan organized by Robert Fulton and Gordon Frazer