Clouded Vision: Art and Exhibition During WWI

by

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Abstract

During the First World War, the first efforts to memorialize the conflict were heavily influenced by the propaganda characteristic of the era. The style of modernism found new precedence during the conflict due to its unfiltered portrayal of war. Official British war artists were commissioned by the British War Memorial Committee (BWMC) starting in 1918, and many such as C.R.W. Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis contributed modernist works. These actions are indicative of those that drove the British government to become a propaganda machine. Firstly, the BWMC manipulated the growing popularity of modern artists and adapted their work to fit the government's narrative. Secondly, the subjectivity of the modern works, an element that contributed to their popularity, was distorted as the BWMC saw fit. Lastly, the BWMC was founded by leaders who saw themselves as harbingers of culture, with little concern as to the everyday hardship the conflict brought. After the collapse of the BWMC, these works were acquired by the Imperial War Museum (IWM). The IWM tended to either place these works in their archive or display them in a very traditional manner, at odds with the themes and subject matter of the works. Thus, I argue, these paintings have been remembered for their involvement in memorialization politics rather than the artworks' own interpretations of an unprecedented conflict.

Introduction

During the First World War, the commission of official war art and plans for its exhibition by the British War Memorials Committee (BWMC) as well as traditional forms of display within the Imperial War Museum (IWM) were heavily influenced by war propaganda rather than their supposed efforts. Modernist artists and their work became more accessible for public consumption as the First World War raged, and government and museum officials both raced to procure depictions of the conflict. These artists transformed from outcasts on the edge of the art world to purveyors of true images of the conflict. The ways in which the BWMC and IWM procured these artworks and their plans for display were heavily influenced by the British propagandistic practices that were occurring simultaneously. As the war went on, mediums such as photography and film became popular ways of disseminating propaganda. In contrast, the perceived permanence of the paintings produced by modernist artists as a part of the BWMC scheme conveyed a sense of memorialization which both organizations attempted to lean into. This was an attempt to keep focus on the war effort, even as the First World War came to an end and many wished to leave the conflict behind them.

Once subversive and shocking to the 'British Establishment', modern art groups were kept on the outskirts of British art society pre-WWI. This establishment, which consisted primarily of national museums along with conservative press, acted as the gatekeepers of the art establishment in London. Rather than falling into obscurity at the start of the war, as their critics hoped, modernist artists took an interest in the conflict and began to provide their own representations of the conflict. These portrayals radically differed in appearance, when compared to traditional depictions of war. Modern war painting was characterized by "intense concentration on the materiality of paint and surface...and an emphasis on freshness...vigour and

energy" (Malvern 45). Academic war painting lacked the urgency suggested by modern paintings, and treated the viewer as an outside observer, rather than immersing them in the subject matter (Malvern 48). Modern painting was considered a step away from academic painting, regardless of subject matter. 'Peace pictures' were a popularly circulated form of academic art during the WWI era. They provided an escape from the conflict for those on the home front and reminded soldiers on the front lines of the homes they wanted to return to. These pictures were traditional in subject matter, as the majority of them depicted landscapes and included the presence of women. These images were rooted in Victorian tradition and harkened back to a time before the war. Although these forms of painting were drastically different, both would serve similar purposes by the end of the war. While academic painting rewarded the viewer with an idyllic, idealistic view of England, both academic and modern artists served to remind the viewer of a constant patriotic duty, whether or not their view of it was favorable.

During WWI, paintings frequently competed with the mediums of photography and film in providing unique representations of the conflict. Photography was used previously in conflicts including the Crimean War, the American Civil War and the Spanish-American War, and discussed within scholarly communities as an artistic medium for several decades. However, it was still popularly seen as an objective and scientific medium. When it came to depicting real-life events, people flocked to exhibitions containing photographs of the front, but gradually grew to distrust their authenticity. Photography, much like film, was often staged, with soldiers serving as actors. These materials were then evaluated for content and censored accordingly, to prevent the 'enemy' from procuring accurate information about the military and their practices (Sanders 124). The censorship rampant within these mediums was felt with war paintings as well, but to a lesser extreme. The inherent falseness of these images only served to solidify

paintings' status as a fine art. These mediums also supplied the dichotomy between photography as a 'witnessing' medium and painting as an 'experiencing' medium, with painting providing the de facto depiction of WWI.

Propaganda took many forms throughout the WWI era, with practices utilized from 1914-16 focusing primarily on propaganda abroad. This strategy was prefaced with the idea that "it is better to influence those who can influence others than attempt a direct appeal to the mass of the population". Thus, the Foreign Office in London specifically targeted professionals such as journalists, teachers, etc. when sending their materials to neutral and enemy countries (Sanders 101). The significance of these early propaganda techniques was that they were a deliberate turn away from internal morale. The people of Great Britain widely supported the war effort, answering the call for unity and volunteering themselves to help the cause (Haste 22). These practices were also an extension of British personal diplomacy, which reflected on a "policy-making elite" who were not knowledgeable about the power of mass public opinion (Sanders 101). Rather, the posters and pamphlets resulting from this outreach were to be of the highest literary quality and the British case argued delicately. These elitist sensibilities were later to be found in the handling of the official war art scheme.

In the years 1917-18, Britain turned its attention to more internal matters. As the Allied nations faced increased losses and morale at the home front suffered, the government set out to 'remobilize' its citizens. Focus shifted from influencing the opinion of intermediaries to directly influencing public opinion. There was no coordinated official propaganda focused towards the home front until 1917. The National War Aims Committee (NWAC) filled this gap. The NWAC had two main purposes: to counteract any pacifist propaganda and to instill a sense of determination to maintain the ideals of Liberty and Justice which were the cause of the Allies

(Haste 41). Propaganda became more simplified, achieving the NWAC's goal by fabricating images and information, then widely proliferating it to provide justification for the conflict (Haste 3). The official war paintings served a similar purpose by rejecting a pacifist message through display of war. These paintings were reminders of the sacrifices of many throughout the conflict, not to establish WWI as a brutal, modernized conflict, but to establish the necessary hardships to defend the motherland. This led to further emphasis on the ideals of Liberty and Justice, especially when the BWMC paintings were collected and displayed by the IWM after the conflict.

As a part of the Department of Information (DoI), later the Ministry of Information (MoI), the BWMC formed in March 1918, following the transformation of the British Department of Information into the Ministry of Information. Lord Beaverbrook became the chair of the latter, who sought to change the focus of government-sponsored war art used as propaganda only during the conflict to a collection of artworks with longer lasting national value. The committee had a further ambitious goal of creating a Hall of Remembrance in which to memorialize the artworks they commissioned throughout the conflict. The proposed design for the Hall planned to incorporate the Classical and Renaissance tropes with the modern artwork to be displayed. Through these choices, the Committee saw themselves as equals to Renaissance patrons, due to their "humanist ideals, their noble civic purpose, and the very size of the scheme" (Walton 396). The BWMC goals thus followed the propagandistic ideals of Justice and Liberty put forth in earlier British propaganda.

Originally the National War Museum, the IWM was founded by Alfred Mond, Martin Conway, and Charles Ffoulkes in March 1917. All three men were well-connected, and lead in a Victorian, scholarly manner commonly found in museums during the late 19th century

(Wellington 48). The IWM was established to procure objects of many kinds pertaining to WWI. They were fierce competitors of the BWMC, who wished to acquire the war artwork commissioned by the committee for themselves. When these artworks were acquired by the IWM, they were housed and displayed similarly to other artifacts, including objects such as weaponry and personal memorabilia. The IWM exhibition displays were shallow in physical depth, providing a map-like understanding of these objects and the purpose they served during the war (Pearce 139). This focused display method solidified the museum's view as objective, thus perpetuating ideas similar to those included in propaganda. The museum aimed to be a place of reverence and reflection, and yet its focus on objects used to create and portray violence suggests a celebration of the events these objects depict (Malvern 178). Due to its nature as a museum that seeks to enlighten, the IWM cannot be said to responsibly memorialize a bitter conflict. Rather, the IWM used its war-related objects, such as its art collection, as propaganda to celebrate Britain's military might, and continues to do so to this day.

Popular Mediums of Expression During WWI

The modes of expression that were most commonly used during WWI can be broken down into two categories: painting, which can be broken down further into academic and modern modes, and photography, including the rise of film. Each medium had its own distinctive styles as well as arguments for and against their use in depicting the conflict. The main concern of the general public was which medium could portray the conflict with the most inherent 'truth'. To this day, there is no one correct answer to this inquiry. It is difficult to discern the truth of any event not witnessed first-hand, especially when said event is depicted by an artist, whose viewpoint is always subjective. What is certain, however, is that popular opinion about each medium did shift as the conflict went on, in the public's search for the most accurate depictions of conflict.

Academic painting was an artistic style put forth by established groups such as the Royal Academy of London. These paintings had a classical composition style, which Malvern describes as the antithesis of modern painting: the absence of "subjectivity, corporeality, and social existence" (44). This style can be seen in academic war paintings of the era, most notably James Beadle's *Zero-Hour* (fig. 1). As a member of the Royal Academy, Beadle's work can properly exemplify this artistic style. The painting depicts a group of British soldiers waiting in a trench to go 'over the top' and march forward into battle (Malvern 44). An event such as this would have been extremely loud, disorienting, and chaotic. None of these elements seem present in this painting. Instead, the painting may be compared to *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 2), in which a violent, chaotic event has been both pacified and largely falsified. Both images serve the purpose of depicting a certain event during conflict without emotion. In the latter piece, death is seen as a heroic, chivalric act, while in the former, the soldiers depicted are not shell-shocked nor

weary of the battle they are to take place in, but instead, stoically accepting their duty to their country.

Using Malvern's three aforementioned criteria, we can properly analyze *Zero-Hour* as a component of academic war painting. Firstly, there is absolute objectivity incorporated into the piece, with the inclusion of a foreground, middle ground, and background. The foreground of mud and rubble places the viewer at a remove from the painting. There is no single person with whom the viewer can identify or empathize, the soldiers are there simply to be gazed upon. Secondly, none of the soldiers show any corporeality. Although the sergeant is checking his watch and another soldier peers over the divide, there is no interiority implied in their actions. Attention is strictly given to their forms, to such an extent that any emotion is completely absent. The soldiers figure as symbols of the conflict more than individual human beings.

Lastly, there is no social component of the painting, in which prevalent social issues may be discussed. The men shown are on the brink of risking their lives, and yet the painting provides no cues for this topic to be discussed. They seem perpetually stuck in this moment in time, with no indication of events prior to or following this moment. Thus, the viewer is both unexposed to any violence and reassured in the reputation of those fighting in the name of their country. They can feel secure in their viewing of the conflict and no moral dilemmas arise from the contemplation of what these men are about to undertake.

Following similar criteria, the so-called 'peace pictures' painted during WWI were created as a respite from daily life during wartime and an idealistic representation of what soldiers were striving to protect (Lady's Pictorial). The most popular genre of these pictures were landscapes of the English countryside, such as that depicted in *Peace* and *The Tranter's Cart: An Autumn Evening in Berkshire* (fig. 3 and 4). These images were very similar in what they depicted,

namely, rural landscapes in which examples of leisure activities or labor are undertaken at a slow, deliberate pace. These similarities were deliberate, as the uniform idea of an idyllic England would make fighting in an unprecedented war seem worth fighting for, even to the most common man. This collectivity helped citizens to band together, regardless of background or status, as they could easily visualize what their country was fighting to protect. These pieces acted as a "landscape of retreat" for those living in Britain, and for some, functioned as a regular part of their daily lives, where they would seek respite from the trials of each day.

Similar to those at the home front, these images also provided soldiers with respite from the day-to-day experience of fighting in the conflict. Indeed, pictures such as these gave soldiers an idealized vision of what was at stake in the conflict. Peace pictures were considered as "categorically feminine" as opposed to the coded-masculine war paintings proliferating simultaneously. These pictures effectively 'feminize' the landscape by depicting it as unfailingly beautiful and needing protection from the British soldiers fighting on the front lines (Malvern 48). Thus, these paintings solidified the dichotomy of the 'feminine' home front and 'masculine' front lines. These ideas ignore the presence of women on the front lines serving their country as nurses, drivers, and more, as well as the men who stayed home due to a number of physical and familial reasons. This dichotomy also replicates the binary of colonial discourse in which colonial territory is feminized as land needing to be controlled while the frontier is a masculine space in which resources are theirs for the taking. Using traditional ideas about gender, conflict, and the Empire, academic painting provided depictions of Britain which public opinion could rally behind on their way to victory.

. Modernist painting, by contrast, came into prominence during the course of the war. Indeed, many members of the European avant-garde movement saw the conflict as an

opportunity for a renewal of their cultures and participating in it as “purgative” and “beneficial” for the individual. The conflict served to create new opportunities for these subversive artists by giving them new, unprecedented subject matter and a chance to further their careers (Malvern 6). Modernism’s break from tradition would make it the perfect choice in which to depict WWI, as both the movement and the conflict would provide sights previously unseen by the majority of the nation. The sense of ‘otherness’ that proliferated during the conflict, due to increased mechanized warfare and widespread mobilization was, according to some, best seen through the canvases produced by modern artists.

As such, these artists could potentially fulfill their established duty to their country by depicting the conflict through their unique artistry. Artists C.R.W. Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis, both later contributors of the BWMC, compounded their patriotic efforts by joining the fight themselves. While Lewis served in the infantry, Nevinson was a volunteer ambulance driver for the Red Cross in France and Belgium, and later transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and the 3rd London General Hospital in 1915 (Malvern 141). After being discharged the same year, Nevinson took part in each subsequent London exhibition during the conflict and became an official war artist from 1917 onwards (Malvern 141). Along with conveying a previously unknown sense of ‘otherness’, the concept of the ‘soldier-artist’ was another key part of modernism. Also true for artists of differing artistic styles, the work of the ‘soldier-artist’ was established as the most credible of all depictions of the front. Due to their status as enlisted men at the front, these individuals had the distinctive power to depict events as they happened, and could do so within reason (Wellington 143). The authority associated with modernists would expand as more artists of this style were hired on as official war artists throughout the conflict.

Using Malvern's three criteria of "subjectivity, corporeality, and social existence" once more, we also can see how modern war painting significantly differs from that of academic war painting (44). Looking at Wyndham Lewis's *A Battery Shelled* (fig. 5), these traits feature prominently. The painting lacks a foreground, leaving the viewer without a vantage point in which to view the subject matter objectively. With only the chaos of the middle ground and background, the viewer is left to decide the meaning of the piece for themselves (Malvern 106). The piece also has a warped sense of corporeality, as the three officers on the left side have green-tinted skin and seem at a remove from the battle raging just behind them. The soldiers themselves take on barely human form, resembling disparate parts taken together to assemble a machine. It becomes hard to differentiate the soldiers from the buildings and equipment that flank them on either side of the canvas. Lastly, this piece has an overwhelming sense of social existence. Compared to Beadle's *Zero-Hour*, this painting created as part of the BWMC war art scheme addresses social conflict head-on. The officers to the left convey indifference and a lack of emotion, even as one looks over to observe the action, contrasting the academic depictions of officers as stern but fatherly figures to their men. The typical heroic depictions of soldiers as fit, healthy men have also been replaced by abstract notions of soldiers without seeming consciousness or identity.

By comparing the aesthetic elements of these two paintings, the wide disparity between both styles becomes clear. Academic war paintings allow the viewer to gain an understanding of the scene before them, and thus feel in control of their viewing experience. This viewing could help to reinforce the idea of a nation going forward to defend itself from its enemies, due to both the subject matter and the control the viewer feels they have. From the observer's point of view, this is their fight, these are the soldiers fighting for them, and thus they ideally would feel pride

in such images and determination to help their country remain strong during the conflict. There is little emotion within the piece, as this aspect is meant to be taken up by the viewer. The idea of a patriotic fight for freedom thus became associated with Britain, while death and destruction was viewed as a hallmark of German forces (Wellington 30). Much like *Zero-Hour* does, John Singer Sargent's *Gassed* (fig. 6), created for the BWMC, is a prime example of affirming the traditional values of upstanding citizenship. Whether before or after the brutality of conflict, soldiers are always depicted with their dignity and stoicism in tact. Embodying Britain's patriotic ideals, these paintings help the viewer to assume that what they depict is the natural order of things (Malvern 105). *Gassed* in particular conveys hope in the form of soldiers being led away to a medical tent and other soldiers in the far background playing a soccer game. These soldiers will soon heal and take pride in the sacrifice they have given to their country.

By contrast, modern depictions of war are confrontational and challenge the viewer's notion of what they may have seen or heard about the conflict. Especially if the viewer had been kept in the dark about the conditions in which the war was being fought, these paintings may have come as a shock when they were displayed. Despite the controversial nature of these pieces, many argued that these paintings served as stark realism, which was viewed as a more 'truthful' approximation of the conflict (Wellington 142). Without the presence of such images, the public would effectively be left with the works of academic painters, which presented a more overarching theme of empire. Modern works, by contrast, prized an individual view of conflict, thus supplying that more 'truthful' version of events. To be disturbed by these depictions was the point of their creation, as they broke through the carefully created version of events perpetuated by the British government and private institutions that sympathized with them (Wellington 143). These paintings brought a certain power to the viewer, allowing them to create their own

narrative of the conflict built from more realistic depictions of it. By the end of the conflict, modernism was seen as the dominant style in which to portray the war as a result of these considerations (Wellington 143). Although modernist painting was seen as a cutting-edge medium, it still enjoyed the benefits of substantial exhibition and gradual acceptance into storied institutions during the conflict.

Photography, by sharp contrast, was not nearly as accepted into the artistic canon as the medium of painting. However, the photographic medium shared the same opportunities to take advantage of depicting a then unrivaled worldwide conflict. As mentioned previously, photography at this point in history was known primarily for its role in journalistic and scientific research. It had not yet been recognized as the artistic medium it is today (Wellington 140). Photography had the opportunity to portray the conflict with the most transparency, due to the camera's ability to capture precisely what it sees. On the whole, it took less time to capture an image than to make a sketch of the same event. This faster response time would imply that photography could capture evidence of the conflict and be sent back to the home front for inspection at record time. The increased rate of production helped to solidify photography as a medium which portrayed events that were happening immediately (Wellington 141). This status did not help photography to become further recognized for its artistic properties, as it was seen to be dissimilar to the longer, laborious effort of painting.

Throughout the conflict, photography became controversial as more and more viewers gained knowledge of staged images that portrayed events, rather than capturing them in real time. However, photographers such as Frank Hurley would make the case that these doctored images were precisely what was needed to accurately portray the front lines. Hurley took part in creating doctored prints which were prints made up of a composite of picture images to form a

collage-like whole. Hurley referred to his creations as ‘Photographic Impression Pictures’, and stood by his work even as his appointment as an official Australian war photographer hung in the balance (Wishart). Hurley reported that frequent attempts to properly portray the horrors of war through single negatives had failed. By combining his negatives together, Hurley was able to portray his subjective truth of the conflict. The official AIF (Australian Imperial Forces) historian Captain Charles Bean, who was appointed to the same Australian War Records Section as Hurley, strongly objected to Hurley’s work and refused to accept it as such. When Hurley threatened to leave his position over the argument, it was agreed that six composite images would be printed if Hurley remained (Wishart). Hurley’s composites thus convey how photography could be an artistic tool in portraying modern warfare, and as such, truth was not an important criteria in creating them.

By taking artistic liberty with photographic images, artists such as Hurley believed they were providing a more human look into the conflict. Single images, while potentially containing a more ‘objective truth’, would still be at the mercy of censors as well as a combatants’ home government (Wishart). Composites emphasize that same concept of individuality that separates modern war painting from academic war painting. A single image can be appropriated by the nation from which the photographer comes from. Whether by changing the narrative focus of the image or censoring it, the responsibility of attributing meaning falls to governmental superiors. By contrast, composite images take artistic liberties, and thus have already had outside meaning attributed to them. Images such as *Hell Fire Corner* (fig. 7) by Hurley have meanings passed on by the photographer, and not only those given by the government, for which the images were produced, and future viewers. The smoke in the photograph was not included in the original, but instead added through superimposing two negatives onto the original image (Wishart). While a

reconstruction, Hurley was able to convey the element of fear more readily through this composite image and make it distinctly his. Without the added smoke, others could have attributed less violence to the same photograph. Although photography had been deemed an artistic medium since the 1880s, these images were seen as ‘fakes’ and denounced by a majority of soldiers and citizens alike, who were not accustomed to staged images . However, these WWI composites functioned similarly to modern paintings by allowing the artist their own interpretations of the conflict.

Film, like photography, was a more experimental medium during WWI. Both fictional and non-fictional war films proliferated during and after the conflict, and proved to be popular with the ‘common man’. Film served to make up for the perceived shortcomings of photography in providing citizens, British and non-British, with reliable depictions of the British front line. At the time, film was as heavily censored as any other medium; however, the novelty of moving pictures and the presence of narrative served to instill interest in the general population. The official war film *Battle of the Somme* was released in August 1916 by Wellington House, the British government’s propaganda wing (Haste 45). It proved to be immensely regarded, with 2,000 bookings of the film requested within the first two months of its release. It raised 30,000 pounds for various military charities which is equal to about 2,600,000 pounds in 2020 (Haste 45).

Response to the film prompted increased production of films, both official and unofficial. By 1917, regular bi-weekly newsreels were being shown in British cinemas (Haste 46). Soon after, the Ministry of Information, which took control of British war propaganda from then on, officially adopted film into their repertoire. As a result, the War Office Cinematograph Committee was formed under the Ministry of Information. They created their own film studios,

stocked with professional film-makers to produce short films to serve as propaganda (Haste 46). Films which were short features or reconstructions of events were preferred by the committee, as they were less likely to contain information which would be useful to the enemy (Sanders 124). Whether or not particular footage was fabricated, the widespread popularity of the medium shows that film was able to reach a wide swath of audiences, both physically and mentally. Like photography, viewers did not necessarily need to visit a museum or other storied institution to reap the benefits of these mediums. Viewers simply needed to find a local theater and pay a fee to watch these film reels, and the ease of watching these events unfold underlined the medium's accessibility. Indeed, many people's views of the conflict were shaped by what they saw unfolding in front of them on the screen.

Painting, photography, and film were three principal mediums through which experience of the WWI conflict was conveyed. This is not to say that they were the only mediums of importance through the war. Newspapers, illustrated posters, and sculpture are just some of the other mediums in which the conflict was described and depicted. However, my research is focused on the mediums of painting, photography, and film, and thus form the center of my thesis. Academic painting sought to depict the war as a conflict fought collaboratively by a mighty empire, while modern painting valued the individual's perspective of a highly mechanized, violent conflict. Despite the differences between academic and modern painting, both benefited from the conflict, as WWI provided subject matter which would boost the careers of these artisans. Each style also conveys a sense of sacrifice, whether this was depicted as heroic or harmful. There is a sense of treading new territory by depicting the conflict and through their portrayals, they come to terms with what they saw, whether in-person or second-hand.

Photography and film were just starting out as artistic mediums within the public sphere,

and appealed most to the common viewer at the home front. Photography in particular was accessible to the broader public, due to the ease of printing, and thus was mass produced especially during the conflict. Both photography and film were also noted by the public to have a more mechanized nature, as opposed to mediums such as painting and sculpture at that time. Despite the high reach of photography and film, painting still held a more privileged status in society. Thus, many civilians, particularly those of higher classes, had greater respect for the stories told in painting rather than those that mass-produced images told. Painting's high status would lead to its later inclusion in the BWMC's 1918 memorialization plans.

Propaganda and Memorialization During WWI

The status of propaganda during WWI can generally be split into two parts: propaganda efforts from 1914-16 and 1917-18. At the beginning of the war, those at the home front were not opposed to the war; in fact, they overwhelmingly supported Britain's role in the conflict. Thus, there was little need for the government to sustain the war effort themselves, and they instead focused their propagandistic efforts on neutral and enemy countries. Throughout the first half of the conflict, the public produced a majority of WWI propaganda in Britain. Much of this material came from the press, through daily newspapers as well as magazines and commercial shops, which sold wares that aligned with the patriotic fervor of the time. Public propaganda additionally came in the form of exhibitions at art galleries and museums. These institutions staged multiple shows where war-related art and artifacts were displayed and visitors could enter for a fee. By 1917, morale had reached a new low, with the allied nations suffering terrible defeats and resources running low. By this point, the British government saw fit to construct a propaganda campaign specifically for the home front, leading to the rise of organizations such as the National War Aims Committee (NWAC).

As the war neared its end in 1918, the government's focus shifted once again from home front propaganda to WWI memorialization. Although the conflict was not officially over, officials were concerned about how the war would be perceived after it concluded, and sought to have control over these perceptions. Although localized memorials provided a more personal approach to memorialization, national memorials such as the Cenotaph (fig. 8) received far more recognition. At this point, subjective war paintings were also displayed together by the state to justify their objective 'truth' of the war. These paintings were thus given meaning beyond mere documentation of the war effort, and took on representation of an unprecedented conflict.

For the first two years of the war, public opinion of the conflict was largely self sustained. The press was one way citizens showed their support for the war effort, despite increased efforts to censor information regarding Britain's military undertakings. In particular, the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) made it an offense to publish information that may directly or indirectly be useful to enemy nations (Sanders 7). Despite this rift between the press and the government, newspapers and magazines continued to proliferate throughout the conflict. Newspapers such as *The Times* provided daily updates on the conflict as well as insights from around the home front. Magazines were more visual in nature, often publishing illustrations depicting the front lines (Sanders 132). These publications included *The Graphic*, the *Illustrated War News*, and the *Sphere*. The printed press was one of the most widely accessible forms of propaganda during WWI, since they were portable and easily available to all, regardless of social class.

Pictorial magazines in particular were considered a great commercial success due to their ability to create meanings for the conflict (Hynes 196). Illustrators had greater artistic freedom than photographers, whose published work was more heavily censored. Since the illustrations did not originate from a machine but rather the illustrator themselves, there was no original integrity to the image for an artist to manipulate, simply an artist's depiction of events. Therefore, the artistic depictions found in such magazines were more widely accepted by the general public, than photographs that could have been edited or doctored in some way. This freedom gave illustrators the chance to produce powerful propaganda, in which moral and political meanings were prompted. Such drawings established symbolism by tying the soldiers depicted to the diligent Allied cause, as well as stereotypes to reinforce the idea of the brave, valiant soldier fighting for his country. Additionally, the rushed, minimal appearance of many sketches give the

impression that this drawing could have been produced on the front lines. This status served to further reinforce the ideas put forth by these illustrations.

The popularity of such illustrations was furthered by their sale from commercial vendors. One example is the proliferation of an illustration entitled *The Great Sacrifice* (fig. 9) by James Clark. It first appeared in the *Graphic*'s Christmas issue published in November 1914 as a large color foldout print, and depicted a deceased British soldier lying peacefully next to the crucified figure of Jesus Christ (Graphic). The image's purpose was to console others going into the holiday season who had lost loved ones in the first months of the conflict. This consolation is evident in the way the soldier's death is idealized - indeed the only indication of injury is a spot of blood on the man's forehead - and even comparing the soldier's sacrifice for his country to Christ's sacrifice for all mankind (Bourke 213). By early 1915, prints of the image were sold by the *Graphic* for a variety of prices, ranging from a simple unframed print to a framed oil print. Commercial shops were able to purchase these prints and profit from selling them to customers (Graphic). Selling the print had public benefits, such as earning a profit as well as being seen as contributing to morale, similar to the war exhibitions I will discuss shortly. These prints also had private benefit, as they were widely available for purchase, thus allowing a large part of the population to sustain their morale through engagement with such images. Circulation of these images shows the early popularity of civil propaganda, as well as public willingness to meet the hardships of war, which included the loss of loved ones.

Seeking to take part in these public benefits, art museums and similar organizations took part in a series of war-related exhibitions. They acted without direct government involvement, aiming to tap into public interest about the war, inspire recruitment, and maintain morale (Wellington 30). These shows produced in the early years of the war were seen as a part of

‘mobilisation from below’. A popular strategy was to create exhibitions that taught the visitor a lesson about the conflict, which often concerned the evils of the enemy combatants and the need to join the efforts to suppress them (Wellington 32). The extent to which the individuals displaying these shows actively believed in what they advocated for is debatable, as museums faced the challenge of maintaining a budget throughout the conflict. While it is true that many museum officials did support the war effort and used their influence to persuade others, these exhibitions were also created out of monetary necessity (Birmingham Post 3).

Public war art exhibitions at the beginning of the war did indeed seek to vilify enemy nations, most notably Germany. A prime example of this is the multiple exhibitions of cartoonist Louis Raemaekers’ illustrations. His drawings were meant to spark outrage at a number of German atrocities, as shown on the front cover of Part One of the “Land and Water” edition of his cartoons. This rather sensationalized image depicts German soldiers as anthropomorphized pigs looking over the body of a dead woman, who is assumed to have been killed by them. According to Malvern, the woman is meant to be Edith Cavell, a British nurse who was killed by German soldiers in Belgium after attempting to free prisoners of war (18). The bright colors used to depict such violence bring a sense of immediacy, conveying the message that not only are these atrocities being committed, they are completed each day. The drawing almost dares the viewer not to act on behalf of the nation after viewing such violence. The artist’s opinion of the enemy soldiers, meanwhile, is blatantly evident, due to their depiction as animals instead of men. Thus, Raemaekers’ depictions contributed directly to the ‘mobilisation from below’ characteristic of early-war propaganda.

In contrast to Raemaekers’ sensational portrayals, war photography exhibitions played on viewer’s emotions in a more cerebral way. 1915 photography displays in particular focused on

the destructive power of the German forces by showing the extent of wartime damage. For example, photographic exhibitions showing Reims Cathedral before and after its destruction of the German army served as opportune propaganda. Photos such as *Shell bursting on the cathedral at Reims* (fig. 10) kept visitors up-to-date with events occurring on the frontlines, thereby connecting them to the tragedies occurring there. In contrast to the act of merely reading about the destruction suffered by the Cathedral, seeing images of the event lends perspective to the scale of the Cathedral as well as the force required to destroy such a building (Wellington 142). These images also reinforced the idea of physical space as being the domain of a certain nation, in this case, Reims Cathedral being the domain of the French. Rather than a visceral urge to defend the nation from civilian-targeted atrocities, destruction of an architectural icon signaled the dangers of losing their cultural identity.

New to the idea of influencing public opinion and encouraged by the high morale of British citizens, the government directed much of its propaganda efforts towards other nations from 1914-16. During this time, overseas propaganda avoided being overt or blatant in conveying its message. This was not an attempt by the British government to avoid blame, but rather an extension of the "personal diplomacy" that foreign-policy members were used to conducting before the war (Sanders 101). The most popular form of propaganda sent overseas came in the form of posters. These were reprinted in newspapers as well as hung in public spaces such as libraries and banks. Their production rate remained high until mid-1915, when leaflets and pamphlets, previously relegated to a secondary position, came into the fold (Sanders 104). Official pamphlets created by Wellington House followed two main criteria: they would be "academic in tone and scholarly in content" and their official nature would be disguised (Sanders 107).

By taking a more factual approach in their writing, with the British cause argued only subtly, these pamphlets were meant to inform the reader and encourage them to make up their own mind. These pamphlets had to appear to be written by private individuals and bear no indication of their origin (Sanders 108). Furthermore, they were distributed through private channels, such as steamboat companies who offered their services at no cost to the government. The lengths to which British officials went to disguise the origin of these pamphlets can also be described as 'black propaganda', as most who read it would likely have little idea of its true origins (Sanders 109). Through these strategies, it becomes clear the British thought their propaganda was effective since it allowed the reader to think for themselves rather than be indoctrinated into a way of thought. However, at its core, the secretive circulation of these pamphlets was indicative of nothing less than deception.

The extent of Britain's overseas propaganda did not stop there, and eventually involved foreign journalists and press associations. Although in most instances, they refrained from taking direct control over foreign newspapers, they remained a notable presence in countries such as America and China (Sanders 116). Britain's involvement in foreign press led to these countries receiving increased information about their contributions during the conflict. This information was not moderated by individual press outlets but rather given directly to them and subsequently published 'as is' (Sanders 117). Along with news of Britain's war accomplishments, propaganda materials discussed various other issues, including how the home front responded to the war. A war painting entitled *The Consoler* (fig. 11) by H. Copping was printed in the Sunday edition of the New York Times on February 6, 1916. In similar fashion to *The Great Sacrifice*, this painting depicted a Christ-like figure, although the focus of the image was a living widower as opposed to a deceased soldier. Such images showed foreign nations the ideologies behind Britain's actions,

more than the sheer facts of wartime events. Beyond the popular mediums of posters and pamphlets, picture postcards, cigarette cards, and maps and diagrams are examples of other materials proliferated at this time.

The British government reserved the right to deem whether certain foreign press associations were 'worthy' of being collaborators through this process. If a press outlet was not worthy, they were not encouraged to be a part of the process, and did not receive news and materials to the same extent. The reasons for these choices included previous history with a certain country, their willingness to cooperate with the British government, and so on (Sanders 120). Despite the scale of Britain's efforts to disseminate propaganda in foreign nations, no effective way of measuring the impact of their actions was created by Wellington House, then the British government's propaganda headquarters. Instead, judgments carried out about its effectiveness remained the domain of individual government officials, through their perceptions and observations (Sanders 111).

Throughout the war, the actions of a few powerful individuals often influenced whole nations, and that is no different when we consider the social and political implications of official British propaganda. Until 1917, there was a single government propaganda agency, the Secret War Propaganda Bureau (SWPB), since they saw little need to influence opinion on the home front. The SWPB was established in September 1914, mainly to counteract German propaganda and gain support of the Allied cause from neutral countries (Haste 37). Through these overseas dealings, the government was able to perfect its strategies for influencing public opinion. This would come in handy towards the end of the conflict, when the government turned its attention to internally focused propaganda.

By 1917, according to Haste, WWI British propaganda became unique due to its use of rationalization, modernization, and simplification for the first time in a conflict of this scale. Rationalization means the ability to discern which information and materials should be disseminated, at what time, and to who. This element explains the shift in focus from overseas to homefront propaganda in 1917 (Haste 2). Modernization came from the advancements in communications and media, which allowed propaganda to be circulated to more of the population in a fraction of the time. Daily newspapers and film are two mediums which were affected by the increased production rate afforded by modernization (Haste 2). Lastly, simplification came about using methods that were adopted from public organizations already producing localized propaganda. In short, it is when a "fabric of images" concerning the war is built up over time using repetition, in order to build irrefutable justification for fighting in the conflict (Haste 3). Most importantly, this strategy entails providing the public justification for what they think and feel about the conflict, but are unable to prove themselves. Unwilling to provide the truth about the conflict, the government chose to play on the public's emotions instead. These three traits would become evident as Britain entered the last two years of the war.

The years of 1917-18 saw a decrease in morale due to the Allied nations' repeated losses within the conflict. Public opinion thus soured on the conflict, with many pushing for negotiations and eventual peace with enemy nations. At this point, the British government deemed it necessary to interfere in this turning of opinion, and began a 'remobilization' effort to persuade civilians of the necessity to keep fighting. This effort is shown more prominently in the formation of the NWAC in 1917. The purpose of this committee was to counteract pacifist publications and opinion as well as convince the civilian population to continually uphold "those ideals of Liberty and Justice which are the common and sacred cause of the Allies" (Haste 41).

Ways in which the committee sought to accomplish this included relationships with constituent party organizations as well as patriotic civilian committees, by which meetings were held and literature was proliferated.

These strategies also helped uphold the view that peace was not a current option by reminding civilians of horrible atrocities committed by enemy nations, most notably the Germans (Haste 42). As such, official dealings with low morale did not take the intelligence of their civilians into account. Instead of increasing the amount of information available about the conflict, the government sought to warp the information that was already being circulated to their advantage (Haste 34). Thus, knowledge of disastrous events and losses was significantly tampered, disallowing civilians to think critically about the conflict, even if they wished to. Although the civilian population was more involved in this war than previous instances, mostly due to the increased mechanization of warfare, the government saw it fitting to keep them in the dark concerning the finer points of front line events (Haste 35). As a result, the government was still deeply involved in the proliferation of materials detailing their ideologies when they began considering the role of memorialization towards the end of WWI.

In looking at more personal and local contributions, the process of memorialization started earlier than national efforts to do the same. These contributions had stemmed from the losses suffered by many civilians, who consequently sought solace by honoring their loved ones, whether individually or with their communities. Some contributions came in the form of rolls of honor which were established in streets, workplaces, and private homes. Although these also listed the names of those currently enlisted or conscripted, the names of the dead were listed equally. Over time, these honor rolls more closely resembled shrines as names were often decorated with items such as flowers, candles, personal mementos, etc (Kavanagh 79). This

humble form of remembrance may well represent the most commonly seen form of commemoration among the British public. These shrines are not to glorify the sacrifices of the dead or bring pride to their country, but rather to comfort those dealing with loss. This deeply personal form of memorialization is in considerable contrast to how the British government chose to memorialize the conflict as well as those who died as a result.

In May 1916 an editorial titled *Artists and the War* was posted in *The Times.* This article set out to resolve precisely what the national role of art was during wartime. Two crucial elements were discussed: 1) the nature of WWI as a total war, in which both the front line and home front were affected in equal measure, as well as 2) Britain having a significant asset in the number of worthy, active artists living among them. In bringing these two elements together, the author argued, openings would be created for these artists, and create a "lasting national heritage" through their artistic depictions of war (Malvern 12). These depictions would ensure a heritage built on remembering both the awful happenings of war as well as actions "that bring honor to our race" (Malvern 12). Thus the intermingling ideologies of propaganda and memorialization come to the forefront.

As for the composition of these paintings, the more horrific events of war to be depicted would stem from the actions of the German army. If they were not explicitly shown committing foul acts, their presence would be felt through the depiction of battered landscapes and/or injured British soldiers. Furthermore, any disadvantage a British soldier would be shown in could be assumed as the result of German interference and not stem from the soldiers' own actions (Haste 3). In memorializing the conflict, artistic depictions would not stray far from propagandistic interpretations, except for the increased status these depictions were afforded as they were mostly paintings created by official war artists. Even particularly harsh depictions of the conflict,

such as Nevinson's *The Harvest of Battle* (fig. 12) could be seen as conveying a message of bravery and determination on behalf of British soldiers, rather than the commentary on the suffering of war that the artist had intended it as.

Creation of the British War Memorials Committee and the Imperial War Museum

In 1918, the last year of WWI, Britain had already set its sights on the aftermath of the war. They began to discuss what Britain's legacy in the First World War should entail. The importance of creating these narratives and securing the objects to support them during the war was recognized by two institutions in particular: the British War Memorials Committee (BWMC) and the Imperial War Museum (IWM). By starting a collection while the war was still raging, these institutions could better control the narrative of what they displayed. The BWMC and IWM preferred this over retroactively providing information about the conflict and including materials to enrich the public's understanding of Britain's role in WWI. These spaces would serve as a memorial to a conflict which they were sure would never be repeated. Considering the BWMC's dissolution by the end of 1918 and the beginning of WWII a mere two decades later, these ideas are rather shortsighted. They highlight how both the BWMC and IWM never strayed far from the ideals and techniques of propaganda, rather than branching out to the somber, contemplative business of memorialization which they claimed to undertake.

The BWMC was formed in February 1918 when the Department of Information at Wellington House became the Ministry of Information, with Lord Beaverbrook as its Minister. Beaverbrook was also a member of the Committee, along with Lord Rothermere, the chair of the BWMC, and Alfred Yockney, former editor of the *Art Journal*. Beaverbrook was additionally the head of a Canadian scheme to commission modern art during the First World War and believed Britain could benefit from a similar project. His aim was to drive the British government away from propaganda which had short-term value during the conflict towards memorialization, which would have a more lasting national value. The intent of the BWMC was thus "to assemble a significant contemporary collection representative of the greatest artistic expression of the day"

(Malvern 69). This significantly ambitious project entailed the commission of seventeen history paintings by artists including Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash, and John Singer Sargent, two sculptural reliefs by C.S. Jagger and Gilbert Ledward, and the commission of thirty-one more artists. These thirty-one artists were either commissioned to make a single work or employed full-time for up to ten months, by the end of which the BWMC would receive their total output (Malvern 69). The BWMC prided itself on being a select and exclusive organization whose commissioned works would have the weight and authority to satisfy any expert, while also positioning themselves as forward thinkers by including modern artists whose works would defy traditional conventions.

Despite the inclusion of modern artwork in the BWMC scheme, this did not entail a democratizing approach to memorialization. The committee looked to memorialize the First World War in a way which linked the modern era to the Classical and Renaissance eras. In this way, the BWMC's commissioned artwork would express national sacrifice and patriotic ideals through the high art tradition discussed previously (Walton 396). Their attempts to strive for a Classical ideal can be further seen in two major elements. One, introduced in an April 1918 Committee meeting, was the adoption of six by ten feet as the standard size for the smaller commissioned paintings, the same as Uccello's *The Battle of San Romano* (fig. 13), which hung in the National Gallery. Similarities between the modern and Renaissance eras were thus reinforced as Paolo Uccello was a Florentine painter active during the Early Renaissance.

The other elements were the committee members themselves, who saw their roles as equivalent to great Renaissance patrons, explaining choices such as the adoption of Uccello-sized measurements. The size of their great scheme as well as their sense of noble patriotic duty further encouraged them to make this analogy (Walton 396). After all, not only did

the BWMC commission what they perceived as groundbreaking art, but they commissioned a large number of works and had a nascent plan to develop a building in which to house them. Although the BWMC's stated goal was to memorialize the First World War through commissioned artworks, it is clear that the committee's personal goals played a factor as well. Rather than considering what the public would need from a WWI art museum, or even if the public found it necessary, the BWMC sought instead to perpetuate their own legacy.

With the artwork scheme properly addressed, the BWMC turned their attention to a proposed Memorial Gallery. This building was proposed by two Committee members, the artist Muirhead Bone and art advisor Robbie Ross. In an earlier letter to the Committee, Ross explained his ideas for future treatment of the commissioned paintings. He spoke of an integration between art and architecture within a designated gallery space. The proposal made by Bone and Ross included building concepts that were heavily influenced by Classical design. In particular, their concept was influenced by the ways Venetians had housed the works of Renaissance masters (Walton 398). Thus, the concept for the Memorial Gallery was influenced by the same Renaissance ideals that the committee members strove towards. Although the BWMC and their Memorial Gallery plans were both created with the aim of memorialization, their idealization of Renaissance collection practices corrupted this aim. The Gallery would be created by people who saw themselves as connoisseurs of high art, rather than seeking to inform and console the public through artistic offerings. The building plans were thus influenced by Classical design, revealing a building designed for the elite of society rather than the wider public who were equally affected by the events of WWI.

The next order of business for the BWMC was to find an architect who would design the layout of their imagined Memorial Gallery. Above all, the committee sought the talents of

Charles Holden. Holden was a prominent British architect at the time, known for his modernist designs and tendency to include sculpture within architectural elements. However, at this point in time, Holden was serving as a lieutenant with the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) in France, in order to mark and register the graves of fallen soldiers. He had left his architectural firm for a decade in order to first join the DGR&E and later become a Principal Architect with the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) (Karol 18). Holden had little time for other concerns and thus his relationship with the BWMC was very much short-lived. They kept a brief correspondence, which culminated in Holden providing a single sketch of his design for the imagined Memorial Gallery. Although it is difficult to imagine what could have been from a single drawing, Holden's cemetery designs as well as his post-war architectural designs give a further idea of what the Gallery may have looked like. It was common for him to use clean, simple mass forms and a modernist style, and this may have translated to the Memorial Gallery, if it were actually constructed (Walton 399). This architectural style would have been in line with the BWMC's insistence that their Gallery recall the great effort of Renaissance patrons, in their commission of unprecedented art and design.

The BWMC did not have long to worry about the designs for their Gallery, as the committee was plagued with difficulties for much of 1918. British officials began to question the true purpose of the BWMC as money was scarce and they sought to finance only those projects they considered essential. Thus, the committee further debated their purpose, claiming that "pictures would be painted with a definitive propaganda motive" and subsequently changed their name to the Pictorial Propaganda Committee (PPC) in the summer of 1918. Official questioning of the BWMC's purpose as well as its name change supports the idea that memorialization was never a key motive of the group. Furthermore, as the war ended in November 1918, the Ministry

of Information was dissolved and funds became incredibly scarce. The PPC hoped the Treasury would follow through on their previous promise of funds, which ultimately fell through as the Secretary decided that "the question of renewal...would be considered by the Imperial War Museum" (Walton 401). With the inclusion of the Imperial War Museum in making monetary decisions, the PPC never received their promised funds. The closure of the Ministry and the lack of funds to produce a building in which to house their commissions, the PPC was forced to dissolve (Walton 401). Its prized art commissions, which totaled thirty-two paintings at the end, were all acquired by the Imperial War Museum by the end of 1918 and are still held within the Museum's art collection today.

At the start of the war, the only extant institution which concerned itself with collecting and preserving artifacts, records, and trophies from wars in which British forces were involved was the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Interestingly, the RUSI made no effort to make a record of the First World War (Kavanagh 80). This lack of foresight partly inspired the formation of the Imperial War Museum, which was an independently proposed endeavor. The idea for such a museum was put forth by Charles Ffoulkes, Curator of the Tower Armories in London, and Ian Malcolm, MP. There was initial pushback from political circles, who accused Ffoulkes and Malcolm of seeking to bolster and maintain the war mood, rather than seeing a need to record and remember the conflict. A letter written in May 6, 1917, by the Admiralty's representative for the new museum committee, Commander Walcott, stated two reasons for the procurement of relics while the war was still on, and thus justifying the need for a national war museum. His argument was founded on the statements that 1) relics, exhibits, etc., were being overlooked and, in some cases, lost to history due to lack of preservation and 2) some relics were being stolen, bought, or taken by individual units and persons, with some being sent to the United States

(Kavanagh 80). After deliberations, Sir Alfred Mond, MP, was sought out by Lord Harcourt to lead the museum initiative, as Mond was the First Commissioner of Works, and therefore his successor. As an individual with high power and position, he was in the ideal position to move this idea further. By March 26, 1917, *The Times* reported on the initiative to begin a national war museum and listed appointed committee members as well as the IWM sub-committees: Admiralty, Air Services, Dominions, Library, Munitions, War Office, and Women's Work.

Similarly to the BWMC, the initial war museum committee was composed of many powerful men who had both influence and strong Victorian ideals. The British government's early trepidation over whether the committee was simply looking to capitalize on the 'war mood' was proven right. This can be seen in how Sir Martin Conway, the Director General of the committee, explained the war museum's plans to become a place of reverence and nostalgia for all involved in the conflict: "when they visit the museum in years to come, they should be able by its aid to revive the memory of their work for the war, and, pointing to some exhibit, to say 'This thing I did'" (Kavanagh 84). Thus, Conway sought to take advantage of the 'war mood' in hopes that acknowledgment of public war effort would encourage individuals to donate personal effects to the war museum collection. Without individual contribution to the collection, the museum would serve little purpose other than as a repository for items used during the First World War. Instead of being seen as the pitfall it was, this reasoning was used to appeal to the mass public, reflecting on them rather than on committee planning.

Years later, Conway admitted to the disappointing amount of responses their call for material received (Kavanagh 84). This lack of engagement gives insight into public sentiments regarding the construction of a national war museum. Absence of materials could point to an overall interest in such a museum, but reluctance to part with personal effects, especially if they

were connected to deceased loved ones. Alternatively, lack of materials could represent total disregard for such a museum and the refusal to engage with its construction by any means necessary. Considering early lack of records pertaining to public sentiments towards British propaganda, it follows that public sentiment towards the museum can only be discerned by numbers recorded rather than an in-depth analysis of public opinion. Regardless of what public sentiment lay behind the choice to not engage with the war museum committee, it is evident the museum expected the public to be proud of their achievements during WWI and willing to have their efforts memorialized for all to see. Rather than providing a place in which those involved in the war could reflect and grieve, Conway saw the nascent war museum as a place where soldiers and nurses, among others, could relive the glory days of fighting for the Empire and share these experiences with friends and family. Thus, the committee saw their war museum as a continuation of the propaganda that proliferated during the war rather than a more mature, retroactive look of the myriad legacies and effects the war had on many.

Indeed their focus on Britain as an Empire rather than a collective of individuals is most prominent in the name selection of the museum. While it had started out as the National War Museum, the Dominions Sub-Committee, which was responsible for securing artifacts from the British colonies' war efforts, pushed for the name to be changed to the Imperial War Museum (Kavanagh 88). Thus, an effort to extol the virtues of the British Empire permeated each element of the museum's ongoings. This was especially seen in the kinds of art acquired by the IWM. Much like the BWMC, the IWM had commissioned their own collection of paintings and drawings. However, these artworks were quite different in purpose, as they emphasized "factual and correct" depictions of the First World War (Malvern 188). In the words of Malvern,"these pictures were less ethnographic artefact and more part of the museum's system of labeling"

(188). Thus, these artworks were not meant as a single artist's subjective viewpoint of events, but as a scientific, objective depiction for the public to accept as fact. Whether the public thought of these images as the committee meant them to or not is difficult to discern. The IWM had a second collection that they obtained from the BWMC, which was much more substantial than the artistic collection amassed by the IWM. The committee's ideas of what the BWMC's art collection stood for was much similar to the BWMC themselves. The modern art included within the collection represented Britain as following their national destiny to become a leader in cultural representation (Malvern 189). The inclusion of these works in the IWM's collection had a 'civilizing' effect on them. Those who could represent their experiences in a culturally acceptable way were worthy of attention and celebration, and their status within the BWMC and IWM helped this genre of artwork to become more publicly accepted.

Through their museum displays, the IWM further participated in the "sanctification of objects" by presenting them as impartial representations of history rather than pieces of other's lived experiences. Although the IWM collection moved to many different locations before acquiring its own building in 1936, its display conventions remained similar throughout the interwar period. The center of each display area was packed with large exhibits, including massive weapons of war (fig. 14), and smaller items were placed along the walls, mostly behind glass (Cornish 44). The IWM placed importance on the ability of the objects to portray war experiences, without much thought to exhibition design besides placing larger objects in the middle of the room. Yet, the layout of the exhibition fits within the dichotomy of 'knowledge understood' vs. 'knowledge proposition'. The IWM's interwar exhibitions fall into the 'knowledge understood' category due to its display conventions. 'Knowledge understood'

exhibitions are characterized by a strong axial structure, shallow depth, and a "low-ring factor of present knowledge" (Pearce 139). The latter means that the exhibition produces a straight-forward presentation of knowledge, where the relationship between each object to another and to the exhibition as a whole is thoroughly understood and leaves little room for interpretation. This is in contrast to 'knowledge proposition' exhibitions where the display elements are less structured. They allow for a higher 'ring-factor', thus presenting knowledge as a proposition, which may encourage visitors to question objects further or transfer personal meaning onto them (Pearce 139). By examining the ramifications of the IWM's display methods, it is evident that the displays were meant to provide objective truth to visitors. Furthermore, this occurred without any acknowledgement that their objective truth stemmed from the subjective input of IWM staff.

During the war, the Tate Gallery went through modifications of its own, including the acquisition of a Board of Trustees and a more detailed brief that described the museum's role in representing modern British art and modern foreign art. The Tate also served as a kind of repository, as it was assumed that pieces in the collection would later earn the title of 'masterpiece' and be promoted to such museums as the National Gallery. In 1920, just after WWI, the IWM loaned forty-eight pieces, mainly from their recently acquired BWMC art collection, to the Tate Gallery for a number of years (Malvern 189). Those pieces loaned to the Tate were those completed by younger, more modern artists, such as Nevinson, Paul Nash, and Wyndham Lewis. By contrast, the IWM retained and displayed artworks by academic artists such as Sargent and William Orpen.

These artworks were often displayed in the IWM separately from the weapons and other artifacts, as they were understood to be separate entities. Unlike these artifacts and the artwork

commissioned by the IWM themselves, the BWMC paintings undeniably had their own individual, subjective meanings. This meant that these artworks were marketed as the “humanistic face of the museum’s destructive and deadly exhibits" (Malvern 190). In comparing these images of the IWM’s Art Section (fig. 15, fig. 16) to the previous image of the IWM’s main exhibit, many differences come to light. The Art Section provides subjective viewpoints of the First World War without much effort to mask the subjectivity of the images. These paintings and drawings are acknowledged as the product of one person, even as they are used to describe the scope of experience during WWI. By comparison, the main exhibits within the IWM display objects such as tanks, guns, and other weapons in a manner similar to a parade. The identity of who created and used such devices is masked in favor of belonging instead to a military designation such as Admiralty, Army, etc. The dichotomy between these sections of the IWM provide contradicting messages about the legacy of WWI, even though they hoped to instill national pride within the visitors who came to the museum. Not only did the IWM continue to provide a view of WWI similar to propaganda, but they presented acquired artworks as sources of national pride rather than a starting point for poignant contemplation of WWI’s effects.

Both the BWMC and IWM were instrumental institutions in setting the tone for official memorialization of the First World War. Even before the war’s end, both were created with the purpose of considering Britain’s legacy within the conflict, and ensuring that purpose was carried out effectively. The BWMC fell short of this goal, as political strife and meager allowances meant that they were able to secure a large number of artworks without procuring a building in which to display them. These artworks were commissioned, not as a genuine effort to support the work of younger, emerging artists but rather to obtain fine art with which the BWMC could control the narrative about WWI memorialization. This as well as changing their name to the

PPC belie a tendency towards propaganda strategies that did not dissipate as the war came to an end. The IWM thus inherited the BWMC's collection as they themselves were in the midst of obtaining their own artifacts and securing a place for display. The IWM's spaces were meant to serve as a memorial to a conflict whose scale they were sure would remain unprecedented. With the occurrence of WWII a mere two decades later, they would later shift the purpose of their museum from memorializing WWI to becoming a focal point of knowledge about Britain's involvement in various conflicts. Thus, the IWM's original goal of becoming a memorial to the First World War is disingenuous, as the museum did not reconsider the ways in which they collected and displayed objects to better fit this category, but rather moved on and continued to venerate the actions of British forces.

Conclusion

In the midst of the First World War, the British Establishment turned their concerns away from the production of propaganda and towards the more lasting work of memorialization. This shifting of priority is exemplified by the creation of the British War Memorials Committee (BWMC) and the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in the last two years of the war. Of great importance was the question of how Britain's role in WWI would be remembered. Many organizations, including the BWMC and IWM, sought to answer this question by collecting their own groups of WWI-related objects and procuring a place in which to display them. However, their acts of memorialization took more from past propagandistic creations than attempting to create an original look into a then-unprecedented conflict. The internal focus of these groups encouraged propagandistic views as they reverted to the practices they knew best. The supposed idealistic efforts of remembering such a conflict was thus corrupted by individual goals and an unwillingness to see the British forces as anything but superior and ground-breaking in its efforts.

Throughout the First World War, there were myriad artistic mediums which those both military and nonmilitary used to document the conflict. Noted as one of the premier fine arts, painting had to compete with other mediums, such as photography and film, on a large scale. The latter two mediums appealed to a mass population, as newspapers were circulated daily and theaters were easily accessible. In contrast, paintings were housed in museums and galleries, where visitors were meant to feel the awe and power of artworks. As well as their location, the question of censorship was frequent throughout WWI, as photographs and films needed to be reviewed and edited before being disseminated among the public. Photography was seen as a 'witnessing' medium and the government sought to prevent the public from witnessing certain

events, primarily those that put the British forces in a negative light. Painting was alternatively seen as an 'experiencing' medium, and while not immune to censorship, its subjectivity was more representative of the artists themselves rather than the British forces. This explains the collection of paintings by the BWMC and IWM, since the medium was considered fine art and provided unique depictions of the conflict.

Propaganda during the First World War utilized these artistic mediums to the British government's advantage. Their adage "it is better to influence those who can influence others than attempt a direct appeal to the mass population" properly summarizes British propaganda efforts from 1914-16. These efforts were focused on countries abroad, but this sentiment would prove true for the BWMC and IWM years later. As part of these efforts, the Foreign Office in London sought out venerated professionals when sending their materials to both neutral and enemy countries, in the hopes that the public would trust them more readily than the British government (Sanders 101). Propaganda strategies would shift at the beginning of 1917 to more internal matters, as morale lessened due to major Allied losses. The first coordinated home front propaganda effort, the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) was created in order to maintain ideals of Liberty and Justice in the face of the enemy and quell any pacifist sentiment. Propaganda thus became more simplified, as images and information were increasingly censored in order to keep the public in the dark and raise morale. This strategy was also adopted by the BWMC and IWM, as they procured objects and determined what was valuable for the public to know about them.

The BWMC and IWM were formed as Britain developed internal propaganda strategies for 1917-18. As part of the newly formed Ministry of Information (MoI), the BWMC was established in February 1918. The IWM was formed a year earlier, in March 1917, and was

actively acquiring objects for its collection when the BWMC was formed. The BWMC committee saw themselves as equivalent to Renaissance patrons from centuries before. They further established this status through an ambitious war art scheme and arranging plans to build a Hall of Remembrance to house them in. By the aforementioned propaganda techniques, the MoI began to question the integrity of the BWMC's proclaimed mission and as a result, the BWMC was forced to change its name to the Pictorial Propaganda Committee (PPC). As the conflict came to an end, however, alternative schemes proved to be more productive due to the attention and finances allowed them. The BWMC's main source of finance, the MoI, disbanded at the end of the war, and they were not deemed eligible for the meager allowances that remained. As a result, the BWMC folded, and the resulting paintings from their war art scheme were transferred to the IWM.

Along with amassing their own collection of WWI relics, the IWM had their own artworks which they commissioned during the conflict, to which the BWMC collection was added. The museum, like the BWMC, had critics who correctly assumed that the IWM was looking to take advantage of the 'war mood' to construct a glorified shrine to the First World War. Allowing the Tate Gallery to borrow many of their modernist artworks for extended periods and creating modes of display which prized war weapons and other such relics are clear examples of this attitude. Instead of providing a place of remembrance to allow visitors to reflect on their subjective experience of the war, the museum established WWI as a national triumph, effectively designating their views as an objective fact.

The IWM's ongoing legacy has been felt over the past century and continues to this day. During the interwar period, there were rare instances where paintings were hung alongside guns in the IWM's exhibition space. This effectively removed the aura that was manufactured by the

paintings' isolation and instead created an interesting dichotomy by heightening the brutality of the weapons while also providing additional social context for the paintings (Malvern 194). After WWII, paintings commissioned during that conflict were hung with artworks from WWI, which provided another case of subjective exhibition display. In this way, visitors could attribute their own meaning to their placement, rather than observing a single piece with established meaning. Official war painting during WWII lacked the grandiosity of the previous war, perhaps due to the knowledge that the second conflict which seemed so unthinkable became a reality two decades later (Malvern 195). Sue Malvern proposes that these display strategies offered "disconcerting, heterodox and discontinuous sights", but I propose that they in fact were the most forward-thinking endeavors that the IWM has undertaken (197). This lack of overarching national pride could explain the lack of restraint when it came to placing objects of differing mediums and time periods together. If awe and interest could not be inspired by the pieces themselves, perhaps a new display strategy would achieve the same effect. These choices painted the IWM in a more visitor-friendly light rather than as an institutional authority. However, these efforts were few and far between and would not last for long.

In the 1980s, four decades after the end of WWII, the IWM was redesigned as part of two major factors affecting museums at the time. First, Britain was in the middle of the 'second Museum age', where the government sought to donate funds to these institutions to lessen their reliance on public funds to sustain themselves. Second, after a long period of rejection, there was newfound support for creating memorials, especially those focused on the Holocaust. This support had been met with equal apprehension as the "forms and meanings of commemoration" could take on lives of their own and there was loss of faith in existing war memorials to serve a similar purpose (Malvern 197). As a conflict-focused museum with a large component of WWI

artifacts, it is important to ask whether the IWM could ever be considered a memorial. This question could be answered in the negative since it is fundamentally a museum that houses collections and conducts its own exhibits. The sheer fact that the IWM's collections include war artifacts does not automatically make it a memorial as the importance lies in the collection's context. As museums house collections as a testament to the culture of varied societies, the IWM serves to uplift narratives of war and destruction rather than discussing the lessons to be learned from such violent episodes.

Not only does the IWM not support memorialization, it actively recalls the glory days of the British Empire through nothing less than its name. As mentioned previously, the museum was called the National War Museum when it was first formed in 1917. However, as time went on and a proper committee was formed, the head of the Dominions section rallied for the name to be changed to the Imperial War Museum (Kavanagh 88). It is fitting that those in charge of securing WWI artifacts from countries colonized by Britain would support this name change, but what is unusual is that the name has never been altered for 103 years. If the museum had changed its focus to report on the effects that British imperialism has had on these formerly colonized nations, perhaps the name would be justified. However, the museum's goals remain largely similar to those proposed almost a century ago: to inform the public of the conflicts in which Britain has fought and to use this history as a source of pride. Thus, for as long as this museum is known as the IWM, its national pride will be synonymous with its imperialistic past.

Image Bank

Figure 1: *Zero Hour*, James Beadle, 1918, Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 5131

Figure 2: *The Death of General Wolfe*, Benjamin West, 1759, National Army Museum, NAM. 1960-03-56-1

Figure 3: *Peace*, B.W. Leader, 1915, Christie's, Lot 6062535

Figure 4: *The Tranter's Cart: An Autumn Evening in Berkshire*, A.R. Quinton, 1917, in Rhys 1917, pg. 72

Figure 5: *A Battery Shelled*, Wyndham Lewis, 1919, Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 2747

Figure 6: *Gassed*, John Singer Sargent, 1919, Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 1460

Figure 7: *Hell Fire Corner*, Frank Hurley, 1917, State Library of New South Wales, PXD 21/32

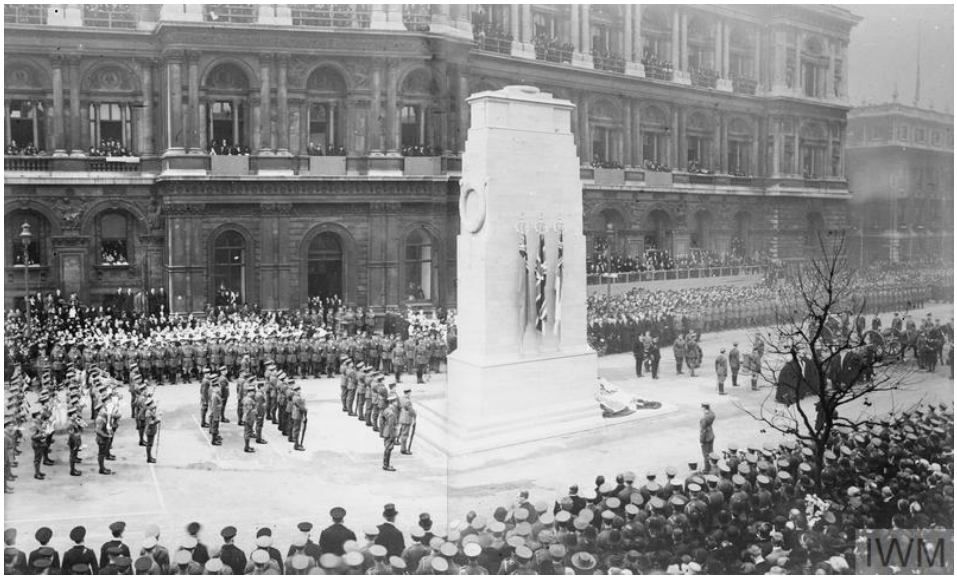

Figure 8: *The Cenotaph at Whitehall*, Edwin Lutyens, 1920, Imperial War Museum, Q 31491

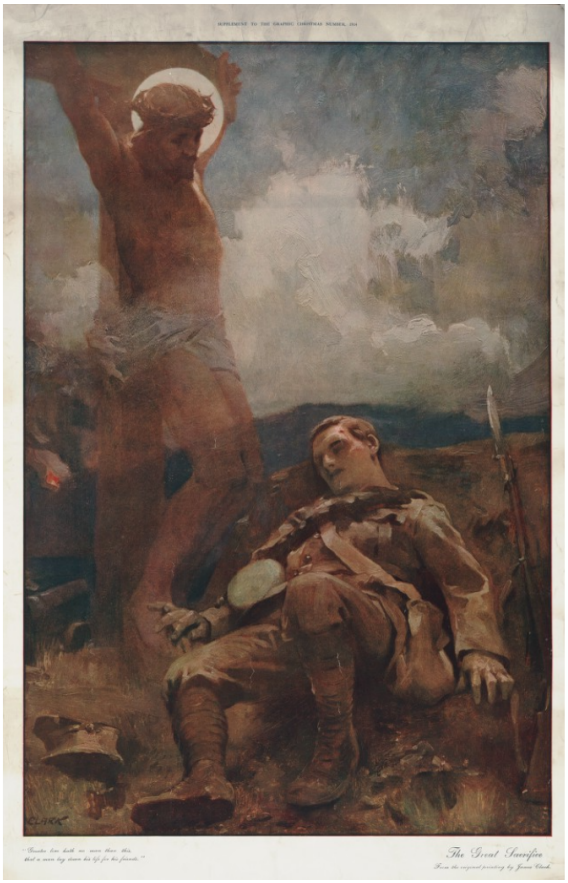

Figure 9: *The Great Sacrifice*, James Clark, 1914, Brown Digital Repository, BDR: 248769

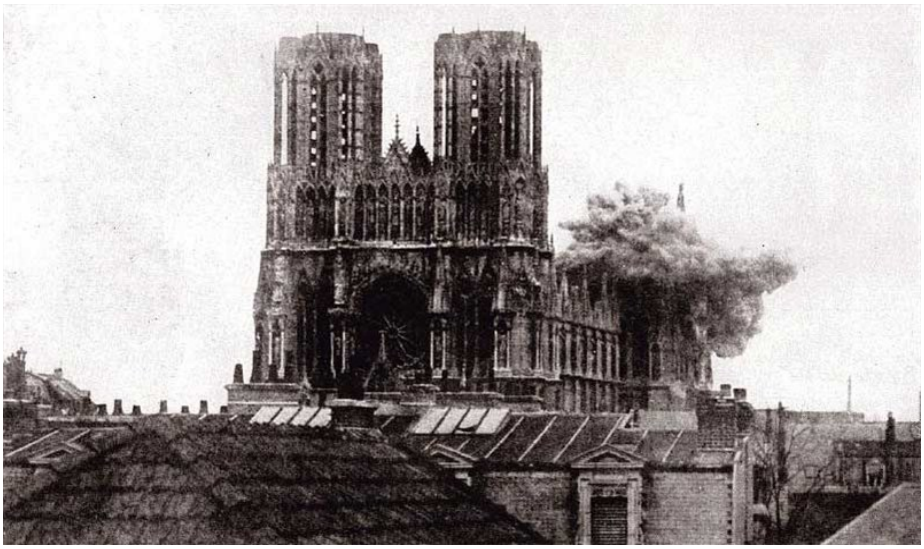

Figure 10: *Shell bursting on the cathedral at Reims,* 1919, in Collier's New Photographic History of the World's War, pg. 86

Figure 11: *The Consoler*, H. Copping, 1915, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2014.3987

Figure 12: *The Harvest of Battle*, C.R.W. Nevinson, 1919, Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 1921

Figure 13: *The Battle of San Romano*, Paolo Uccello, c.1435-1460, National Gallery, London, NG583

Figure 14: *View of the Army Section, Imperial War Museum at Crystal Palace*, Horace Nicholls, 1920, Imperial War Museum, Q 31438

Figure 15: *View of Imperial War Museum's Art Section at South Kensington*, Horace Nicholls, 1929, Imperial War Museum, Q 48436

Figure 16: *View of Imperial War Museum's Art Section at Crystal Palace*, 1921, Imperial War Museum, Q 17028

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