

What can art tell us about the experience of soldiers and communities during war?

There are three main visual ways of representing war — through photographs, paintings or sketches, and posters.

- 1 Look at the collection of non-photographic images below (photographs are looked at on a separate worksheet) and decide what they tell us about the war. Apply these questions to each image to help you analyse it. You might like to divide this up into a group task.



Analysing visual art

ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS	MY ANSWERS
What does it show?	
What aspect of war is being depicted?	
How is the subject depicted (e.g. realistic, caricatured)?	
What is the message about this aspect of war?	
Is it effective?	
Is it a primary (first hand experience) or secondary (based on other accounts) source?	
Is it truth or propaganda?	

- 2 At the end, discuss what art does that photographs cannot.
- 3 What do the ones you decide are propaganda all have in common — that is, those characteristics that make them propaganda rather than information?

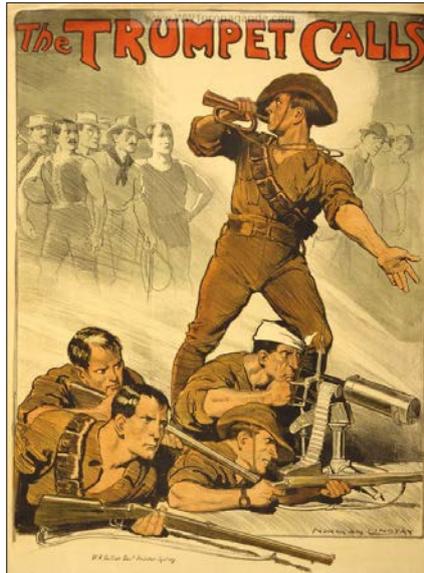


click to enlarge



1 A government recruiting poster from 1918.

AWM ARTV00078



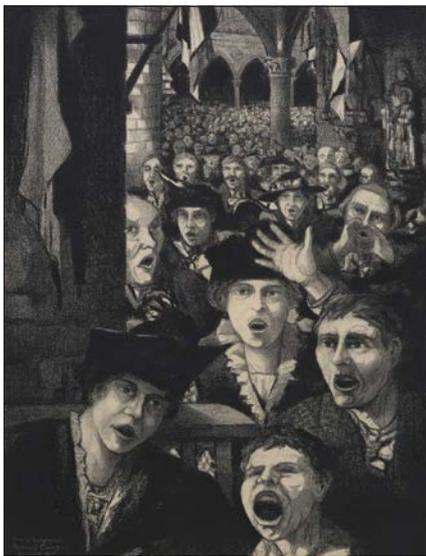
2 A government recruiting poster, c.1918.

AWM ARTV00039



3 A government recruiting poster, 1916.

AWM ARTV08838

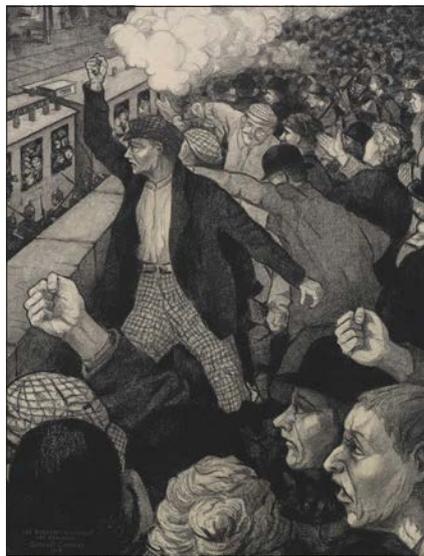


4 A 1916 drawing by Belgian artist Gisbert Combaz,

The drawing shows a crowd of Belgian civilians on their national day of 21 July.

'Long live Belgium!'

<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/historiography-atrocities-the-long-shadow#>

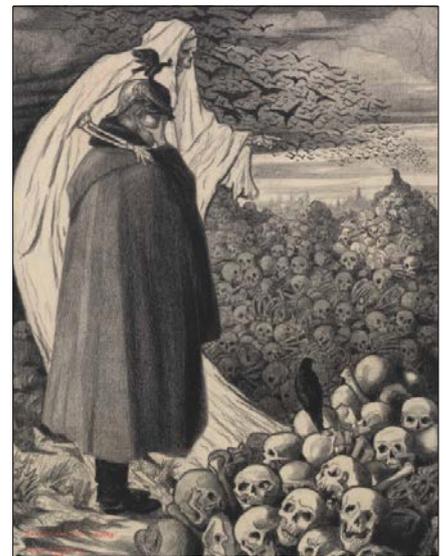


5 A 1916 drawing by Belgian artist Gisbert Combaz

The drawing refers to Belgian workers being conscripted and transported to Germany as forced labour.

'The barbarians take the slaves.'

<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/historiography-atrocities-the-long-shadow#>

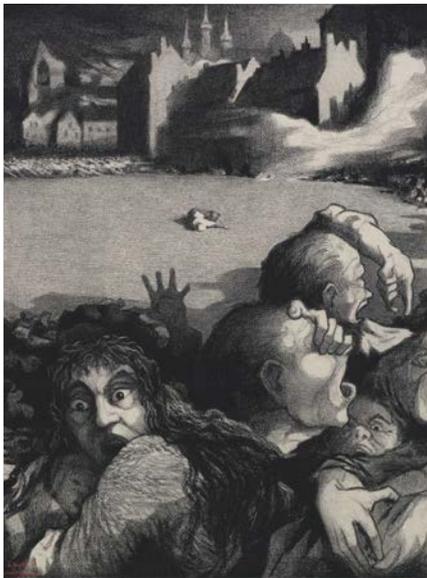


6 A 1916 drawing by Belgian artist Gisbert Combaz

It shows Death and German Emperor William II.

Villain, this is your work!

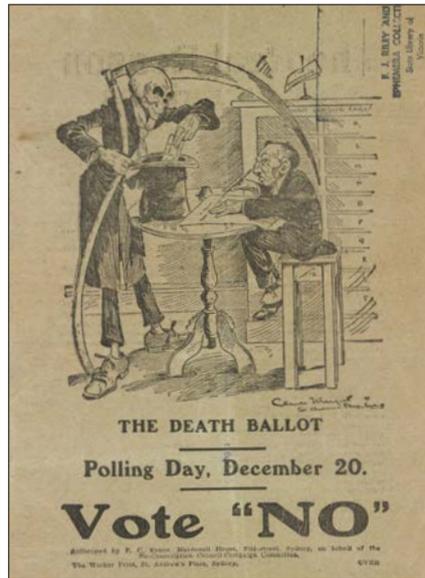
(Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique)



7 A 1916 drawing by Belgian artist Gisbert Combaz, Louvain

It shows the people of the Belgian city of Leuven (Louvain) fleeing the city on 25 August 1914 as invading German troops killed hundreds of civilians and burned down the mediaeval library building and its priceless collection of manuscripts.

<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/historiography-atrocities-the-long-shadow#>



8 An anti-conscription leaflet, 1917

The seated figure is the Australian Prime Minister William Morris Hughes who called for the vote to introduce conscription. The cabinet in the background contains the names of men who will be eligible to be conscripted if the law is voted for.

The Death Ballot. Polling Day, December 20.

Vote 'No'

State Library of Victoria, Riley and Ephemera Collection



9 A postcard by Belgian artist James Thiriar painted during the war.

It shows a rooster (symbol of Wallonia, the southern French-speaking region of Belgium) and an eagle (symbol of Germany). The Flemish symbol (a lion) is not depicted. The caption reads:

Belgians are you ready?

Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique)



10 Poster for a French-made film The Frenchwoman in war-time (Library of Congress)



11 Zero Hour (8th August 1918) a 1935 sculpture by Australian artist Leslie Bowes (AWM ART12504)



12 On the Messines Road (1917) by Australian war artist Charles Bryant (AWM ART00182)



13 A 1915 painting by French artist Paul Leroux.

One of the soldiers is checking the dead soldier's identity papers.

At Eparges, soldiers bury their comrades by the light of the moon.

(Musée National du Château de Versailles)



14 An anti-conscriptionist leaflet, 1917

Australian Nationalists

Married men are exempt if the government Proposals are carried, but if they are REJECTED, all men will have to go.

'Vote Yes mum or else they'll take dad.'

Vote Yes

(State Library of Victoria, Riley and Ephemera Collection)



15 A French poster at the start of the war.

The woman and children are wearing traditional Alsatian national costumes. Both France and Germany claimed Alsace-Lorraine, and the Germans had taken control there after the 1871 Franco-German war.

Stand up! Those who have died for our country ... This is France!

(Library of Congress)



16 'L'enfer', painted in 1921 by French soldier and artist George Leroux

Hell

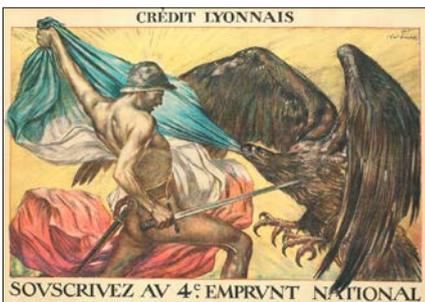
(Imperial War Museum)



17 A 1917 painting by official French war artist Felix Vallotton

Military Cemetery at Châlons-sur-Marne

(Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg)



18 A French poster calling for contributions to a war loan.

Subscribe to the 4th National Loan

(Library of Congress)



19 A drawing by Belgian artist Franz Gaillard 1918

Woman (widow of a soldier from the 1914-1918 war) shows the portraits to three children, 1918.

(Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique)



20 A government recruiting poster, 1918

God bless dear daddy who is fighting the Hun and send him help.

(AWM ARTV05469)