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Shock and Awe: Contemporary Artists at War and Peace 19 July – 17 September

The RWA is about to open its most controversial and compelling exhibition to date; an installation of works by contemporary artists recently exposed to the front-line of war in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans.

The exhibition is part of the *Bristol 2014 Project*, an extensive programme of events marking the centenary of the start of the First World War and also looking at other conflicts that have had an impact on Bristol over the last century.

Each participating artist has created their own powerful response to conflict, building on personal and collective memories, whether by examining acts of remembrance, the notion of art as a warning or as a form of protest. In the run up to the opening of the exhibition the RWA in conjunction with the Bristol 2014 project looks at what inspires the artists, their ways of working and how they have coped in highly demanding, often very stressful conditions.

David Cotterrell is an installation artist who has used different media and technologies to explore the social and political tendencies of a world at once shared and divided.

His works *Sightlines Series* and *Gateway Series* records the arduous work of the British Medical Corps.



In November 2007 David Cotterrell was granted unprecedented, uncensored access to observe the work of the Joint Forces Medical Group, in Afghanistan. Working as part of a commission by the Wellcome Trust for an exhibition on war and conflict, David, photographed the life-saving operations which take place in the 201 Field Hospital at Camp Bastion military base in Helmand Province. These images are documented in the *Sightlines Series*. In contrast, the *Gateway Series* portrays the air evacuation of soldiers with life-changing injuries to Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham, for continuing treatment.

David spent a year reflecting on his experiences and the photographs he had produced during the course of his research. With the MoD's permission, he traced the casualties, and doctors, featured and asked whether they wanted the images to be destroyed after the exhibition but many felt that there was a continuing role for the photographs. When the photographs were first shown in public, they generated

debate about the human cost of war, by portraying the physical effect of warfare on the individual.

David was acutely aware of his role as an observer and has spoken of his approach: 'I chose to deliberately make work, which failed to satisfy the desire for drama [...] the frozen, interminable, the night-time evacuation flights, and the uncertain waiting for casualties...'

Jill Gibbon's work breaks from the tradition of depicting war zones to commission and instead centres on producing drawings, uninvited and undercover, inside Arms Fairs around the world.



Mercenaries, Jill Gibbon, 2013, inkjet printing

Having spent time sketching anti-war protests outside of Arms Fairs, Jill became intrigued as to what was happening inside and began to gain access to the secretive events, through a number of different guises. Her biggest challenge was how to convey, the shock of what she witnessed. It is a surreal environment where snacks are consumed, alcohol flows and military equipment is displayed as a gleaming commodity. Jill describes her work as 'deliberately playing with traditions of war art and reportage'

Using small A6 concertina sketchbooks and an ordinary pen, Jill is able to draw discreetly, as though she was merely taking notes. These clandestine sketchbooks document nearly 7 years from 2007-14; and have a sense of immediacy which appears through a mis-drawn line, a smudge, or a drop of coffee.

Jill's flat colour poster-style prints enlarged drawings from the sketchbooks reflect the brash advertising of Arms Fairs. For the first time, objects which Jill has collected from Arms Fairs will be displayed alongside her sketches and poster prints.

Tim Shaw is a sculptor who works in various media and different scales. His work is political as well as metaphorical and metaphysical.



Casting a Dark Democracy, Tim Shaw RA, 2008, steel, black polythene, oil and sand

'Casting a Dark Democracy' by Tim Shaw demands the viewers' attention. The imposing seventeen foot high sculpture is constructed of industrial materials: steel, barbed wire, black polythene and electrical cabling. The piece was created in response to the media representation of the Iraq war and public sense of outrage at the United Kingdom government's decision to join the invasion Iraq in 2003. In particular the shocking photograph exposing the treatment of a hooded prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq shaped Tim's work. The image was one of a series of photographs exposing United States troops' abuse of Iraqi prisoners which hit the headlines in the British Press in April 2004. For Tim, the photograph evoked a strong reaction, similar feelings to those he had experienced when living in Belfast during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Tim describes the work as 'barbaric and medieval in appearance. Its presence is menacing.'¹ Historical and more modern references are drawn upon, from the stance of ancient Greek bronze statues, Spanish painter Goya's Peninsular War works, to the hood worn by the Ku Klux Klan. In contrast, the figure has 'a Christ-like compassion and vulnerability.'² Ten years after the photograph which inspired 'Casting a Dark Democracy' was taken, Tim believes '...the image remains potent, as something that trawls just beneath the surface of the collective consciousness'.³

Challenging and thought provoking this exhibition is unlike any others seen at the RWA.

¹ Tim Shaw, *Casting a Dark Democracy* text.

² Ibid.

³ Tim Shaw, *Black Smoke Rising* text.

ABOUT THE RWA

The RWA has eight galleries within a stunning, purpose-built 19th century building. The five upstairs galleries – Sharples, Winterstoke, Stancomb-Wills, Methuen, and Milner - host the main exhibition/s, alongside the Bristol Drawing School studio. Downstairs is the Fedden Gallery and a newly completed gallery space. All gallery spaces are available for private hire for special events, such as weddings and parties, conferences and meetings. The downstairs area has a shop, and a café run by Papadeli <http://news.papadeli.co.uk>

The Royal West of England Academy (RWA) is England's only regional Royal Academy of Art. It is a registered charity which has been self-supporting for over 150 years and is housed within an outstanding Grade II* listed building, boasting beautiful top-lit galleries and an extensive permanent fine art collection. The RWA has HM Queen Elizabeth II as its patron and HRH The Prince of Wales is an honorary academician.

The RWA is an established venue for the fine arts and embraces an artistic awareness of the widest nature. The exhibition programme provides a showcase for one-person and mixed exhibitions in a variety of media, attracting large numbers of visitors nationwide. The Academy is situated in the academic heart of Bristol at the Clifton Triangle opposite the Victoria Rooms.

Closed Mondays

Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 6pm

Sunday 11am – 5pm

Adults £5 inc. gift aid

Concessions £3.50 inc. gift aid

Under 16s, University of Bristol, UWE and SGS students FREE

Royal West of England Academy, Queen's Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1PX | 0117 973 5129
| www.rwa.org.uk

Notes to Editors

- Children must be accompanied by an adult for all sessions
- For more information on the Bristol festival of nature please see www.festivalofnature.org