

David Cotterrell: legion-magazine.co.uk : Artist explores war and medicine

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War and medicine: 150 years of life and loss is the title of a new exhibition at the Wellcome Trust, in London. It has been supported by the Ministry of Defence and features new work by contemporary artist David Cotterrell.

The exhibition explores the often uneasy, but continually evolving, relationship between warfare and medicine, beginning with the disasters of the Crimean War in the 1850s, and continuing through to today's conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It's an uneasy relationship, because as the capacity to maim and kill continues to grow, so too does the ability to repair and heal. The two seem at odds, yet are closely bound.

Cotterrell spent a month in Camp Bastion in the Helmand Province last year, his trip having been inspired by the realisation that he is part of the last generation to have living relatives who experienced the Second World War.

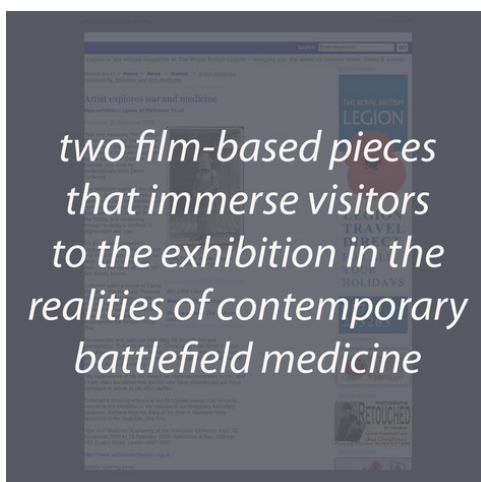
He observed and captured their daily life through film and photography. Cotterrell explained: Growing up I can recall in-depth conversations with my grandfather about his own memories of war, and I feel fortunate to have been born into a generation that was not required to join the military.

My experiences of life will always be moderate compared to this, and I have often wondered how people who have experienced war have managed to adjust to life after conflict.

Cotterrell's resulting artwork is two film-based pieces that immerse visitors to the exhibition in the realities of contemporary battlefield medicine. Extracts from his diary of his time in Helmand have appeared in the Guardian.

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