Paul Gough, ‘A concentrated utterance of total war’ - Paul Nash, CWR Nevinson and the challenge of representation in the Great War, in Joanna Bourke (ed.) *War and Art: A Visual History of Modern Conflict*, Reaktion Books, November 2017, pp. 270-282. ISBN-10: 1780238460

The British government was slow to commission artists in the First World War. French and German artists had been recording the battlefronts long before the Scottish draughtsman Muirhead Bone was appointed the first official British war artist in mid-1916. 1 Further painters and printmakers were eventually commissioned by the Department of Information, intending to use their work as little more than pictorial propaganda. Drawn from the art establishment and the royal academies, none of these artists had seen active service, and their imagery was indebted to an honourable (but outmoded) tradition of battle art or reportage.

Within a year, a second wave of younger artists, most them serving with the armed forces, had been recruited in an ambitious and comprehensive programme of arts patronage. Before the war many of these painters, printmakers and sculptors had been associated with Wyndham Lewis, self-appointed ringmaster of a brilliant clique of young Modernists who readily embraced the geometric dynamism of Cubism and Futurism. From their workshop, the Rebel Art Centre in central London, they contrived a powerful visual style, which the Imagist poet Ezra Pound dubbed ‘Vorticism’, a loud and jagged, irreverent aesthetic that was in lockstep with the new machine age. 2

Painters Paul Nash and Christopher Nevinson were loosely linked with the Vorticists, the latter enjoying a constant and colourful battle for supremacy with Lewis. Both men gained first-hand experience of the Front, Nash as an infantry officer, Nevinson as a medical orderly. Their experience of the battlefields in France and Belgium and the impact on the men who fought there resulted in art of immense power and singularity of vision, unparalleled in modern times.

Opening extract from:

**War and Art: A Visual History of Modern Conflict**

Editor Joanna Bourke

* Reaktion Books (20 November 2017)

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[Jon Bird](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&text=Jon+Bird&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Jon+Bird&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Monica Bohm-Duchen](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_2?ie=UTF8&text=Monica+Bohm-Duchen&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Monica+Bohm-Duchen&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Grace Brockington](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_3?ie=UTF8&text=Grace+Brockington&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Grace+Brockington&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [James Chapman](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_4?ie=UTF8&text=James+Chapman&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=James+Chapman&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Michael Corris](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_5?ie=UTF8&text=Michael+Corris&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Michael+Corris&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Patrick Crogan](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_6?ie=UTF8&text=Patrick+Crogan&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Patrick+Crogan&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Jo Fox](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_7?ie=UTF8&text=Jo+Fox&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Jo+Fox&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [**Paul Gough**](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_8?ie=UTF8&text=Paul+Gough&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Paul+Gough&sort=relevancerank)(Author), [Gary Haines](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_9?ie=UTF8&text=Gary+Haines&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Gary+Haines&sort=relevancerank) (Author), [Joanna Bourke](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_10?ie=UTF8&text=Joanna+Bourke&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Joanna+Bourke&sort=relevancerank) (Editor)

This sumptuously illustrated volume, edited by eminent war historian Joanna Bourke, offers a comprehensive visual, cultural and historical account of the ways in which armed conflict has been represented in art. Covering the last two centuries, the book shows how the artistic portrayal of war has changed, from a celebration of heroic exploits to a more modern, truthful depiction of warfare and its consequences. Featuring illustrations by artists including Paul Nash, Judy Chicago, Pablo Picasso, Melanie Friend, Francis Bacon, Kathe Kollwitz, Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, Dora Meeson, Otto Dix and many others, as well as those who are often overlooked, such as children, women, non-European artists and prisoners of war, this extensive survey is a fitting and timely contribution to the understanding, memory and commemoration of war, and will appeal to a wide audience interested in warfare, art, history or politics. Introduction by Joanna Bourke, with essays by Jon Bird, Monica Bohm-Duchen, Joanna Bourke, Grace Brockington, James Chapman, Michael Corris, Patrick Crogan, Jo Fox, Paul Gough, Gary Haines, Clare Makepeace, Sue Malvern, Sergiusz Michalski, Manon Pignot, Anna Pilkington, Nicholas J. Saunders, John Schofield, John D. Szostak, Sarah Wilson and Jay Winter.

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