

Centennial Of US Entry Into World War I Marked With Museum Exhibitions, PBS Dance Film



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As the centennial of the entry of the United States in World War I approaches next month, artistic commemorations of this event and of the war are being offered at museums across the United States, as well as in a dance film on public television.

Perhaps the grandest exhibition of them all, *World War I and American Art*, is on view at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia through April 9; this will then travel to the New-York Historical Society this spring and then to the Frist Center for Visual Arts in Nashville in the fall.

The first major museum exhibition to revisit this unprecedented global event through the eyes of American artists, *World War I and American Art* shows how American artists translated their wartime experience, opinions and perceptions into works that chronicle this transformative moment in American culture. The war's impact on art and culture was multifaceted, as American artists spoke out against it, participated as soldiers on the battlefield and workers on the home front, designed enlistment posters and camouflage, served as official artists documenting the war, and helped shape postwar society in its wake.

The 160 works by 80 artists in the exhibition encompass a broad variety of stylistic approaches, viewpoints, and experiences through paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints, photographs, posters, and ephemera. A diverse array of artists is represented, including Ivan Albright, George Bellows, Charles Burchfield, John Steuart Curry, Howard Chandler Christy, James Montgomery Flagg, Henry Glintenkamp, Marsden Hartley, Childe Hassam, Carl Hoeckner, George Luks, John Marin, Violet Oakley, Georgia O’Keeffe, Joseph Pennell, Jane Peterson, Horace Pippin, Man Ray, Boardman Robinson, Norman Rockwell, John Singer Sargent, John Sloan, Edward Steichen, and Claggett Wilson.

“World War I and American Art examines a critical moment in history from both the home front and firsthand experience, allowing for images of intense patriotism and outraged dissent to recreate the charged atmosphere leading up to and during the war,” noted David R. Brigham, PAFA president and acting museum director. “Artists both mirrored and participated in these debates, and the images they produced fueled discussions about the United States’ role in the world.”

The exhibition also demonstrates how the conflict changed American art itself. World War I unfolded as the American art scene was rapidly changing and experiencing a growing range of aesthetic viewpoints, political agendas, exhibition and publication opportunities, and contact with European émigrés. Images made during the war reveal American artists in transition, using more experimental forms including abstraction to capture the apocalyptic tenor of the conflict but also drawing on a straightforward realist manner to make the human experience accessible to their audience.

Among the exhibition's major is John Singer Sargent's monumental painting, *Gassed*, from the Imperial War Museums in London. Measuring approximately 20 feet wide by 7 feet tall, the composition depicts the aftermath of a mustard gas attack Sargent witnessed on the Western Front. The painting features a central group of wounded soldiers, depicted nearly life-size, walking toward a field hospital and past the bodies of their dead and injured comrades in arms.

Through July 17, the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia is showing *1917: How One Year Changed the World*, which looks back 100 years to explore how three key events of 1917—America's entry into World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the issuing of the Balfour Declaration, in which Great Britain indicated support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine—brought about political, cultural, and social changes that dramatically reshaped the United States' role in the world and provoked its most stringent immigration quotas to date. The exhibition examines this consequential year through the eyes of American Jews, who experienced these events both as Americans and as part of an international diaspora community.

1917 features nearly 125 artifacts—including uniforms, letters, photographs, and posters—as well as films, music, and interactive media. Among these are two original drafts of the Balfour Declaration, a decoded copy of the Zimmermann Telegram, the Treaty of Versailles, an Uncle Sam costume, the Medal of Honor posthumously awarded to Jewish WWI soldier William Shemin, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis's judicial robes, a postcard written by a young Golda Meir and a page from the original Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. This exhibition will travel to its co-organizer, the American Jewish Historical Society in New York, from September 1 - December 29, 2017.

On April 5, the Museum of the City of New York will offer *Posters and Patriotism: Selling World War I in New York*.

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, two and a half years after the war started, New York City artists and illustrators were convinced to join the war effort, and many of them worked for the federal government's new Division of Pictorial Publicity. *Posters and Patriotism: Selling World War I in New York* explores the outpouring of powerful posters, flyers, magazine art, sheet music covers, and other mass-produced images created by these New Yorkers to stir the American public to wartime loyalty, duty, and sacrifice.

Digging more deeply into the ideas behind the patriotic aesthetic, which mirror current events in familiar and perhaps disconcerting ways, the exhibition examines themes such as nationalism, fears surrounding immigration, and censorship of the press, that have emerged and reemerged in the national consciousness throughout American history, especially during times of crisis.

The internationally acclaimed, all-male dance company BalletBoyz is featured in the compelling narrative dance film, *Young Men*, airing Friday night, April 7, on PBS' *Great Performances*. *Young Men* follows a group of young soldiers as they experience the indiscriminate brutality of warfare.

Airing in commemoration of the centennial of World War I, the feature-length film was shot on location in northern France. Based on a highly successful stage production that premiered at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre in January 2015 (and returned in October by popular demand), it is choreographed by Iván Pérez with a commissioned score by critically acclaimed recording artist, singer-songwriter Keaton Henson. The production was conceived by artistic directors Michael Nunn and William Trevitt, formerly leading dancers with the Royal Ballet.

Looking back at a subsequent world war, St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn through April 9 is presenting the production of *946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* of Kneehigh, a UK theater company. Adapted by Kneehigh's former co-artistic director Emma Rice and author Michael Morpurgo (who also wrote *War Horse*, about World War I) from Morpurgo's book, *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips*, this new play tells a true tale of what happened when African-American soldiers met the townsfolk of Devon, England, when they were sent there to rehearse for D-Day and the Normandy invasion. *946* takes its title from the number of casualties sustained during these bungled maneuvers, an incident kept secret by the American and British governments until Morpurgo wrote about it. Like most Kneehigh productions, *946* features a lively band on stage performing original and period music.