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Crossing the Wire: Western Contemporary War Art in the Interbellum

In 2022, war is again at the forefront of international consciousness, to degrees not seen for two decades. The response of the Administration of US President George W. Bush to the terror attacks in America on 11 September 2001 embroiled global geopolitics in an upheaval that dominated the news cycle for many years. America's already precarious post-9/11 righteous indignation was eroded in a series of Coalition atrocities, ghost prisoners, black sites, extraordinary rendition, torture, humiliation, and festive cruelty at Abu Ghraib. Global attention to the seemingly endless deployments inevitably waned in the War's second decade, after the election of US President Barack Obama and the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. The visibility of the War on Terror mutated into the more banal-sounding 'Overseas Contingency Operation',[1] while Obama increased the number of attacks on foreign soil through drone strikes, prompting Derek Gregory's 2011 coining of the term 'everywhere war', in which the monolith of war dissolves into less visible acts of "self defence" that "obscures the systematic cumulative nature of the campaign".[2] Obama's sleight of hand did the trick and attention waned, only to emerge briefly as a coda in 2021 with images of desperate Afghans falling from an American C-17 onto the runway at Kabul.

Two decades of the global War on Terror taught the world nothing new about war. Nearly twenty years later we know exactly what six-to-ten million protestors on 15 February 2003,[3] against the invasion of Iraq, might have suggested—that war is the violent exercise of existing power relations, usually colonial, if only vestigial, that it fires-up long-standing and deeply ingrained injustices, that the wealthy profit while the already impoverished and vulnerable pay with their uncountable grief, their lands, their bodies and lives. War is nonlinear and stochastic, and its outcomes are synergistic and unpredictable. Neither those who had chanted "no war!" back in 2003 nor those who moved resources around maps in the Pentagon could predict the extent of the final costs; yet all knew generally someone would pay, and who they would likely be. Brown University's Watson Institute for International Relations and Public Affairs found that up to August 2021, 387,072 civilians died in Iraq, Afghanistan and other nations in the region, as a direct result of the War on Terror. That is more than a third of all deaths in those wars.[4] This is the point underlying Muhub Esmat's recent article in *Di'van* on the video installation work of Aziz Hazara, an Afghan working between Kabul and Ghent, whose five-channel video installation *Bow Echo*, 2019, was included in the 2020 Sydney Biennial. In that work, young Afghan boys struggle to stand on a windy mountain top with Kabul down below, while blowing a tiny toy trumpet. The work speaks of vulnerability and a stoic endurance in the face of forces that are both great and indifferent, that could literally blow life away.

In this article, I want to briefly consider a handful of recent western contemporary war art works, while picking up on a powerful point made fleetingly in Esmat's article, in which he argues that "Hazara's works aim to incite examination and investigation", unlike what he disparages as the "facile compassion often aroused by the widely circulated images of the war."[5] The implicit targets of Esmat's ire are the works of many western contemporary artists who have travelled to the war in Afghanistan as it stretched over the last two decades. These artists have been the focus of much of my own research since 2009, initiated by a series of interviews with Shaun Gladwell leading to the book *Double War*,

which discussed the video installation artist's work as Australia's Official War Artist in Afghanistan in 2009, particularly within the broader visual politics of the War on Terror.[6] Over the past four years, I have worked closely with Uroš Čvoro on three books published by Bloomsbury as part of the large Art in Conflict project, two of which are due out next year. We are also about to enter our next project in 2023, Art of Peace. What has become clear to us is that art can be powerful, even in the face of war, but it can do virtually nothing to prevent it or change its course. The grandest of humanitarian statements against war—a tapestry at the United Nations of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*—was simply covered with a blue curtain as Colin Powell presented falsities and outright lies to the Security Council on 5 February 2003 to justify the American invasion of Iraq. That moment attests to both the power and limitations of art.

As Terry Smith convincingly argues, 'contemporary art' is deeply enmeshed within contemporaneity; both reflective and constitutive of our time's 'currents,'[7] and this is strongly the case with contemporary war art. In reflecting contemporaneity, as Smith argues, contemporary art tends to map-out, explore and articulate deeper historical shifts that take place over larger timeframes. After two decades of contemporary war art from the War on Terror, we now live in an atmosphere of a tense and seemingly fleeting interbellum. One generation after the beginning of the War on Terror, and nearly thirty-five years after the end of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear war has returned as a geopolitical tool, gambling with the highest stakes possible. This moment seems appropriate for some critical reflection on 'contemporary war art', or, more perhaps accurately the focus of this article, on *western* contemporary art that addresses the wars that western nations, Australia, the United States, NATO, wage elsewhere in the world. How are Australian artists and other artists from the west to address something as profound as the human cost of war, while negotiating reductive or performative modes of compassion? This article briefly considers not only the question of what war art can *incite* in audiences in the west, but also what we, that audience, demand of contemporary war art.

In Susan Sontag's final book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, written in the early days of the War on Terror, she argues audiences make ideological demands on images of war.[8] Sontag discusses *Three Guineas*, published in 1938 on the precipice of World War II, in which Virginia Woolf suggests that images of human destruction in war incite a universal response of horror with the potential force to stop war in its tracks. Sontag rejects Woolf's assertion, arguing that any compassion is actually contingent on the extent to which the audience of the image identifies with the victim depicted: "identity is everything."[9] In other words, Sontag argues, compassion is ideologically conditional. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, audiences can impose emotionally-driven demands on images, which are sometimes left unsatisfied by the images themselves. In instances where the images are important enough to an audience, those demands are met by iterative mediated reimaginings of those images, until they are fully rehabilitated in the service of the audience's demands. One such example is the image of the supposedly dead Osama Bin Laden that was widely broadcast following his assassination by the US Navy Seals on 2 May 2011. The photo briefly did the rounds on different television and online media outlets, before it was swiftly debunked as a bad photoshop job that had been circulating on the net since 2009. And yet, a year and a half later, as if to satisfy the popular thirst in the US for an image of Bin Laden dead, that had been effectively stolen away when the photo was debunked, a representation of the 'real' photographic image reappears in Kathryn Bigelow's

Zero Dark Thirty (2012), as a photograph taken by the Navy Seal commanding officer, seen fleetingly on the back viewfinder of his digital camera.[10] Sontag says in her earlier landmark work, *On Photography*, that images can goad conscience but can never be ethical or political knowledge.[11] If compassion is ideologically conditional and, in turn, we make demands on images to align with what audiences want of them, the highly subjective field of visual art is particularly apt to act as a mirror to popular fears and desires.

In his 2015 lecture, [12] and his later 2017 article,[13] Rex Butler considers the possible forces of the collective Id at work in the popularity of Ben Quilty's *After Afghanistan* exhibition as it toured Australia. Butler is particularly swingeing of what he saw at that time as the uncritical "nationalist group-think" of Australia's art critics around Quilty's work.[14] The *After Afghanistan* series mostly consists of large oil-on-canvas portraits of Australian Defence Force soldiers, posed in Quilty's studio in Robertson in regional New South Wales in the months following the artist's time in Afghanistan as Australian Official War Artist in 2011. It is now ten years since *After Afghanistan* began its tour, met with the almost unanimous praise of Australia's art critics. Focusing on Quilty's virtuosic execution of impasto painting, applied in thick swathes with a cake icing knife, Butler points out that this signature style is what critics claim connects the audience with the individual psychologically traumatic experiences of his soldier sitters. Critics often applaud the artist's own incisive empathy and the ways in which his gesturality and expressivity channel the soldiers' traumatic experiences through the aesthetic enactment of trauma—"visceral technique supports the emotional response of the subjects to their wartime experience,"[15] "sensuous layers of paint [that] reveal the emotional cost of war,"[16] "given their pain a language".[17]

Butler argues, however, that despite the fairly consistent reading of the paintings as capturing and conveying traumatic experience, their expressionistic aesthetic functions primarily as a vehicle for audiences to perform a generic empathy that has little to do with the actual sitters' experiences. "The real experience of the work," argues Butler, "is an empty expressiveness, the signs of expressivity but without anything actually being expressed."[18] The mainstay of Butler's critique of Quilty's *After Afghanistan* is less an attack on the paintings themselves or any accusation of Quilty engaging in 'facile compassion'; but rather that the popularity of the works reveals much about what Butler calls the "wider ideology of our time";[19] that is, "solicitation at a distance or care without responsibility, that 'interpassivity' that is to be seen in all contemporary internet campaigns, Facebook signings and twitter trendings in the name of a good cause."[20] Butler borrows 'interpassivity' from Slavoj Žižek, meaning a "mode of our participation in socio-ideological life in which we are active all the time in order to make sure that nothing will happen, that nothing will really change."[21]

Butler's analysis of the popular reception of *After Afghanistan* suggests that what Australian, and western audiences more generally, want from contemporary war art is that "we just abstractly have to feel or sympathise with them [the traumatised returned soldiers]," Butler says, "and that is enough."[22] In other words, *After Afghanistan* provides its audience with the opportunity to publicly perform empathy and compassion—reassuring them they are *good people*, against war in the broadest terms—without mounting any ethical challenges to the larger political and structural contexts that lead to Australia's involvement in Afghanistan in the first place.[23] And I don't say this smugly. My own analysis of Quilty's *After Afghanistan* at that time focuses on the work's adept affective capacities

and discusses the gesture of the sitters through Warburgian analysis,[24] while overlooking the more complex ethical problematic arising from the tour of *After Afghanistan* being supported by defence contractor Thales,[25] a criticism of the exhibition I have only once come across, in a blog post by Natalie Thomas.[26]

Shaun Gladwell immediately preceded Quilty as the Australian Official War Artist and was sent to Afghanistan with the ADF in 2009. Gladwell and I worked collaboratively on bringing to print *Double War: Shaun Gladwell, visual culture and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq*, my first book on contemporary war art with the artist contributing many images of his work and several interviews. What interested me about Gladwell's approach was, in our interviews he talked about "an impossible empathy" that percolates through his Afghanistan works,[27] the inability of him as an artist to align himself in any meaningful way with the experience of the soldiers. This is clear when we compare two works from Gladwell's Afghanistan works, *Double Field* and *POV: Mirror Sequence Tarin Kowt*, both 2009-10. Both are synchronised two-channel video installations in which two opponents attempt to follow each other through the viewfinder, moving sideways and strafing around their opponent. In *Double Field*, both opponents are ADF soldiers: "The overall effect is that the two points of view form a tight isolated hermetic feedback loop – nearly a mirror image";[28] on the other hand, in *POV: Mirror Sequence Tarin Kowt*, Gladwell takes the place of one of the soldiers, and the civilian/military divide becomes clear, through differences in both the visual framing of the points-of-view and the movements of Gladwell and the soldiers. Furthermore, I was acutely conscious that any in-depth discussion of a western official war artist accompanying Coalition troops on a War on Terror mission, necessitated discussions of torture, the Bush Administration's twisting of international law, the weaponization of video games, the gamification of viewfinder warfare and the propaganda of movies like *Zero Dark Thirty* and NBC's *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003). Large sections of the book never mention Gladwell or his work.

During a public talk promoting *Double War* a year later, an audience member asked, where are the absent Afghans in Gladwell's Afghanistan?[29] It is an obvious point that can be fairly made about both Quilty and Gladwell's Afghanistan works—the central topic of both bodies of work is 'our' pain, 'our' gaze. Questions aside of whether or not we get to know either of these dimensions through their respective bodies of contemporary war art work, the perspectives of Afghans lie far outside their frames, in the sense used by Judith Butler in *Frames of War*. To an Australian and western audience more generally, the images in Hazara's work make this contrastingly clear with images that we do not necessarily want to know about, that challenge the security of our long-held narratives of having defended Afghanistan's liberty in the face of the tireless tyranny of the Taliban. How are we to know about the massive dumps of potentially toxic military material pictured in Hazara's *I am looking for you like a drone, my love*, 2021, or imagine the oppressive presence of the American surveillance blimps fixed 1,500 feet above the expanse of Kabul depicted in his *Kite Balloon*, 2018, when images such as these are rarely on our news and never in western contemporary war art? As Esmat says, even though the blimps are now gone, "the experience of living under them, that shaped the lives of many since their original introduction into the country in 2007, remains."[30] They are literally and figuratively beyond our frame.

Yet this is an inherent limitation surrounding any western contemporary artist in an overseas war zone, many of whom are sent with their nation's military in the capacity of official war artist. The very first Australian, British and Canadian official war artists worked alongside soldiers in the trenches on the front lines of the First World War. As Australia's scheme developed and included high profile artists, such as Stella Bowen, William Dobell, Donald Friend, Ivor Hele and Arthur Streeton, they became less exposed to direct risk. However, Australia's Official War Artists sent to America's war in Vietnam, Bruce Fletcher and Ken McFadyen were required to be fully trained to fight in jungle warfare. When McFadyen was sent in 1968 he was shot in the leg, by accident.[31] It is quite likely this incident is the reason why Australia appointed no more official war artists until 1999, when Rick Amor and Wendy Sharpe, were sent to cover Australia's INTERFET peacekeeping operations in Timor Leste. With Amor and Sharpe, the scheme was broadened to include any Australian military operations,[32] and has since included a greater representation of Indigenous artists and women artists after a long list of mostly white men.[33] Yet risk management, insurance and workplace health and safety standards, which have clearly changed since McFadyen's day, necessitate official war artists functioning in similar ways, and with comparable restrictions, as those of embedded journalists.

As art theorist Julian Stallabrass argued amidst the War on Terror in 2008, western troops, their travails and stories, become the inevitable focus of work of embedded journalists and, moreover, they depend upon them for their very safety and survival.[34] At a 2016 symposium at Kings College London, Stallabrass pressed Gladwell on this issue, to which the artist responded, "I was offered that vantage point, but I could not be outside of that space of power."[35] Similarly, British contemporary artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen was sent to Iraq as Britain's Official War Artist, where he was embedded with British troops in Basra. McQueen felt completely constrained, not allowed to leave the base, and was told he would receive no protection if he left on his own.[36] Of course, a western artist within the danger and volatility of a war zone, in a foreign country and unfamiliar cultural context, unarmed and untrained, is extremely vulnerable, so the constraining protections are inevitable. This is not to naively suggest that Quilty, Gladwell and others needed to throw caution to the wind and cross the wire; but rather, that the possibility did not present to them as an option.[37]

However, not all recent western official war artists have remained inside the wire. English artist David Cotterrell spent a month with British troops in Helmand Province, at the height of the war in Afghanistan. Cotterrell was commissioned by the Wellcome Trust, in association with Britain's Ministry of Defence, to create a major series of works around the intersection of contemporary war and medicine. His first trip to Afghanistan was in 2007 with the Joint Forces Medical Group and the Combat Medical Technicians of 40 Commando at Camp Bastion, Lash Kagar and Sangin. However, he returned in 2018 as a tourist and observed, "I felt I saw more and I could look back at how strange that bubble looked from just beyond the wire. When I saw the armed columns racing through Kabul and I wasn't in them, it was very interesting to get a sense of how threatening that looks, even when the soldiers are waving and trying to take the helmets off to look like they are relaxed."[38] Cotterrell began to understand the extent to which the very infrastructure and equipment considered necessary for protection functions symbolically. This brings to mind Esmat's discussion of Hazara's *Kite Balloon* and the 'protection' provided by American surveillance.

As Cotterrell observes, “everything mitigates a risk, but what they never talk about is what it *represents* to people.”

As Esmat’s article argues, Hazara’s work emphasises the longer term, the deeper time, of lived experience within an ongoing zone of conflict. In *I am looking for you like a drone, my love*, 2021, Hazara conveys the scale of the garbage dumps left behind by the American military infrastructure, with a number of locals foraging among the expanse of tech waste and military junk. While Cotterrell’s images are clearly different in many ways, they share a similar deeper sense of time, as well as address the clash of temporalities that occurs in war zones. For an official war artist, whose experience of war zones is often measured in the total of a few weeks, Cotterrell spent a significant amount of time longer in Afghanistan creating *Theatre*, 2009, a 180° multichannel video installation at the Wellcome Collection, London, as part of the *War and Medicine* exhibition.[39] Michael Corris says of Cotterrell’s *Theatre*, it is “a work of immense emotional power”.[40] And, in 2009, Cotterrell continued to document returning injured British troops at Selly Oak and Headley Court over the course of six months.

Of course, once again it is the narratives of the troops of western military that are the focus, the Coalition perspective of the war in Afghanistan. However, Cotterrell is highly conscious of the differential temporalities that collide in war zones and within the frame of his own images, which inflects his work somewhat differently. His works address the gulf between the subjective experience of a war zone and the ways in which they are mediated visually: we do not see “12-hour films of [solders] waiting to see if they’re going to be extracted on a plane or not,” yet, “that waiting is so important, and the problem is the formats which were used for actually conveying information deal with things which are resolvable in a short time, and digestible.”[41] For Cotterrell, it is artists’ championing of the subject’s experience, “without the objective aspirations of a historian or the journalist”[42] that is the greatest value that western contemporary artists bring to war zones. Comparing his role with that of the news media, he says:

> [journalists] had to form stories; and I think the problem is that it belies the fact that most conflict involves chaos, moments that don’t make sense. And it’s right they don’t make sense. Part of the trauma is the fact that there isn’t meaning and not all things lead to a conclusion. And the problem is, it’s very hard to represent those.[43]

Cotterrell observes that the closer to the crucible of warfare, we see “less of the meta-narrative”.[44] War time is experienced by combatants in war zones, as the aphorism from the First World War goes, as ‘months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror.’ Much of the boredom is waiting, indefinite interruptions of the narrative flow; much of the terror is chaos, non-narrative. The hours of boredom cannot be mediated and represented, and so the moments of extreme terror cannot be contrasted against it. As Cotterrell says, this “means that we don’t really understand anything of the actual experience”.[45]

Cotterrell notes that in a war zone the chaos of events fragments narrative, and that it is often the ambiguity, incomprehensibility and the open-ended free-floating sense of volatility that is traumatic to experience.[46] In the reconstructive process—whether this is in Cotterrell’s studio practice on returning to the UK, or in the news media’s reports of stories

of the War—a form of 'mastery' is imposed upon events that were, in fact, fugitive and chaotic. That mastery was entirely absent in the subjective experience of the original moment as it happened. Events as they happen possess a sense *atelicity*—until a coherent narrative retrospectively forms and those events become teleological (*this happened, then that, leading to this*). After returning to the UK, Cotterrell's photographs and diaries from Afghanistan served to remind him of the subjective experience of chaos that is lost in the later construction of narrative through his work: "my memory would swiftly try and provide a coherent narrative and the diary would remind me that it was fragmentary and unresolved… it's important not to forget that so much of the trauma of a situation is actually the ambiguity. It's not the clear understood moment of drama."[47] What is interesting about Cotterrell's investigation of the trauma of war is that it is less rooted in the empathy/compassion/trauma nexus, enacting in an affect-trauma psychodrama, but is instead more concerned with the temporalities of trauma. It seems not to demand that we, the audience, connect empathically in order to understand trauma—and the surgical PPE in much of Cotterrell's images further serves to disconnect us from the depicted subjects—but rather, in focusing on the disorienting *atelicity* experienced in war, we might understand something about trauma beyond *how we imagine we might feel*.

An even cooler head can be found in much of the work of Mladen Miljanović. Miljanović lives and works in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a republic of the former-Yugoslavia—the 'former East' yet not a former member of the Warsaw Pact; now ambiguously east *and* west; a European nation and yet not within the European Union; a seemingly ambivalent aspirant to NATO membership with a problematic past with existing NATO members. His work often addresses the duality of straddling boundaries, of being none and both, of crossing the wires of Europe. Miljanović was a child in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) in a village around a kilometre away from the frontline. Following the Dayton Agreement, the war ended in 'negative peace'—absence of conflict, rather than the presence of peace'—and the compromise of one country with two 'entities', the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, and Banja Luka is the de facto capital of the Republika Srpska. As a survivor of the Bosnian War and then former military conscript, Miljanović's work often addresses war, or rather the conflicting tensions that sometimes barely hold it at bay. Between military service and establishing himself as a contemporary artist (the first to represent Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale after a two-decade absence), Miljanović worked for a stonemason as a tombstone engraver ("In my village, I was a curse," he jokes, "the curse was 'I hope that Mladen would draw your portrait!'"),[48] a technique that is often found in his work. In 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the frontline of another type of conflict in Europe, as thousands of displaced people fled ISIS in Syria and northern Iraq, travelling west to seek asylum in the European Union, particularly in Angela Merkel's Germany. In response, some EU member nations, notably Hungary and Slovenia, reinforced and militarised their borders, refusing to allow the asylum seekers passage through their countries. Anticipating the wave of European ethnonationalism that has since followed, this moment saw the re-emergence of hard borders within the European Union.

In response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the hard-line taken by Slovenia and Hungary, Miljanović created *Didactic Wall*, 2019, a large white marble work engraved with survival manual instructions and diagrams on how to cross a fortified border, use the sun and the hands of a wristwatch to determine direction and a multitude of other practical

techniques for surviving outdoors and evading authorities. *Didactic Wall*'s first opening night, on July 15 2019, was held at the city gallery of Bihać, a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bihać is ten kilometres from the border with Croatia, at the hard edge of the European Union. Between the town and border was the Vucjak camp, at that time housing 800 asylum seekers hoping to cross the border. Miljanović had the same survival manual diagrams compiled and printed into a booklet, 1,000 copies of which were made available for anyone visiting the exhibition to take a copy. The booklets were stacked on two plinths next to wall text printed with the inscription from the survival manual given to Miljanović as he graduated military academy in 2001: "Believing that the knowledge you have gained in this military school would be successfully applied in peace, as well as in an eventual war, I wish you much luck in your future life."[49] A limited number of the booklets included a sachet of flammable coloured powder, which, if set alight, would emit brightly coloured smoke that could be used to signal for help. At the opening of Didactic Wall at Bihać City Gallery, the booklets found their way into the hands of some of the asylum seekers, who attended the gallery. Almost inevitably, one of those copies was set on fire by some of the children outside of the gallery. In the time of Donald Trump's Mexican border wall and the hardening of borders in Europe, *Didactic Wall* subverted military knowledge, smuggling it to asylum seekers as tools of active agency for crossing the wire. Miljanović's works incite not just compassion, albeit a subversive one, but also action. Compassion is the starting point, not the destination.

Didactic Wall possesses the mischievous dissident humour found throughout much of his work, often actively resisting the wishes of his audience. On opening night of his 2013 Venice pavilion show, Miljanović performed *The Pressure of Wishes*, in which he held in his arms a heavy granite slab engraved with text taken from various messages of best wishes and expectations leading up to Venice, the slab covering his face and body, turning the demands back on the audience. At several of his openings he has performed *At the Edge*, in which the artist hangs high up on the exterior wall of the gallery by only his forearms.[50] At his 2017 opening at ACB Gallery Budapest, he performed *In Low Flight*, crawling along the floor of the gallery, amongst opening guests' feet. Each performance is effectively a snub, eschewing the guests, the glasses of wine and the polite conversation, potentially with wealthy collectors and influential curators. Over the two decades since the War on Terror, an expectation has developed that *good* contemporary art anti-war is necessarily centred on performative modes of those things that are incontrovertibly *good*—compassion, empathy and emotionality—which in turn remind us that we are *good* people, against war, while overlooking the more critical structural, ideological and political dimension of war. Meanwhile, works such *Didactic Wall* addresses the messy specificities and complexities of the shifting geopolitics, from historical tensions, to displaced populations and xenophobic domestic politics, and remain less legible as contemporary war art.

The complex geopolitical context that characterises Bosnia and Herzegovina—its duality, its straddling of the ideological east and west—is also central to the current war in Ukraine. Like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine is in the 'former East', a former republic of the Soviet Union, now an applicant to both NATO and the European Union. The threat seemingly posed by the westernisation of its culture and its political integration into Europe was motive enough for Vladimir Putin's Russia to invade on 24 February 2022, attempt to overthrow the government in Kyiv, and unilaterally annex the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts in September the same year. Many Ukrainian artists became war

artists by default, and the war art coming out of Ukraine since the invasion is immediate, raw and reactive. One such Ukrainian artist goes by the pseudonym 'Ave'.[51] Before Russia's invasion, her works still possessed a graphic style that borrowed playfully from eastern European twentieth century propaganda poster art. Prior to the invasion, it seems to be a largely aesthetic appropriation, and almost nostalgic adoptions of a style half-a-century's historical distance. Yet since February 2022, all of Ave's works now focus on the war. Some are figurative depictions of tragedy, while others are metaphoric and symbolic vignettes; and their style now takes on a different weight. I only saw many of Ave's works at the very end of writing this piece and I have yet to properly digest these works; but what is clear in them is their raw anger and lack of compassion. To varying degrees, each of Ave's post-invasion works convey a deep sense of rage that to a western audience may well feel uncomfortably forceful. In contemporary war art, we are not used to thinking about victims of war as active, creative agents, as vociferous. Maybe we are not used to hearing their voices at all.

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[28] Kit Messham-Muir, *Double War: Shaun Gladwell: Visual Culture and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq*, (Fisherman's Bend: Thames & Hudson Australia, 2016) 189.
[29] Gladwell's images in *Double War* do include some images of Afghan military personnel within the wire of the Coalition camp.
[30] Muheb Esmat, "To hold you close as you fall with the hope that you may rise in a better place," *Di'van* 11 (11 June 2022) 82.
[31] Ryan Johnston, "Recalling History to Duty: 100 years of Australian war art," *Artlink* 35, no. 1 (March 2015): 15.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Catherine Speck, "The Australian War Museum, Women Artists and the National Memory of the First World War," in *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 Conference Proceedings*, ed. Martin Critty (Brisbane: School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland, 2009), 278.
[34] Julian Stallabrass, "The Power and Impotence of Images," in *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War* (Brighton: Brighton Photo Biennial, 2008), 6.
[35] Shaun Gladwell, *Traces of War Symposium*, Kings College London, October 1, 2016.
[36] Adrian Searle, "Last Post," *The Guardian*, 13 March, 2007 https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/mar/12/iraq.art accessed 10 November 2022.
[37] There is, of course, the fairly unique case of western war artist George Gittoes, who I have addressed elsewhere: Kit Messham-Muir, "Conflict and Compromise: Australia's Official War Artists and the 'War on Terror'", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Artistic and Cultural Responses to War – Volume 1: Australasia, the British Isles, and the United States*, Martin Kerby, Margaret Baguley and Janet McDonald (eds.), (Melbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
[38] David Cotterrell, interview with Kit Messham-Muir, transcribed by Monika Lukowska, London, 31 May 2019.
[39] Michael Corris, "My Name is David and I will be your War Artist for the Day: David Cotterrell Shoots a Video," In *War and Art*, edited by Joanna Bourke, 7-41 (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2017) 291
[40] Ibid.
[41] David Cotterrell, "The Theatre of War Symposium Day One – David Cotterrell, Subjective Documentary," *Abbey Theatre, YouTube*, 4 February, 2015 https://youtu.be/Tvc8yZv8aWM accessed 10 November 2022.
[42] David Cotterrell, "Age of Terror: David Cotterell on making art in Afghanistan," Imperial War Museum, URL: https://youtu.be/rD1j3ZHFK-Q accessed 9 November 2022.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Cotterrell, "The Theatre of War Symposium Day One".
[48] Mladen Miljanovič, interview with Kit Messham-Muir, transcribed by Monika Lukowska, London, 29 May 2019.
[49] 'The Didactic Wall', *Mladen Miljanovič*, http://mladenmiljanovic.com/The-Didactic-Wall accessed 10 November 2022.
[50] Oberfälzer Künstlerhaus in Schwandorf, Germany (2011), HDLU Zagreb, Croatia (2012), A+A Gallery, Venice, Italy (2012), Gallery MC, New York, USA (2012), DADO Gallery Cetinje, Montenegro (2013), ACB Gallery Budapest, Hungary (2014), PERA Museum, Istanbul, Turkey (2016), Synagogue, Varaždin, Croatia (2017), Gallery OFF, Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland (2018).
[51] Ave brought to my attention by George Gittoes.