

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, announces an Exhibition of the war etchings of Otto Dix to open to the public on Wednesday, August 1, twentieth anniversary of the World War. The etchings, a folio of fifty bearing the title Der Krieg, are a recent acquisition of the Museum, a gift from an anonymous donor. A room will be devoted to their display.

Otto Dix was born in 1891 at Unterhaus, Germany. At the age of fourteen he began his painting career as a Dekorations-maler, one step below a house painter. Five years later, in 1910, he was able to enter the Arts and Crafts School in Dresden, where he mastered academic draughtsmanship. The war interrupted his studies and he fought four years on the Western Front.

In an article on the work of Otto Dix published three years ago in The Arts, Mr. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of The Museum of Modern Art, comments at length on the war etchings and the single great war painting that resulted from the artist's four years of fighting. Mr. Barr says:

"All Quiet on the Western Front", written by Dix's compatriot, is frequently named the greatest novel on the war. The memories and sketches which Otto Dix preserved from these years were ultimately made permanent in a folio of etchings and in a single great painting, works worthy to rank with Remarque's novel, for which they might serve as illustrations.

"The painting, perhaps the most famous picture painted in post-war Europe, is called, simply, War. It is a masterpiece of unspeakable horror. Vines of barbed wire, the serried teeth of cartridge belts crawl over the sick earth. Half-fleshed skulls are mocked by ogling gas-masks. Painted with the uncanny verisimilitude of wax works, this staggering vision of decay in death lives through the terrific loathing which Dix has concentrated in it.

"In 1924, Dix purged himself finally of war poison in a folio of fifty etchings bearing the title Der Krieg. These are documents in the spirit of the great painting, cumulatively as powerful and affording, naturally, a far greater variety. The etchings bear prosaic names; they present facts, but seem an anthology of nightmares.

Star-shells lighting the farm at Monaco shows us shattered walls, an overturned caisson and writhing tree stumps drawn with that sensitive calligraphic delicacy which we find in the whiteline drawings of Altdorfer and Baldung Grien. A Dead horse gestures with stiffened, protesting legs. Shellholes at Dontrien lit by rockets, Near Langemarck, February, 1918, are landscapes as sterile and deathly as lava fields on the moon, or the etchings of Hercules Segers. Shock troops advancing under gas seem more inhuman than the two cadavers in another print who engage in grotesque conversation while grass sprouts from their skulls.

"Goya's Desastros de la Guerra of course comes to mind, but Goya is at once more dramatic and more journalistic. He is outside, looking on, an observer and a commentator. But Dix is a survivor who has participated. Goya thinks in terms of contrived action, of violent forces; Dix depends on eloquent, spectral silence, on documentary precision. Goya, the classicist, the Latin, emphasizes the human dramatis personae, but for Dix war is a process of organic disintegration, a slow fantastic metamorphosis of life into death, in which the human being emerges, as it were, accidentally.

"Huysman, Poe, or Baudelaire might, perhaps, have done justice in words to Dix's war painting and etchings though there is little about his work which suggests the love of the horrible or the decomposed for its own sake. Dix is no decadent taster of gamey delights nor a mere amateur of the macabre. He is an artist who has gone through four years of "quiet" on the Western Front and expressed himself subsequently with a certain lack of restraint."

The Dix etchings, grim documents of a war twenty years old August 1, on display will remain at The Museum of Modern Art throughout the month of August.