



Landscape and Memory:
Frank Hurley and a nation imagined

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Landscape and Memory:

Frank Hurley and a nation imagined

In the closing months of the 2018 centenary commemorations of the First World War eight contemporary artists accepted an invitation to engage with iconic photographs taken by Frank Hurley (1885 – 1962). The exhibition *Landscape and Memory: Frank Hurley and a Nation Imagined* includes artworks in a range of media that have been informed by the interplay between Hurley's work and the artists' own 'imagining' of conflict filtered through a variety of cultural artefacts, family history and personal experience. In doing so, they offer the viewer an acknowledgement and an exploration of the horror of war. Reflection in practice is a critical part of an artist's process and after 100 years it might appear that there is little left for artists to say about a conflict that affected almost every family in Australia. However, this exhibition proves that this is not the case.

Artists make a multitude of decisions when creating artwork using their skills, expertise, and experiential approaches. They undertake a journey of discovery, experimentation and problem-solving. This exhibition represents the visible culmination of that process and the unique vision of each of the eight artists who have brought new perspectives to imagery that has become an integral part of the Australian story. Landscape evokes poignant memories, particularly when associated with global seminal events such as the First World War.

Without the ubiquitous use of technology that we are accustomed to, photographs such as Hurley's take on even greater significance. The landscapes he captured were of a world scarred by war. Over time the land has healed itself, softening and obscuring the surface evidence of war. This has simultaneously brought a sense of comfort, but also a fear that with the loss of immediacy, there is only oblivion. 'Lest we forget' becomes less the expression of a determination to remember, but a fear of forgetting.

Each of the artworks in this exhibition seeks to connect with a specific Hurley image and reimagine it through a personal aesthetic. In this way, the artists not only challenge the loss of memories, but also explore the process of remembering.

The curators wish to thank The University of Southern Queensland (USQ), the Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, Art Education Australia (AEA) for their support and USQ photographer David Martinelli whose wonderful photographs of the artworks grace the pages of this catalogue.

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Curators – *Landscape and Memory:
Frank Hurley and a nation imagined*

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Foreword

We can never forget that Art is an important part of our lives. Art challenges us and our thinking. Art reinforces values and brings us together in ways that are memorable. Art serves to refresh us and to remind us of better things, especially in the turbulent world of today.

The Arts have been with USQ since the very beginning and have contributed to the University's identity and purpose. They have helped to shape USQ into a unique institution - a university with a strong regional and online base which delivers high quality higher education across the nation and the globe.

At USQ there is a community of committed and talented staff and students who are engaged in the Creative Arts, and who seek to lead, inspire and transform the worlds in which they live. A number of them are represented in the exhibition, including Michael Armstrong, Magaret Baguley, Beata Batorowicz, Neville Heywood, Anne Smith and David Usher. Their contributions and involvement are core to the exhibition.

For me, being presented with images of an event, that I have not been part of and that has irrevocably changed the world, offers a prompt to do the hardest thing of all, to try to imagine – really, truly, deeply. At once the act of imagining sets of possibilities for recoiling, understanding, empathising, appreciating, respecting, honouring, acknowledging, apologising, growing and changing.

Thank you to all involved for this unforgettable exhibition.

Professor Barbara de la Harpe

Executive Dean

(Faculty of Business, Education, Law and Arts) - USQ

Introduction

At his grandmother's funeral in Brisbane in 1992, Martin Kerby, the co-curator of *Landscape and Memory: Frank Hurley and a nation imagined*, a group exhibition at the Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery (TRAG), found himself standing next to his great-uncle, a veteran of the war against Japan. Looking around at the red mud, the upturned earth and the overcast skies, Henry Finch, formerly of the 2/32nd battalion, compared the scene to Passchendaele. Henry could not identify anything in his war that could act as a metaphor for this intimate experience of mortality amidst a disturbed landscape and deteriorating weather. He felt compelled to reach back 75 years to his father's war and a disastrous battle fought in Belgium between July and November 1917 to find an appropriate analogy. Images of a destroyed landscape, appalling weather, and men drowning in a sea of mud dominate the collective imagining of a battle that cost Britain and her Empire over a quarter of a million casualties. Harry Gullett, the Australian correspondent and later the author of the volume of the official history dealing with the Light Horse, struggled even to convey the impact wrought on the landscape by mass industrial warfare:

For many miles in Flanders – hundreds of square miles in fact you could not find amid the shell holes a space on which to pitch a tent so complete and terrible has been the shelling. It is impossible of description. Not a tree is alive, not even a blade of grass, and over that the men advance under the barrage from the guns. (Sunday Times, 30 Dec., 1917, p. 2)

Despite the fact that the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) suffered 38 000 casualties in the space of six weeks, Ypres occupies a strangely ambiguous place in the Australian imagining of the First World War:

[The] battles of 1917 – Bullecourt, Messines, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, perhaps even Passchendaele – elude popular cultural imagination. Ghastly though they were, they lacked the form, drama and sense of place that shape a strong heroic narrative. They presented no scaling of cliffs, no climatic moment like the charge at the Nek. They gave centre stage not to courageous individuals – though there were plenty of these – but to artillery, poison gas, air power, and all the other lethal technology of mass industrial warfare. (Beaumont, 2013, p. 391)

Even Charles Bean, the official historian and founder of the Australian War Memorial (AWM), consigned Ypres to the “periphery of that prevailing narrative of the war, the Anzac legend” (Haultain-Gall, 2015, p. 137). Bookended by Gallipoli (1915) and Pozieres (1916) and the victory at Villers-Bretonneux (1918), its importance is further obscured by the ambiguity of 1917 as “the year in between” (Gammage, 1983, p. xxv).

Yet for all the uncertain place of Ypres and 1917 in the national consciousness, the photographs that Frank Hurley (1895-1962) took there transcend their context. The Australian imagining of the lunar landscape of the Western Front with its sea of mud, shell holes, blackened tree stumps and corpses owes much to Hurley's photographs. Likewise, his images of the AIF in Palestine, who were long stung by the view that they were forgotten, or worse, “loafers, enjoying themselves in the Holy Land, or in the unholy land of Egypt, while the infantry divisions slogged it out in Europe” (Hill, 1984), have also exerted a considerable influence on the national imagining of the conflict. Hurley was already famous before the war for his photographic work in the Antarctic with Douglas Mawson (1911-1913) and later with Ernest Shackleton (1914-1916). Despite his standing and his considerable personal bravery, Hurley clashed with Charles Bean over his predilection for self-promotion and the use of composite images that he viewed as being historically unreliable. This dispute saw him exiled to the Middle East to record the deeds of the Australian Light Horse. His post-war work was no less impressive, and “for three decades he inspired Australian film makers and photographers and was the most powerful force to shape Australian documentary film before World War II” (Pike, 2018). Hurley's “immortal pictures” have, without doubt, “flow[n] into history” (Bickel, 1980, pp. 8-9).

This essay will analyse the re-imagining of landscape and memory by a group of eight Australian artists whose work has been informed not just by Hurley's images but the pervasive mythology that still informs our understanding of what it is to be Australian.

Rationale

The exploration of the above-mentioned exhibition is framed by the work of Samuel Hynes as outlined in his seminal work *A War Imagined*. Hynes posits that though the war was the major political and military event of the age, it was also a “great imaginative event”, one which “altered the ways in which men and women thought not only about war but about the world, and about culture and its expressions”. This imagining is a version of the war “that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant” (Hynes, 1990, p. xi). It is not, however, synonymous with falsehood. Instead, it refers to the layers of cultural meaning that over time encase an historical event (Badsey, 2009). In this, the final year of the First World War Centenary, a period characterised as a memory orgy (Beaumont, 2015), Hurley’s photographs are an appropriate starting point for a ‘reimagining’ of the battlefields of 1917 and 1918 and what they communicate about national identity and communal memory. For as Leonard (n.d.) observes, landscape conducts memory and identity; both, however, are malleable. The artists have not sought to replicate Hurley’s work but have responded to a photographic image, layered as it is with historical memory to draw through a personal interpretation which is necessarily contextualised for a contemporary audience.

To make sense of a conflict that by 1918 had left Australia a broken nation (Beaumont, 2001) required an imagining of the war on the part of her soldiers and citizens that drew on familiar tropes. The most pervasive of these was the belief that the Australian people share a special relationship with the land. Mythmakers and the soldiers themselves “found stunning similarities, and sometimes even mirror images” between the Australian outback and the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East (Hoffenberg, 2001, p. 118). The destruction wrought by war actually offered Australians continuity rather than a disruption of their national narrative, even when it involved urban landscapes. As Bevan (2006, p. 13) observes, “to lose all that is familiar – the destruction of one’s environment – can mean a disorienting exile from the memories they have invoked” but for Australians the physical environment of the battlefield was a hostile foe, the confronting of which echoed the struggles of frontier life. Before 1915 white Australia had no great warriors equal to the likes of Nelson and Wellington, but the explorers, both in their bravery and in their deaths, were deemed to be “acceptable substitutes” (Hirst, 1982, p. 17). This ideology was reinforced rather than challenged by war:

This was a moment of ironic inversion. Australians could claim Europe because its historical space had been returned by combat to abstract, prehistorical, physical space, like their continent ... War returned Europe itself to what had preceded the first explorers and settlers in the Antipodes: horizons, possible tracks, bounding places, but not picturesque locales. The Western Front was the rugged, barren and pre-historical (perhaps, post-historical, in this case) landscape of Antipodean mythology. Soldiers lost their way in this primordial world of confusion, heat, thirst and dust, as had Australia’s first immigrant martyrs, the explorers of the Outback. (Hoffenberg, 2001, p. 118)

The malleability of this imagining of the landscape was hardly a unique phenomenon. For landscape is never “inert; people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it. It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, local or nation-state” (Bender, 1992, p. 3). Though it possesses a physical nature, it is just as accurately understood as a construct of the mind (Tuan, 1979, p. 6), or in Hynes’ words, an imagining. Writing about Hurley’s photographs of Australia in the 1950s, John Thompson (1999) observes that he gave Australians the means for understanding and appreciating their own country. His imagining was “clear, uncomplicated and based firmly in reality” (p. 9). This was equally true of his work between 1917 and 1918, though in place of the wide open spaces, we see battlefield vistas that are, almost in spite of the subject matter, hauntingly beautiful. For there is, as Bevan (2006, p. 7) observes, “both a horror and a fascination at something so apparently permanent as a building, something that one expects to outlast many a human span, meeting an untimely end”. Hurley’s images of the great Cloth Hall in Ypres, just as much as the famous one of the shattered landscape of Chateau Thierry, are disconcertingly beautiful despite the horror they record.

Michael Armstrong: A world beyond landscape

Though Hurley's image of the silhouetted forms of soldiers of the 1st Australian Division near Ypres is one of the best known of the entire war, one senses that Michael Armstrong's response to it is actually informed by his own service with the Australian Army in Afghanistan and Iraq. The figures in Armstrong's artworks are submerged in beeswax and thereby have become rendered as abstract forms. Mass industrialised warfare has stripped the soldiers of their individual identities; they are all but subsumed into a hostile landscape. Yet in creating this artwork, Armstrong has become both the viewer and the viewed. What we see is not so much a landscape, but a self-portrait. For Armstrong has also marched to the sound of the guns, and though he would not necessarily welcome being labelled a war artist, like Wilfred Owen, his subject is clearly the pity of war.

By distorting and concealing the soldiers' individual forms, Armstrong also compels the viewer to see in their struggle, the struggle of all soldiers in all wars. This approach is consistent with the broader evolution in the work of Australian writers and artists who have increasingly explored notions of trauma, suffering, and empathy (Holbrook, 2016). As a veteran, Armstrong knows that each soldier will eventually wage their own war, one that will know no peace. Indeed, without the Australian War Memorial (AWM) caption, it is unclear whether Hurley and Armstrong's soldiers move toward or away from battle. For like the modernists, Armstrong has de-rationalised and de-familiarised space described eloquently by Hynes:

The background is left empty, or disappears, so that distance doesn't run out to a horizon line, but simply disintegrates. On the earth in these pictures, there are no examples of architecture, no aesthetically pleasing ruins, no signs of previous inhabitation. More than that, there are no natural forms – no trees that retain the shape of trees, no natural bodies of water, not even natural shapes in the earth itself. Human figures are either altogether absent, or are rendered as tiny, insignificant figures, or are distorted or mechanised. (Hynes, 1992, p. 196)

Beyond the personal insights that he inadvertently provides, Armstrong's exploration of this "troglodyte world" (Fussell, 1977, p. 36) is indeed arresting. His vision is of a world that is beyond landscape, perhaps even an anti-landscape (Hynes, 1992), or as Geoff Dyer (2009, p. 119) observes of another artwork, "a new kind of infinity: more of the same in every direction, an infinity of waste".



Supporting troops of the 1st Australian Division walking on a duckboard track near Hooze, in the Ypres Sector.
Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E00833. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c54919



LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY: FRANK HURLEY AND A NATION IMAGINED



Images 1 – 5: Michael ARMSTRONG / *Untitled* 2018 / graphite and beeswax / 26 × 20cm



Anne Smith: The Silent Cities of the Dead

Anne Smith's *Lest we Forget* is powerfully reminiscent of Lord Byron's characterisation of war cemeteries as silent cities of the dead. Her artwork, however, is imbued with a rural rather than an urban sensibility, reflecting both her own background and the traditional approach adopted in Australian art and literature dealing with the First World War. Smith's juxtaposition of Hurley's photograph of two soldiers visiting a cemetery with an image of George Gnezdiloff, a Second World War veteran, and Ian Lade, a Vietnam War veteran, in a contemporary Australian rural scene is an approach that Hurley would have both understood and applauded:

[He had] a longstanding practice of embellishing or manipulating an image to achieve a particular effect or to heighten its drama ... The practice, used at least since the First World War, had aroused controversy and criticism among those who thought the veracity of the photographic record was compromised. Hurley's defence was an artistic one: if the finished result gave the viewer a better understanding of the scene, or it enhanced the realism or beauty of the photograph, then such a manipulation was appropriate. (Thompson, 1999, p. 5)

Smith also shares with Hurley an admiration for Australian soldiers, for she believes that they are part of a "brotherhood". It is not necessarily an inclusive community, for though the intimacy of the connection between the two veterans is powerfully rendered, Smith does not allow viewers the comfort of full identification. They remain somehow separate from those who have endured war, though membership of this elite community comes at a cost. Like the statues at the American Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, the now elderly men scan the cemetery for the names of lost comrades, or perhaps even their own. They mourn for a world now lost, but it is melancholy, rather than grief that Smith explores. For though the landscape has been touched by war, it is not overshadowed by it. The sun continues to shine on this sunburnt country, as the presence of Ian's grandson Cody, protectively placed between the two veterans, makes clear.



Two unidentified soldiers look at the inscriptions on the crosses at the cemetery at Vlamertinghe, near Ypres.
Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E00847. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c54921



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Smith's image is very Australian in a way that some of the other works in the exhibition are not, Armstrong and Usher's in particular. For while they both eschew the specifics, Smith, who served in the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF), takes a very different approach. She has merged an image of the veterans' hometown of Proserpine, an Australian regional centre with a population of 3500, with one from the Western Front. This imbues the work with a palpable sense of connection with place; the presence of a working dog further emphasises the rural credentials of the men.

The inclusion of an image of Billy Sing, a local revered as Australia's greatest sniper, compels the viewer to make connections between the three conflicts and through this process acknowledge that they are imagined by the national community in very different ways. Like Hurley's vision of Australia, however, Smith's is simple and uncomplicated with a message that is unapologetically didactic. There is no place, however, in Smith's imagining for glory; nevertheless her reverence for the human connection that war generates is offered as a balm to a wounded community.



Anne SMITH / *Lest We Forget* 2018 / Metallic photographic paper mounted behind 6mm ultra clear toughened safety glass with polished edges / 104.5 x 2300cm

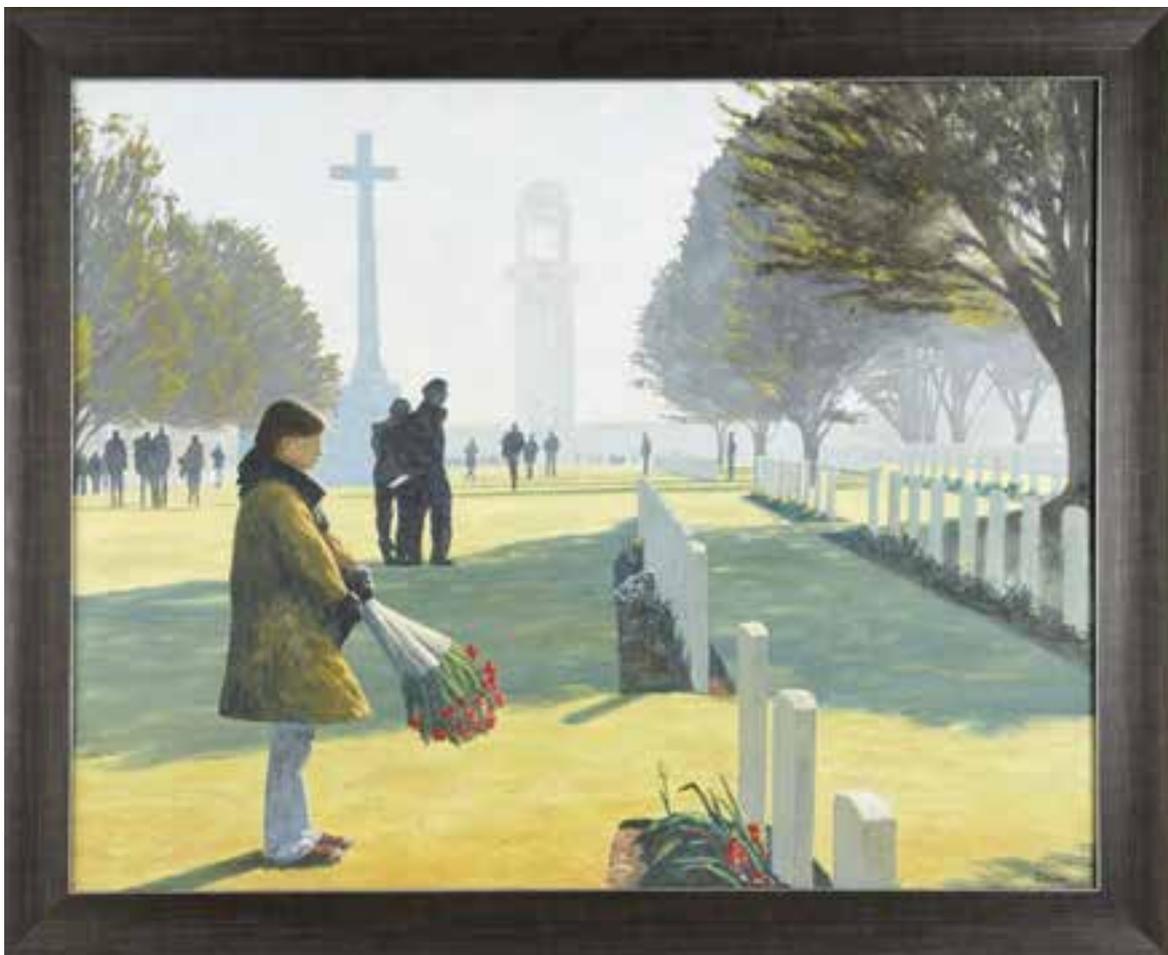


Garry Dolan: A Nation Mourns

Like Armstrong, Garry Dolan explores the notions of trauma, suffering and empathy, but the similarities end there. He has chosen as his setting The Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, the foremost memorial to Australians killed on the Western Front, and the now quiet battlefield of Bullecourt. In April 1918 a \$100 million interpretive centre named for Sir John Monash was added to the Villers-Bretonneux site, further establishing this French town in the national imagining. The choice of a Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery as a vehicle to explore landscape and memory is an interesting one, though it is not unprecedented.

The Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) established a pattern and uniform aesthetic for cemeteries that is now instantly recognisable – orderly rows of headstones, uniform in height and width, graves facing east toward Germany, at the eastern edge of the cemetery an altar raised upon broad steps, and at a prominent spot a Cross of Sacrifice with a bronze longsword blade facing downward embedded on its face. It was intended to give the impression of an old fashioned English churchyard, “with flowers and swathes of neatly cropped grass to soften the architecture and rows of headstones” (Summers, 2007, p. 32). The formula was simple and iconic and ultimately justified Winston Churchill’s promise that they “would excite the wonder and reverence of future generations” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 435).

Garry DOLAN / Villers-Bretonneux 2015 / Watercolour on canvas / 78 x 62cm



*Australian infantry wounded at a First Aid Post near Zonnebeke Railway Station.
Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial P04060.005. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c1018761*





Dolan's engagement with this ordered landscape reflects more than just the commemorative design of cemeteries, for the war generated a heightened awareness of nature and a desire to identify with it. Paradoxically this idealisation of nature came "at the precise moment when man was murdering the wood" (Mosse, 1990, p. 108). As though in response to this assault, the landscape became "all-consuming and the ground a living entity – a landscape alive with the dead, as if taking revenge for the destruction wrought upon it by man. The mud did not just make life virtually unbearable – it killed as well" (Leonard, n.d.). It is not this world, however, that Dolan paints. He brings order to the chaos, perhaps even the triumph of man over nature. For here, Nature is brought under control. The land has healed and youth has returned, flowers are in bloom, and the sun is soft and nurturing. There is a promise of regeneration in *Villers-Bretonneux* and in his triptych *Bullecourt*, perhaps even resurrection. Dolan has recognised that the central figure in the former is engaged in more than an act of communal mourning, for such an observance can be "understood and explained as a Christian rite, even liturgy, albeit one in predominately secular guise" (Billings, 2015, p. 230). In *Bullecourt*, he offers the viewer a pastoral idyll, a land that has, at least outwardly, repaired itself, though it can never be as it once was. This contrasts with Smith's use of an explicitly Australian landscape, which is neither ordered, nor controlled. As Jill Montgomery (in Wallace-Grabbe, 1992, p. 165) observes, the Australian landscape is "neither hostile nor even indifferent to man's presence, but totally oblivious. Man's attempt to domesticate the landscape has been conspicuously unsuccessful". The Outback remains untamed, yet the battlefields of Europe have seen the return of the eternal spring. In Australia, however, the never ending summer continues unabated.



Garry DOLAN / *Bullecourt* 2015 / Watercolour on canvas / 62 x 183cm



David Usher: The Weight of the World

The landscape of war was something that particularly attracted Hurley's attention and he took great risks to photograph it. He was "stunned by the violent contrast between the pastoral character of the French countryside and the deadly energies and blasted landscapes of the Western Front". In August 1917 he described in his diary the

tents surrounded by wheat fields and great hayricks ... the gay tiled cottages and the beauty and glorious colour contained in the countryside". In contrast, he saw Hill 60 and its "awful sense of desolation! ... Everywhere the ground is littered with bits of guns, bayonets, shells and men ... It might be the end of the world where two irresistible forces are slowly wearing each other away. (Dixon & Lee, 2011, p. xx).

Where Hurley's image is a preserving of what the landscape had become, in *The Weight of the World* David Usher references the soldiers, duckboards and craters, whilst maintaining a sense of lull or post-destruction in the action. He captures a liminal period of time in which to detach from the landscape and 'see' the effects of claiming the land, rather than be subjectively at the core of the actions that wrought the devastation.

Usher's painting technique references the Abstract Expressionism movement which was prominent in post-Second World War New York. It used abstraction to convey strong emotions and the space to express on large canvasses. Usher's work too is deliberately large in order to focus on the extremes of death and suffering that preface the actual site of Hurley's photograph. New York art critic Harold Rosenberg referred to this art movement as 'action painting' because of the way in which artists applied paint to the canvas: not to highlight painting, but to highlight the event (of making the art). The artwork is a manifestation of effort upon the canvas, and in Usher's case, it is one that resonates with his own 'wrestling' of how best to respond to Hurley's image.



Soldiers of an Australian 4th Division field artillery brigade on a duckboard track passing through Chateau Wood, near Hooze in the Ypres salient, 29 October 1917.

*Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E01220. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c1119*





Hailing from the vast saltbush and flattened floodplains of St George, Queensland, Usher's response to the image similarly engages the landscape as the chief citation for his imaginary space on canvas. Hoffenberg's overseas Australian outback resonates in *The Weight of the World* so that the reader experiences the comparative isolation and quietness that both images capture. The haunted landscapes that Hurley ironically preserved for audiences are rendered large and in

colour in Usher's work in order to facilitate his exploration of "man-made desolation balanced with the sanguinity of survival and new life". While he acknowledges the "destructive nature of mankind's belligerent treatment of each other and the environment, this work explores themes of healing the scars of the earth and the phenomenal resilience of nature and its capacity to adapt and renew".

David USHER / *The Weight of the World* 2018 / Acrylic and oil on canvas / 160 x 280 cm

The de-rationalised and de-familiarised work of Armstrong is noticeably absent in Usher's work. Rather, the soldiers and other evidence of human occupation are erased, yet their ghosts echo in the dominating landscape of thick black outlines, brown overflowing pools, and what seems like an endless drip of ambiguous green. In articulating the scale of violence and destruction that the First World War wrought

on the environment, Hynes asserts that it literally "changed reality" (Hynes, 1991, p. xi). This shift is also present in Usher's work, which highlights the signs of potential for new life, yet the use of green paint indicates that the new growth might also be toxic: a residue that embodies and references the past indelible horror witnessed by, and scarred deeply into the landscape.

Beata Batorowicz: The Seamstress (A)mending World War I History

Beata Batorowicz brings an outsider's sensibility to her response to Hurley. As a Polish immigrant who arrived in Australia at five years of age, the Western Front is not *her* war. In fact, her influences are to be found either side of 1914-18, as she draws on her country's experience of the subsequent Soviet domination of Eastern Europe (Doecke, 2012, p. 86) with a childhood influenced by European fairy tales, mythology and folklore evidenced in her 2012-13 project *Tales Within Historical Spaces*. In her response to Hurley, she explores notions of wartime, wounding and trauma through rituals of handiwork that serve as overarching themes throughout her career's work.

Batorowicz's approach to her practice and research is one of a subversive retelling of history through the investigation of imagery as a subjective narrative (Gildersleeve & Batorowicz, 2018). She interweaves her critique of historical discourse and its visual representation with a debunking of authority. Batorowicz provides a counterpoint to the notion of grand narratives of history, particularly Western Art history or what she calls *Big Art*, with a metaphorical and poetic subjectivity. In turn, Batorowicz positions her artmaking within the self-conceptualised realm of *little art*, a subjective exploration of personal stories and lived experiences that she brings to the foreground, overshadowing and disrupting the larger historical narrative (Batorowicz, 2012, p. 73).

The subversive strategy of little art is about occupying and asserting the importance of peripheral and in-between spaces which Big History omits or ignores. Little art extends beyond simply pointing out the Othering that takes place in the historical grand narratives. It is about shifting the very space of Otherness, by establishing its own power – a peripheral power that enables the undoing and dispelling of history. She often employs the fox as her totem – a 'trickster' who exhibits a mastery of the periphery (Weaver & Mora, 2016, p. 479).



A scene on the Menin Road near Hoge, looking towards Birr Cross Roads, during the battle on 20 September 1917.

Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E00711. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

awm.gov.au/collection/c43126



Beata BATOROWICZ / (A) mending WWI History: Seamstress' Shawl 2018 / Leather, Cotton Thread, Felt, Fur, Found Object / 32 x 73cm



Her approach to artmaking is about embracing craft processes and tactile fibres (such as felt, fur and leather) as her material language of *little art*. Her work is metaphorical, a symbolic method of the subversive. There is a strong element of performative enactment in which the objects inserted subvert the grand narrative of establish histories, in turn, creating their own mythologies and legacies. Batorowicz's act of creating

through 'handiwork', is a ritualised practice; a way of mediating the art and stories through what Paul Carter (2004) refers to as *matter*. In particular, Paul Carter (2004) identifies with, and refers to matter in terms of 'material thinking': "Material thinking is performed in making – making thinking, thinking making ... we turn over words – commutative function – in this compound of interest afforded by the term material thinking" (p. 2).

Beata BATOROWICZ / *(A) mending WWI History; First Aid Kit 2018* / Leather, Felt, Fur, Found Object / 18 x 23 x 5 cm



In this current work, *(A)mending WWI History*, Batorowicz undertakes the role of a quasi-medical seamstress with her first aid–sewing kit at hand to treat and mend the wounded soldiers featured in Hurley's *A Scene on the Menin Road near Hodge*. Batorowicz's contemporary artefacts are however, visual puns that retell and 'amend' Hurley's visual documentation of historical accounts and acknowledge his approach in

staging and re-staging events to construct his photographic imagery. Beyond this discourse of truth-telling; Batorowicz's first aid/sewing kit offers tools and artefacts such as a fur lined thimble and measuring tape that the audiences can use to reinterpret histories. These artefacts serve as both a residue of history while at the same time become reminders of the very constructed nature of history itself.

Abbey MacDonald: The long, dark night of the soul

Geoff Dyer (1995, p. 120) argues that the First World War “ruined the idea of ruins ... things survived only by accident or chance ... or mistake. Destruction was the standard and the norm. Cottages and villages did not crumble and decay – they were swept away”. Yet Hurley’s images, both of ruins and of the battlefields generally, convey what Dixon and Lee (2011, p. iii) characterise as the “grand spectacle” of the Western Front. It is this quality, however, that Abbey MacDonald finds almost repellent:

The composite and constructed nature of Hurley’s war ‘realities’ simultaneously strike and sicken. There is something distasteful about the theatricality and convenience of these works, and the decisions made to enhance, compose, layer and construct in order to be a more impactful capture of the stains of war. To what end? I check myself to question what constitutes a ‘tasteful’ depiction of war, and immediately feel ashamed at where that realisation brings me. With a sharp slap to chastise my own methods and patterns of response, I am reminded that nothing is tasteful in war.

MacDonald’s instinctive rejection of Hurley’s aesthetic choices is part of her interrogation of the very nature of war art. She looks for veracity, yet acknowledges “there is no truth, only representations of it”. Even her own art is not so much an historical record but a synthesis of things seen, remembered and read about. Jay Winter, one of the most respected historians of the First World War, faced the same questions when assessing the historical value of war poetry:

[Let us] talk about history – any history – as coming to a stop during the war. That is, what if the idea of history as a story, backed up by documents, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, suddenly ceased to work. What if 1914–18 required a different kind of story-telling, one in which fabrications tell the truth, and documents lie? What if the way the Great War was fought on the Western Front pushed not only men beyond the limits of human endurance, but history beyond the limits of narrative? If that is so, then the poetry is the history, or rather a significant part we ignore at our peril. (Winter, 2018, para. 6)



The ruins of the Cloth Hall at Ypres.
Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E01217. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c955164



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In creating her own fabrication, or perhaps more correctly, her own imagining, MacDonald shows that any response to war is inevitably filtered through the artist's previous engagement with other cultural artefacts and personal experiences:

I draw from the repertoire of my fortunate position of distance, pulling together disparate yet familiar threads that span my experience as learner, teacher, child and mother in relation to war. I dip back to my time as an art school undergrad, all at once locked in and fortuitously locked out of a dialogue with Otto Dix's Wounded Soldier (1924). Absence of colour and contrast of light against dark is cold and devoid of life (Fox, 2006), and this seeps into my own embodied renderings.

MacDonald's imagining of the landscape of war is, like Dix's, pervaded by a "terrain of nightmares". Dix was subsequently "relentless [in his] depiction of mutilated corpses, wounded and brutalised soldiers, ravaged and muddy landscapes and the madness and depravity that gripped the ordinary populace" (O'Hehir, 2018, para. 3). Yet for MacDonald, any imagining of war is shaped by the contemporary refugee crisis and the media's "visual saturations of tiny bodies washing up

on the shores of beaches in North Africa". She personalises her response, unashamedly so, by "wondering what I myself would do as a mother facing an impossible choice". Again, it is the image of youth that intrudes on her vision:

I revisit my sixteen year old skin prickling as I watch Spielberg's little girl in Schindler's List (1993), as black and white cinematography is used to spark and then extinguish a tiny life bundled in a full colour red coat against a monochrome background. (Asl & Mizban, 2016)

It is here that MacDonald shows the influence not only of Dix and her own engagement with contemporary politics and cultural artefacts, but of the sculptor Hagenauer and the painter Matthias Grünewald, whose creation of the Isenheim Altarpiece (c. 1512-1516) is one of Christianity's most terrifying artworks. It is, as Jones (2008, para. 3) describes, "death without disguise, grotesque and terrifying". Like MacDonald perhaps, Matthias Grünewald's "faith is troubled. The religious experience his art records is a long, dark night of the soul" (Jones, 2008, para. 7). MacDonald has likewise confronted her own long, dark night and has, perhaps unintentionally, created artwork that is both haunting and beautiful.

Abbey MACDONALD / Act 1: Recast the victims and villains 2018 / Oil on canvas / 40 x 70cm



Abbey MACDONALD / *Act 2: Replay the scene* 2018 / Oil on canvas / 40 x 70cm



Abbey MACDONALD / *Act 3: Rebuild the stage* 2018 / Oil on canvas / 40 x 70cm



Margaret Baguley:

It came upon a midday clear - The Battle of Jerusalem 1917

The fall of Jerusalem on 9 December 1917 was an event that the British Prime Minister Lloyd George saw in a mix of pragmatic and symbolic terms; on the one hand, it was an event likely to impress both the enemy and neutral states and on the other, a balm to the British Empire bleeding after the Third Battle of Ypres. In the context of a world war, the fall of the city was hardly a decisive event, but symbolically it was an important moment. After 674 years, Jerusalem was again in the hands of a Christian power, offering to the Allies their only victory in a year of almost ceaseless battle. Its symbolic importance was certainly not lost on General Sir Edmund Allenby who made a conscious effort to limit the destruction and to carefully stage manage his entry into the city. Aware of the effect of the Kaiser's entry into Jerusalem in 1898 on horseback, Lloyd George wanted the city occupied "with reverent if impressive humility". Allenby walked into Jerusalem at midday on 11 December 1917 and "surrendered to the invisible and enchanted spell which surrounds the Holy City" (Shermer, 1973, p. 223).

The official historian Harry Gullett was still moved by this moment six years later when he described the event in unashamedly religious rather than military terms:

In all that great army it is doubtful if a single man of European origin entered Jerusalem for the first time untouched by the influence of the Saviour. Christ met each man on the threshold of the city; each man, as he entered, was purified and exalted. The influence was, perhaps, not lasting. War is not a Christian mission. But for a brief spell at least the soldier's mind was purged of grossness, and he knew again the pure and trusting faith of his early childhood. (Gullett, 1923, p. 519)



*A regiment of the Australian Light Horse on the march near either Bethlehem or Jerusalem.
Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial B01619. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/C841?image=1*



Margaret BAGULEY / *It Came Upon a Midday Clear – The Battle of Jerusalem 1917* 2018
Wood, enamel paint, 3D printed tiles and upholstery pins / 90 x 2 cm



Baguley's *It came upon a midday clear – The Battle of Jerusalem 1917* both explores and transcends that singular moment by acknowledging Jerusalem as a site of almost ceaseless warfare. Major battles are noted on each of the nine 3D printed tiles which when considered individually emphasise the contested ownership of the city and its religious and political significance for three of the world's great monotheistic religions. When considered in total, however, the tiles emphasise the profound power of each group's imagining of Jerusalem. One is reminded of the phrase *L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* (Next year in Jerusalem), often sung at the end of the Passover Seder and the Ne'ila service on Yom Kippur, which expressed a desire on the part of Jews "for an end to exile and return to the Land of Israel" as well as "a prayer for ultimate redemption, for peace and perfection for the entire world" (Dosick, 1995, p. 137).

Baguley's artwork speaks deeply of this disconnect between a yearning for wholeness and the incompleteness of exile or dispossession. This is further explored through the use of the scarlet Crusader's Cross contrasted against a pure white background. The nine tiles and the Crusader Cross also symbolise the Kingdom of Jerusalem through their placement which creates an outline of the Jerusalem Cross. The implied and overt references to Christians again 'reclaiming' the Holy Land in 1917 serves only to emphasise the cyclical nature of history. The ongoing historical and religious links with this contested and sacred piece of land is also symbolised through the 12 pins on the circumference of the panel representing and linking both the 12 Tribes of Israel (Old Testament) and the Twelve Disciples of Jesus (New Testament).

Margaret BAGULEY / *It came upon a midday clear – The Battle of Jerusalem 1917* (detail) 2018
Wood, enamel paint, 3D printed tiles and upholstery pins / 90 x 2 cm



In exploring Hurley's use of landscape by using a contour map of Jerusalem, Baguley allows the viewer to engage with the landscape while still facilitating a sense of apartness. The viewer can slip the surly bonds of earth, and if not quite touch the face of God, certainly can at least consider the Middle East as a product of a long historical process. It is a land, like Australia, that is at once very old and very new, given that the national borders are artificial constructs imposed after the First World War. Baguley's vantage point was one that was familiar to Hurley. In a flight in a Bristol fighter flown by famous aviator Ross Smith in February 1918, he was deeply moved by what he saw:

From our great height it appears as if some mighty thumb has pressed into the earth and impressed it with its markings ... I am powerless and utterly incapable of describing the wild and tremendous grandeur of the view now stretched before us.

He ignores the anti-aircraft fire, a reminder of more earthly endeavours, for he "was too absorbed in contemplation, in fact intoxicated by the mighty works of nature, to heed the

vile endeavours of Turkish rabble to shoot us down" (Hurley Diary, 16 February 1918, cited in Dixon & Lee, 2011, p. 96). So awed was he by the experience that he was left describing how he appeared to a viewer rather than attempt a meaningful description of what he himself was witnessing:

From the ground we appear as a tiny humming bird flitting through the infinity of cloudless blue; from my seat, we are hurtling along on the wings of a tornado, poised over the deep blue waters of the Mystic Sea. I was lost, enraptured by the ineffable beauty of the scenery below ... borne on the wings of our great bird, which circled over [Jerusalem] like a great albatross, one scarcely seemed to be of this world. (Hurley Diary, 16 February 1918, cited in Dixon & Lee, 2011, pp. 96-97)

Like Hurley's assessment of his flight, Baguley's artwork offers a "glimpse of another world, a peep into the realm of the infinite" (Hurley Diary, 16 February 1918, cited in Dixon & Lee, 2011, p. 97).

Neville Heywood: A retreat into nature

As if to emphasise that an artist's work, like that of the historian, is not created in a vacuum Neville Heywood's *Ypres Sector: Belgium 25 Oct 1917* and *For Glory* are filtered through a range of other cultural artefacts, as well as his long engagement with the Australian landscape.

Normally I work directly from nature, observing, drawing, and moving about in the natural world. In this case that wasn't possible. So to get a sense of Hurley's vision I watched documentaries on the Light Horse, and of course the classic Australian movie, The Light Horse. I also listened to Paul Ham's book Passchendaele on audio as I painted. That clarified a lot concerning the futility of war, allowing a kind of 'out of the body' sense of the Ypres battlefields.

Heywood's rendering of Ypres is inevitably a work in progress, for it seeks to find balance where there can be none. Though he is aware of the destruction at an intellectual level, Heywood's artistic choices are nevertheless informed by his reverence for the Australian bush as a regenerative force. Whilst searching for inspiration he did not rely on the cold page of the history book, but instead retreated into nature. As an artist used to responding to the natural landscape, the need to respond to an *unnatural* landscape offered a range of challenges. One of these was the fact that for the British the ruins of Ypres retain an almost mythic place in war memory.

A guidebook from 1920 captured the mood by asserting that "there is not a single half-acre in Ypres that is not sacred" (Connelly, 2009, p. 55). Heywood's loose brushwork is evidence of this engagement, for it is a pastiche of hatching, cross-hatching and stippling that creates an unfinished and messy version of the process of ruination.



*Ypres Sector, Belgium. 25 October 1917. Australians on the way to take up a front line position in the Ypres Sector.
The ruins of Ypres, including the Cloth Hall, can be seen in the background. AWM E04612*

Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial E04612. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

awm.gov.au/collection/c1351



Heywood's *Ypres Sector: Belgium 25 Oct 1917* rather ingeniously references and inverts the outdoor, spontaneous practice of painting developed by French Impressionists at the turn of twentieth century. The short, thick brushstrokes used by Monet, Renoir, Degas and Cezanne to encapsulate the illusion of movement and spontaneity both complements and disrupts Hurley's black and white images through the use of colour and light. Hurley's original photograph from the Ypres Sector reveals what was probably a sunny day that ghosts the ruins behind the hard-edges of the soldier's regimented live bodies in the foreground. Heywood's brushstrokes similarly suggest light being reflected from the surface of the image in warm yellows and browns, contrasted with various hues of blue. Through using these messy Impressionist tropes, Heywood's painting reveals the erasure of a partially-visible Rising Sun Badge (Australian Army General Service Badge) using a burst of yellow that is immediately smothered by clouded blue to indicate the tenacious ache of impermanent action and memory. Heywood also echoes the bodies of partially-visible soldiers and their equipment bogged in brown like a line of prose among the process of ruination. It is hard to tell whether the ruins in Heywood's work have pushed through the ground in protest or are rotting into it: they can only suggest that which was and is, not what is to come. Similarly to Usher's *Weight of the World*, Heywood's work evokes the linear parade of an order descending or ascending into chaos and madness, all juxtaposed by the use of colour and light to illuminate the mess of contagious endless warfare.

Neville HEYWOOD / *Ypres sector: Belgium 25 Oct 1917* 2018
Acrylic on paper / 50x 70cm



Heywood's *For Glory*, however, is a remarkably different type of image. It is a composite of vignettes based on insignia and images from various Light Horse regiments. It also reminds the viewer of a time when the Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) (formerly the Returned Sailors & Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), and then the Returned Soldiers and Airman's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA), before settling on its current designation in 1990) was a powerful political force and the most vocal defender of the Anzac mythology. Heywood acknowledges that his painting is "reminiscent of those old ornate framed images in some RSL precincts". But it is the landscape which shapes his vision:

The thought that kept occurring to me was the soldiers' view of desert having left a land of colourful vegetation with blooming gum flowers, wattles and profuseness compared to tracks in a desolate desert. I kept thinking of a garden as a form of mental compensation for a soldier in such bleakness. Interestingly enough, later in listening to soldier commentary in a documentary, one soldier said all he wanted to see was an Australian garden instead of the endless desert. I also wanted to convey the colour and flamboyance of the Australian Light Horse through the bric-a-brac of military insignia.

An Australian Light Horseman collecting anemones near Belah in Palestine.

Photograph by James Francis (Frank) Hurley – Australian War Memorial P03631.046. Public Domain Mark 1.0.
awm.gov.au/collection/c979439



Neville HEYWOOD / *For Glory* – Australian Light Horse 2018 / Acrylic on paper / 70 × 50cm

Similar to *Ypres Sector: Belgium 25 Oct 1917*, *For Glory* creates a lineage of visible tropes emerging from a contrasting effervescent context of colour, but not light. Heywood removes the reliance on Impressionism in *For Glory* so that light is diminished rather than reflected through a black background. This suggests a detachment and distance from Hurley's work that actively engages in the practice of homage rather than representation. Interestingly, while MacDonald argues that "colour can be used powerfully to inflict wounds", Heywood seeks to emphasise its capacity to offer comfort. As Elias (2007) observes, without colour, Hurley's colourised image on which this artwork was based, would function only as an act of remembrance. Instead, it succeeds in signifying both the glory and the graveyard:

[It] encapsulates the tension and ambiguity between romantic and realistic representations of sacrifice, blood, and death. The beauty of flowers is a paradoxical distraction from the horror. Flowers not only restore confidence in beauty and peace in the face of conflict, but are the objects upon which we unload private and public displays of grief and remembrance. Hurley's image is highly attuned to the concepts of regeneration and hope, and the importance of flowers to the solemn ritual of remembrance. The analogy between the red carpet of flowers and blood is vital ... Colour lends intense symbolism, with each flower simultaneously representing the life, blood, and soul of a fallen soldier. New life is also signified by the abundance of bloom. The solitary figure reveals the suffering and psychological isolation of being unable to comprehend or resolve loss. (Elias, 2007, para. 11 - 12)



Conclusion

Art is a powerful tool by which emotion can be expressed. For these artists, the photographs taken by Frank Hurley 100 years ago provided the perfect stimulus to continue the deep connection to historical events in reimagining landscape. The artists have respectfully, through their work, altered their approach to and subsequent memory of the First World War landscapes created by Hurley. Through this process they have re-interrogated the concept of these iconic war landscapes for a contemporary audience. Their distinctive approaches resonate with that of Hurley who sought through his photographs to create works of art that were evocative and graphic.

Photographers and filmmakers such as Hurley during the First World War created a communal memory through their imagining of events that were occurring for Australians on the other side of the world, before the ubiquitous technologies that are available today. These images 'became' the war and the theme of landscape and memory which underpins this exhibition draws upon the importance of this seminal event which simultaneously drew people together and tore them apart. The time which has elapsed has allowed the artists in this exhibition to carefully reflect on and interrogate the centenary commemorations through iconic images which question notions of identity and home through our memories and the lands to which we are connected.

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1. Passchendaele is often used as a synonym for the Third Battle of Ypres, when in reality it was “merely the last scene of the gloomiest drama in British military history” (Liddell Hart, 1992, p. 327).
2. It is relatively common for soldiers of the Second World War to use the collective memory of the horror of the First World War to describe their own experiences (See Arthur, 2005).
3. ‘On the Star of “The Legion of Honour” (From the French), 1815’.
4. See Summers, J. (2007). *Remembered: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*. London, UK: Merrell

Exhibition Dates

4 AUGUST – 2 SEPTEMBER 2018

Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery

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