



**Immediate Release**

## **Truth and Memory**

# **British Art of the First World War**

19 July 2014 – 8 March 2015

IWM London

Free Admission

**IWM London presents the largest exhibition of British First World War art for almost 100 years. This major retrospective comprises over 120 artworks and will feature the most iconic images to emerge from the First World War, including paintings by Paul Nash, Percy Wyndham Lewis, CWR Nevinson, Stanley Spencer and William Orpen, as well as lesser known, yet significant works, by artists such as Anna Airy, George Clausen and Gilbert Rogers.**

*Truth and Memory* will assess both the immediate impact and legacy of British art of the First World War. Comprised predominantly of works from IWM's Art Collection, the exhibition will show how artists of all ages, traditions and backgrounds, strived to represent the unprecedented, epoch-defining events of the First World War, which ultimately helped shape the nation's perception of the conflict and of warfare itself. The exhibition aims to make a fresh interpretation of British First World War art, placing it firmly within the context of the times, taking into account critical and popular responses and incorporating contemporary artistic debates.

At the turn of the last century, art in Britain held a position and status in society quite different from today and was often regarded as having a social function. In particular, images of warfare imparted notions of identity, culture and morality, enshrining these as the 'truth'. However, in a conflict where the soldiers themselves were the 'artists' a very different idea of war emerged. The first section of the exhibition *Truth* will focus on the works of those artists who experienced life on the front line, first-hand. In their quest to comprehend and give meaning to a modern and unfamiliar war, young British 'serving' artists, challenged established ideas of war - and redefined notions of the 'truth'.

CRW Nevinson reveals a Futurist vision of modern war in his painting *La Mitrailleuse*, 1915. Prior to the war, Nevinson was keen to embrace the speed and violence of the modern age, but his experience as a medical orderly and ambulance driver in the First World War, rapidly changed his world view. His depictions of trenches and soldiers are reduced to a series of angular shapes and definitions between human flesh and heavy artillery become intentionally unclear.

Paul Nash's interpretations of Western Front landscapes show a despairing view of war. His iconic, *We Are Making a New World*, 1918, shows the violation of the landscape as a metaphor for the force of war and the cost to humanity.

*Memory* will look at how British art met the challenge of commemorating the First World War and how this helped form the collective memory of the war as we know it today. In doing so, it will address why

some pictures have seemed to transcend definitions of art and come to epitomise the slaughter and sacrifice of the First World War. Focusing on both official and independent works produced enduring the war and in its immediate aftermath, this section of the exhibition will early attempts by British artists to convey the tragedy of the First World War and to build a lasting memorial to the nation's sacrifice.

Eric Kennington's life like image of *The Kensingtons at Laventie*, 1915, serves as both a self-portrait and a democratic tribute to his comrades. Painted shortly after being invalided out of service it shows the moment when the artist and comrades arrived at billets from the frontlines amid the snow in the desperately cold first winter of the First World War. A mundane incident made monumental by the paintings scale and technique, oil on the reverse of glass, *The Kensingtons* testified to the attrition of trench warfare and honoured the stoicism and comradeship of ordinary soldiers.

George Clausen's *Youth Mourning*, 1916, offers an alternative response to the tragedy of the First World War, motivated by the death of Clausen's daughter's fiancé. Painted when in his sixties and in stark contrast to his nostalgic impressions of rustic English life, the allegorical form of a young woman set against a desolate barren landscape, emphasises the rawness of grief and emptiness of death.

The exhibition will consider the art commissions of the Imperial War Museum itself and the contribution of women in works such as Anna Airy's *Shop for Machining 15- Inch Shells*, 1918. The chaos of the factory floor reveals the sweatshop conditions many women endured in supporting and sustaining the nation's war effort.

The final section of the exhibition will focus on the ambitious plans of Lord Beaverbrook's British War Memorials Committee and the Imperial War Museum, to build an artistic record of the nation's war in the form of a Hall of Remembrance. Key commissioned paintings, such as John Singer Sargent's magnificently elegiac *Gassed* and Wyndham Lewis's modernist canvas *A Battery Shelled*, will be displayed alongside important sculptural works like Jacob Epstein's *The Tin Hat* and Eric Kennington's studies for his Soissons Memorial to the Missing. The exhibition concludes with William Open's controversial painting, *To Unknown Soldier in France*, revealing the artist's disillusionment with the machinations of the triumphant Allied leaders.

*Truth and Memory* will act as testament to the huge artistic outpouring in Britain instigated by the all-encompassing, all-consuming nature of the First World War.

**For further information, including interview and image requests please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors**

**IWM London**

IWM London - IWM's flagship branch - tells the stories of those whose lives have been shaped by war through the depth, breadth and impact of our Galleries, displays and events. Explore what life was like at home during the Second World War in [A Family in Wartime](#); delve into the world of espionage in [Secret War](#); visit our award-winning [Holocaust Exhibition](#); discover stories of bravery in [The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes](#); see work by some of Britain's most significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century artists in our [art galleries](#) or take in our latest major temporary exhibitions. Our family learning sessions and events encourage debate and challenge people's perceptions of war.

IWM London is **temporarily closed 6 January – 19 July 2014** as we 'Transform IWM London'. The museum will re-open with the new major exhibition [Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War](#), our brand new [First World War Galleries](#), a [new Atrium](#), new shops and a park-side café.

### **From 19 July 2014**

Open daily from 10am – 6pm (except 24 - 26 December)

IWM London, Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ.

T: 020 7416 5000

[iwm.org.uk](http://iwm.org.uk)

### **Publications**

#### ***Art from the First World War***

##### **Publication date May 2014**

Showcasing IWM's extensive collection, this book includes work from the major artists of the time such as John and Paul Nash, Orpen, Spencer and Singer Sargent as well as other artists who are less familiar to us today. With an introductory essay by Richard Slocombe, Senior Curator at IWM, this book offers an insight into the huge range and power of wartime art during the First World War.

### **Digital Project**

#### **Putting Art on the Map**

[Historypin.com](http://Historypin.com) together with IWM and the University of Edinburgh, have been asking members of the public, experts and history enthusiasts to help solve mysteries about the places, people and events depicted in key artworks held within IWM's First World War Art Collection. **Putting Art on the Map** is supported by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts - Nesta, Arts & Humanities Research Council and public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

### **IWM**

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, is transforming with new First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with large object displays which will open on 19 July 2014 to mark the Centenary of the First World War. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).

### **First World War Centenary**

**2014 - 2018** marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM will mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country, including the opening of brand new First World War Galleries at IWM London in 2014. For more information visit [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org)

