

# ARTS

A L I V E

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## visual arts

by Elizabeth MacKenzie

## War Zones Address Issues of War and Conflict

**D**o you have a used, unused, unwanted bicycle? Gu Xiong wants to put it into use.

On Thursday, June 3, Gu Xiong plans to bring 150 bicycles into Presentation House Gallery (PHG) as part of an artwork about the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

Gu Xiong was born and educated in China and came to Canada in 1989, shortly after the Tiananmen Square protests. His installation piece *Barricade of Bicycles*—June 4, 1989 represents the conflict between students and tanks at Tiananmen Square and speaks to the power of the collective human spirit in the face of adversity. In a statement about this piece, Gu Xiong writes: "One person is a bicycle. Many bicycles are together. There is unity. It is people's power."

Gu Xiong is one of the more than 20 international artists whose work will be included in an ambitious project called *War Zones* being organized by PHG this spring and summer. *War Zones* will present a wide and diverse range of photo and media-based artwork that address issues of conflict

and war from a contemporary perspective.

Struggles for power and control of territory are recurring themes within human history which artists have often explored within their work. *War Zones* consists of three interrelated exhibitions and an extensive program of special events, including artists' talks, a film series at Pacific Cinematheque, and a panel discussion series at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Gu Xiong's installation is part of *Bearing Witness*, the second exhibition in this series, taking place at PHG from June 5 to July 18, as well as at the Vancouver Art Gallery from July 14 to September 26. The work in *War Zones* represents issues relating to conflicts in China, Rwanda, Somalia, Northern Ireland, Vietnam, and elsewhere, touching on direct experience as well as remote experiences generated through the media, such as newspapers and TV.

*War Zones* will also extend into the public domain with three consecutive billboard projects which will be displayed during the months of May, June, and July on a billboard on the

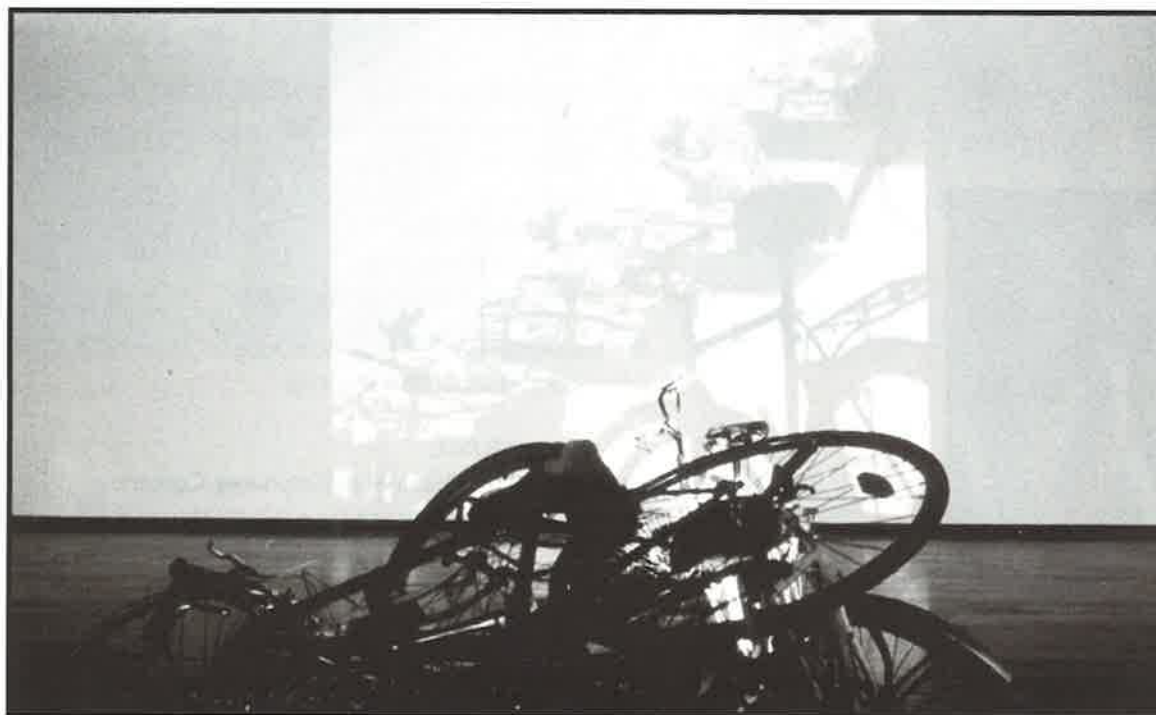
corner of Georgia and Homer Streets. An extensively illustrated catalogue which includes a number of critical essays will be produced at the conclusion of the project.

If you'd like to contribute to Gu Xiong's *Barricade of Bicycles*, please call Diane Evans at 986-1351. Your phone call will help the gallery determine how many bicycles to expect. Bikes can be dropped off at the gallery on Thursday, June 3, from 10 am to 6 pm. All bikes used in the installation will be sent for recycling at the conclusion of the project.

**War Zones at Presentation House Gallery:**

*Siting Conflict, April 17 to May 30*  
Barbara Alper (New York), Willie Doherty (Northern Ireland), Alfredo Jaar (New York), Allan Harding MacKay (Calgary), Martha Rosler (New York)  
*Bearing Witness, June 5 to July 18*  
*Opening Reception, June 5, 2 pm*  
Eugenio Dittborn (Chile), Roy Kiyooka (Vancouver), Nam June Paik (New York), Barbara Steinman (Montreal), Hiromi Tsuchida (Japan), Gu Xiong (Vancouver)

Elizabeth MacKenzie is an artist, arts administrator, and writer.



*Barricade of Bicycles, installation with bicycles and slide projections by Gu Xiong*



# ENTERTAINMENT

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THE VANCOUVER SUN

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1999

## Balkan conflict resonates in look at war through art

### WAR ZONES: SITING CONFLICT

The first part of a survey of the art of war.

Presentation House Gallery, 333 Chesterfield, North Vancouver, until May 30.

MICHAEL SCOTT  
SUN ART CRITIC

There is a grisly serendipity to the timing of War Zones, the largest survey of art work related to armed conflict that has ever been presented in Vancouver. At exactly the same time as events in the Balkans are teaching us a new version of ethnic cleansing, this ambitious package of exhibitions, films, artists' talks and impassioned panel discussions reminds us that there is much, much more to war than what we see each night on CNN.

The mass media and its race-tinted logic can lead us to luminous images of refugee children (white-skinned this time, thus all the more telegenic) but it cannot make us think.

War Zones is different. In exhibitions over the next three months at Presentation House Gallery, Pacific Cinémathèque, Access Gallery, the Vancouver

Art Gallery, Artspeak Gallery and the Contemporary Art Gallery, we are asked to consider deeper and more troubling implications of war — the charred uniforms of school children caught in the nuclear summer of Nagasaki, or evidence of the media's early indifference to the genocide in Rwanda. We are confronted with the comfort zone the media provides.

War is hell, but *Frasier* is on in half an hour.

War Zones is the work of two Vancouver-based curators: Karen Love, director of Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, and Karen Henry, former director of the Burnaby Art Gallery. The dozens of events and exhibitions included here are not intended as a comprehensive survey of the history of war, but taken as a whole, they urge us to consider the epoch that French historical theorist Paul Virilio has called the merciless century.

The first segment of War Zones is subtitled Siting Conflict, and is comprised of artwork that looks at war in relation to geographic place. Genocide in Rwanda, sectarian vio-

lence in Northern Ireland, ruthless banditry in Somalia — our understanding of current events is often fused to the abstract notion of the places where they unfold. We've never been to Kigali or Mogadishu, but we can imagine what they're like because we've seen them on television. Or can we? The five works in Siting Conflict turn their gimlet eyes on the role of the media in encapsulating war and rendering it palatable for supertime audiences.

Martha Rosler, who came to prominence during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, was a pioneer in examining the media's role in shaping our understanding of war. Her *House Beautiful* photo-montages are brutal reminders — even 30 years later — of how obscenely ironic it is that we watch wars unfold from the comfort of our suburban family rooms. Rosler took images of stylish house interiors and littered them with the images of war: American GIs prowling a glamorous new kitchen looking for land mines; a Vietnamese woman crumpled in death on the floor of a



**BRINGING THE WAR HOME:** Martha Rosler's ironic pairing of suburban bliss and war's horrors.

SEE WAR ZONE, D11



WAR ZONES from D1

# Art challenges smugness about war

slip-covered living room; or a burned-over landscape glimpsed through a sunroom's charming window treatment.

Rosler confronts us with smugness — our own in particular — and mocks our presumptuous sense that we understand anything about war.

Alfredo Jaar, a Chilean artist living in New York, goes even further. In *Field, Road, Cloud*, he seduces us with images of great physical beauty: large colour prints of a field of coffee plants, a fluffy cloud, a charming country road. Hanging next to these images are small hand-drawn maps that locate the site of each image. The field is on the road to Kigali, we learn, placing the sequence of photographs in Rwanda. The dirt road leads to a church in a village called Ntarama, and the cloud hovers in the sky above the church's unseen steeple.

Jaar wants us to peer closer, puzzling over what these images might signify.

The final hand-drawn map identifies the churchyard as the site of a mass burial. Nothing is directly stated.

What Jaar is offering in *Field, Road, Cloud* is a souvenir of a Sunday-morning massacre in the summer of 1994, in which 400 people were hacked to death by a Hutu death squad that came upon them during mass. One frightened survivor, Gutete Emerita, has become a tragic touchstone in Jaar's work. Emerita watched her husband and two sons murdered but managed to escape with her 12-year-old daughter. "I remember her eyes," Jaar writes. "The eyes of Gutete Emerita."

And he took a photograph of her eyes, a heart-wrenching image that became the basis for his most important work to date. Jaar took that image of eyes that have seen too much and placed one million slide copies of it on a huge light table — a bier for all the people killed in the Rwandan genocide.

Northern Irish artist Willie Doherty uses a video to show us the mundane reality of life in that shell-shocked corner of the empire. We are sitting in the front passenger seat of a car bumping along a country road. The famous green fields of Ireland roll out on either side, our view partially obscured by the hedgerows that flank that narrow road. Ahh, country life.

Then the car rounds a curve and comes upon an immovable cement barrier, grossly at odds with the bucolic countryside and the chirping birds. Suddenly there is a scent of danger in the air. Who placed the barricade here? Why are we stopped? Is it an ambush? An Irish voice intones a truism: "At the end of the day, it's a new beginning," or "Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past." And then the video loops back to the beginning.

Like a skilful arcade game, Doherty's video manages to prise real emotion from us — a slice of fear, a sense of isolation, a quality of being chained to unhappy history.

Also in *Siting Conflict* are Banff artist Allan Harding MacKay, who served as an official Canadian war artist during the Somalia conflict, and New York artist Barbara Alper.

MacKay's video tracks an armored personnel carrier through the streets of Mogadishu, playing visual tricks with speed and time. MacKay was in Somalia in 1993, and his work plays out now against our knowledge of the disgraceful behaviour of Canadian soldiers during that mission.

In addition to video works, MacKay produced just under 60 works on paper based on his observations of life in Somalia. Since the middle of April, he has been destroying one of those works per day as a protest against Canada's involvement in the NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia.

## War Zones

War Zones is a city-wide survey of art concerned with situations of conflict. In addition to gallery exhibitions, the project includes a film series, billboards, panel discussions, artists' talks and installations. Here are some highlights.

**SITING CONFLICT** Works by Barbara Alper, Willie Doherty, Alfredo Jaar, Allan Harding MacKay and Martha Rosler, at Presentation House Gallery, until May 30.

**WAR ZONES FILM** This miniseries at Pacific Cinémathèque includes films by Alain Resnais, Stanley Kubrick, Sergei Eisenstein, Werner Herzog, Paul Verhoeven and Srđan Dragojević. Screenings are Thursday nights, April 29, May 6, 13 and 20.

**BILLBOARDS** Look for large-scale public statements about war by Edward Poitras, Jamelie Hassan, John Lennon and Yoko Ono on a billboard at West Georgia and Homer.

**PRESENT TENSE** War is not always between military combatants. This part of War Zones examines broader conflicts, with works by Jochen Gerz and John Scott, Mona Hatoum and Nancy Paterson. At the Contemporary Art Gallery

from May 15 to June 26.

**BEARING WITNESS** The history of war is the subject of the third part of War Zones, with works by Eugenio Dittborn, Roy Kiyooka, Nam June Paik and others, on view at Presentation House Gallery June 5 to July 18.

**SPEAKERS** Zdenka Badovinac, a museum director from Slovenia, joins artists Nancy Paterson and John Scott and media theorist Thomas Keenan in a panel entitled *War, Capital and Media* May 16 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Belgian artist Johan Grimmonprez will discuss his piece *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* that was shown at Documenta X, June 6 at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

**INNER SANCTUM** Montreal artist Dominique Blain unveils an installation work at the Vancouver Art Gallery July 14. The work will remain on view until the end of September.

For a complete listing of War Zones events, including times and locations, call Presentation House Gallery at 986-1351 or visit the gallery's Web site, [www.presentationhousegall.com](http://www.presentationhousegall.com).



# War in the present tense

The second part of the War Zones art project looks at military economics, voracious technology and historical inevitability.

## WAR ZONES

Part Two: Present Tense

Contemporary Art Gallery and Artspeak Gallery, until June 26

MICHAEL SCOTT

SUN VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

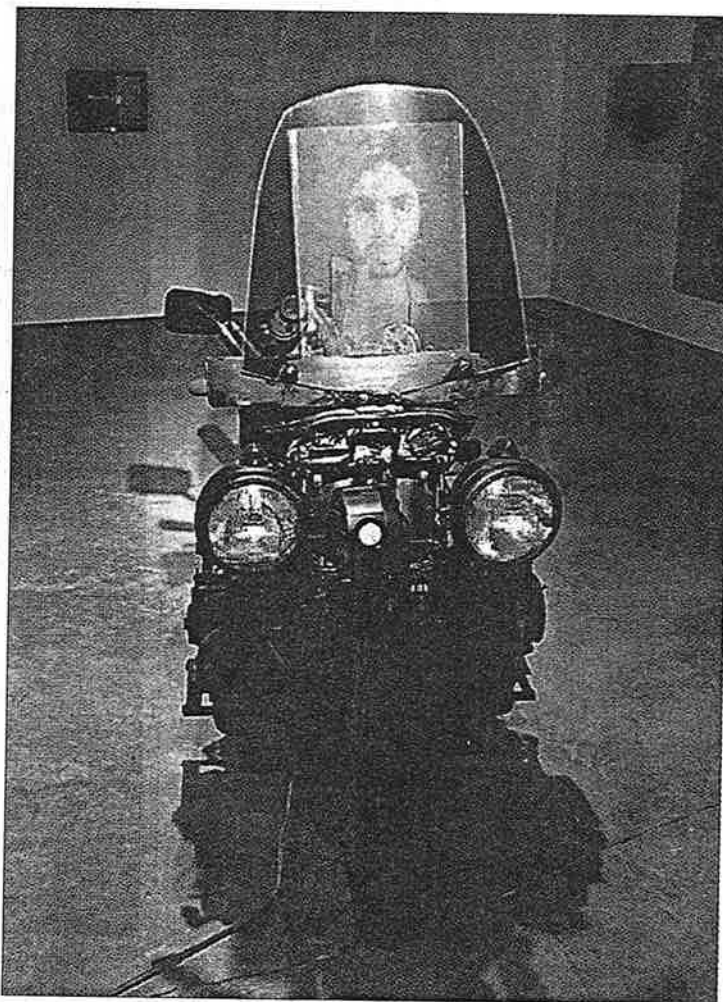
Present Tense is the second part of the ambitious War Zones project — a series of exhibitions, films, seminars and public installations on the subject of war. While the first instalment, *Siting Conflict*, paid close attention to the locality of combat, *Present Tense* looks at broader issues such as military economics, voracious technology and historical inevitability.

Nothing is clear-cut though. Like a modern guerrilla skirmish, War Zones comes at you from several directions at once — none of them the glorious frontal assault of olden days. The very subversiveness of this approach seems to be part of the strategy.

On the Downtown Eastside, for instance, Artspeak Gallery presents a work by the expatriate Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum, a billboard message displayed in the gallery's Carrall Street window — "Over My Dead Body." The image shows a young woman's head thrust defiantly forward, with a toy soldier, bayonet fixed, balanced on the bridge of her nose. Women and children are often the victims of war, and Hatoum acknowledges that in her deeply layered message. But the insignificance of the toy soldier and the ferocity of the woman's challenge turn the usual balance of power upside down. The guerrilla force of this 1988 work comes about in its manifold meanings — the warfare implied here is just as likely to exist in a conventional middle-class marriage as on a Middle Eastern battlefield.

Inside the gallery, Toronto artist Nancy Paterson examines the economics of war in *The Machine in the Garden*, a casino-style slot machine that spins video images of warfare, gambling and children's cartoons instead of oranges and lemons. Each yank of the lever produces a slightly different array of images — on tiny LCD screens in the slot machine itself as well as on a trio of television monitors. Brief glimpses of Desert Storm-era world leaders are interspersed with cartoon violence, journalistic footage of war zones, spinning roulette wheels and other trappings of Las Vegas gaming. "This piece addresses war images as saturated by commercial interests and part of our entertainment culture," write co-curators Karen Henry and Karen Love, "immediate, superficial, without depth, but with potential spiritual consequences." At the end of each round, the monitors freeze on random images of a woman covering her eyes, her ears or her mouth — the Buddhist dictum to see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.

The Contemporary Art Gallery handles the masculine side of the equation, with works by Toronto artist John Scott and Paris-based artist Jochen Gerz. Scott's work is particularly affecting. In *Between the Eyes*, he fills vast sheets of paper with his abrupt drawing of a stealth bomber. The plane is represented in an angry, tarry slurry of charcoal, graphite and oil stick. Its purpose, according to a partially obscured text is nothing less than the "extinction of human consciousness." Framing the image of the plane are two giant human eyes (actually one eye, reversed left for



**The Avatar, a vast death star of a motorbike, is a strong work.** right), peering out with untroubled gaze.

The strongest work in *Present Tense* is Scott's *The Avatar* (*The Deathless Boy*) a vast death star of a motorbike, on whose windshield a Christ-like hologram is etched. This "most evil vehicle" is an immense conglomeration of bicycle parts — two or three separate engines' worth — and used computer circuit boards, all painted a flat menacing black. A corresponding video loop shows a pair of hand-animated sequences of Scott's other aircraft drawings and fuzzy portents of doom.

Jochen Gerz's presence is less immediate and more irritating in its obliqueness. The German-born artist, who spends part of each year at his home in the Gulf Islands, has three works at the CAG, all of them multi-panel framed photographs. *The US Doubt* proclaims "The US at 400 A.D. had abolished Doubt" over top of a mosaic of industrial architecture. The work is precise and rectilinear, and displayed on the wall in a configuration that tilts off the horizontal. The curators say that Gerz is showing us the ironic confluences of history and the everyday in order to talk about the complexity of war, but the three works here feel hyper-intellectualized and cut-off from emotion — the opposite of what most can only imagine war must be like.



# Artful ways to say that 'war is hell'

SARAH MILROY  
Special to The Globe and Mail, Vancouver

A picture is worth a thousand words — or so the cliché goes. Whether we are looking at a photograph of a Kosovo grandmother being pushed in a wheelbarrow across a muddy field to political sanctuary, or a heap of bloated bodies by a roadside in Rwanda, the image makes us feel that we have learned something more intimate about mankind's suffering.

Or have we? The current series of exhibitions titled War Zones — organized by Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver and displayed at a number of venues around the city from now until September — challenges that assumption. How much can traditional photographic and electronic media help us to know about the experience of others? Does the commercial application of these images in the newspaper and television industries bleed them of their potency? Could alternative forms of representation take us deeper into knowing?

In an effort to answer these questions, curators Karen Henry and Karen Love have gathered international art that addresses violent confrontation, much of it aimed at undermining the authority of conventional journalism.

Alfredo Jaar's *Field, Road, Cloud* (1997), on show at Presentation House, documents the area around the Ntarana church in Rwanda, the site of a notorious mass execution in 1994 that left 500 dead. In contrast to the typical media documentation of such sites — the destroyed village, the bullet holes in the plaster wall, the grave mounds of the unnameable dead — Jaar turns his camera away in sadness, to the peaceful tea fields in the afternoon sun, to the turning road bordered with lush growth, and to a cloud floating above — an ethereal witness to the horrors below.

Willie Doherty's work at Presentation House also explores the intersection between the unexceptional details of life and the sudden shocks of war. In his video installation *At the End of the Day* (1994), the camera travels down a stretch of country road in his native Northern Ireland, jostling over the bumps and around the turns only to come up against an unmanned barricade. As the birds gather at dusk in the darkening branches above, Doherty's sorrowful voice intones one of a series of truisms ("The only way is forward"; "We have to forget the past and look to the future"; "We're all in this together") before the tape loops back and begins the approach again. The futility of the exercise and the

hopeless naivete of the aphorisms leave us struggling all the more to make sense of the abrupt obstacle in the landscape.

These two works, part of the *Sitting Conflict* show running until tomorrow, have good company across town at the Contemporary Art Gallery, where an exhibition called *Present Tense* features the work of Toronto artist John Scott. A self-appointed Horseman of the Apocalypse, Scott is known for his rough charcoal and graphite drawings of weapons of mass destruction, which he often deploys in ferocious installations incorporating sound.

At CAG, Scott is showing a large drawing of a warplane entitled *Between the Eyes* (it has a photo of a left and right eye attached to either side) and *The Avatar (The Deathless Boy)*, a giant motorcycle loaded with a video projector and carrying, Scott says, all the wisdom of the past into the future. (The title refers to a figure from Hindu scripture who teaches lessons to the other gods.)

The projected images are from videotapes Scott made of his many drawings of war and mayhem, accompanied by the raw a cappella sounds of the American blues singer Sun House (singing *John the Revelator*). Scott's anarchistic and deliberately low-tech approach

never fails to turn up fresh insights on the relationship between war, patriarchy and big, mean machines in North American culture.

While Scott delves into the popular culture of the junk yard and the blues for his material, Regina native artist Edward Poitras has excavated British and Canadian colonial history to create a public billboard and Web-site project (warmblanket.com) to evoke war's place in our "peacekeeping" nation. Poitras documents the intentional distribution of smallpox-infected blankets to the Indians by British soldiers, perhaps the earliest and crudest example of germ warfare. One letter displayed on the Web

site from a British naval officer to his colleague encourages him to try "every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race" including "hunting them down by dogs" or resorting to "the Spanish Method" of mass execution. The Georgia Street billboard advertising the warmblanket Web site also carries the image of a pile of flaming rifle butts, the spoils of the ammunition raids on Oka.

Coming exhibitions in this series will feature Belgian artist Johan Grimonprez's *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.*, a video installation about international terrorism and the airline industry; paintings on airmail paper by Eugenio Dittborn (whose work

laments the disappearance of Chilean political prisoners); photo documentation of the ephemeral remains of Hiroshima's victims by Hiromi Tsuchida; Roy Kiyooka's archive of local news coverage of the war in the Pacific and the internment of the Japanese in B.C. and Alberta during the Second World War; and Vancouver artist Gu Xiong's *Barricade of Bicycles*, a memorial by the expatriate Chinese artist to those killed in the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

As well, the Vancouver Art Gallery will stage a solo exhibition by Montreal artist Dominique Blain from July 14 to Sept. 26.



# ENTERTAINMENT

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TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 1999



BILL KEAY/Vancouver Sun

REMEMBERING TIANANMEN: A child sits in front of Vancouver artist Gu Xiong's *Barricade of Bicycles*, created to recall the wall of interlocking bikes that went up in Beijing to bar soldiers.

## BEARING WITNESS TO HORROR

The third part of a multimedia exhibition called *War Zones* looks back at some of most appalling events in history, from Hiroshima to Tiananmen Square.

### WAR ZONES

Part Three: Bearing Witness

Presentation House Gallery, 333 Chesterfield, North Vancouver, until July 18

MICHAEL SCOTT  
SUN VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

There is a fountain pen in the third part of *War Zones*, an ambitious series of exhibitions in Vancouver on the subject of conflict, that recites a gruesome poetry about the aftermath of war. The pen is one of some 6,600 objects stored at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan. It is a very ordinary pen, unremarkable except for the fact that it was found clinging to the burned skin of a young journalist who was 1.3 kilometres from ground zero on the summer morning in 1945 when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan's 10th-largest city. His clothes were burned away in a second and the pen, which had been riding in his shirt pocket, was seared into his flesh by the heat of the blast.

The photograph of the pen, along with several other equally haunting images from the collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, are the work of Hiromi Tsuchida, a Tokyo

photographer. Beginning in 1976, Tsuchida produced a lengthy three-part photographic project about the bombing of Hiroshima. He was inspired, he says, by the horrifying realization that only 30 years after the war, the Japanese as a people were studiously trying to forget what happened. It is precisely this element of collective memory that inspires the choice of artists in *Bearing Witness*. Fallible and frail as we are, our recollection of even the most horrific events will grow dim with time as we accentuate some details and erase many others.

Korean-American artist Nam June Paik savours that mutability in *Guadalcanal Requiem*, a video document he made in 1977. Using a jumpy camera technique and a surrealist sensibility, Paik follows cellist Charlotte Moorman through an art happening on the tiny patch of land in the west-central Pacific. Interlayered with archival footage, images of battle-scarred countryside just visible through the encroaching jungle, wild solarizations and the earnest reminiscences of islanders who witnessed the famous battle in 1943, Paik asks his contemporary audience to contemplate the many tens of thousands of lives and the fleets of war ships that were sacrificed by both sides to capture the island.

His point, of course, as his camera trails after Moorman and her cello, is that it all seems too distant now for us to care. Paik's images of Henderson Air Field, the reason for defending Guadalcanal in the first place, show an unused patch of parade ground and the rusting frame of an air-traffic control tower. What was the fighting all about? In a moment of sharp irony, one of the blustery war veterans with whom Paik speaks observes that describing his war experience is "like trying to explain Rembrandt to a blind man."

The late Roy Kiyooka grew up in Canada during the Second World War. A few years after the war, Kiyooka began to take photographs of wartime newspaper clippings — a work he conceived as a kind of scrap book, a way of reminding his viewers of the racism and shocking propaganda that formed much of the reportage in even respectable papers like *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *The Vancouver Sun*. The folio of black-and-white photographs is sobering, even disturbing. "Jap Naval Losses To Date" chirps a clipping from *The Vancouver Sun* in February 1942. An upbeat graphic bears the legend "Battleships: Sunk - 2, Hit - 4; Cruisers: Sunk - 5, Hit - 10...."

An installation work by Vancouver-based artist Gu Xiong shows that memories of battle can be recent. In *Barricade of Bicycles*, Gu memorializes the events of June 1989 when tens of thousands of demonstrators took over Tiananmen Square in

SEE BEARING WITNESS, C5



# Experiences as icons



BILL KEAY/Vancouver Sun

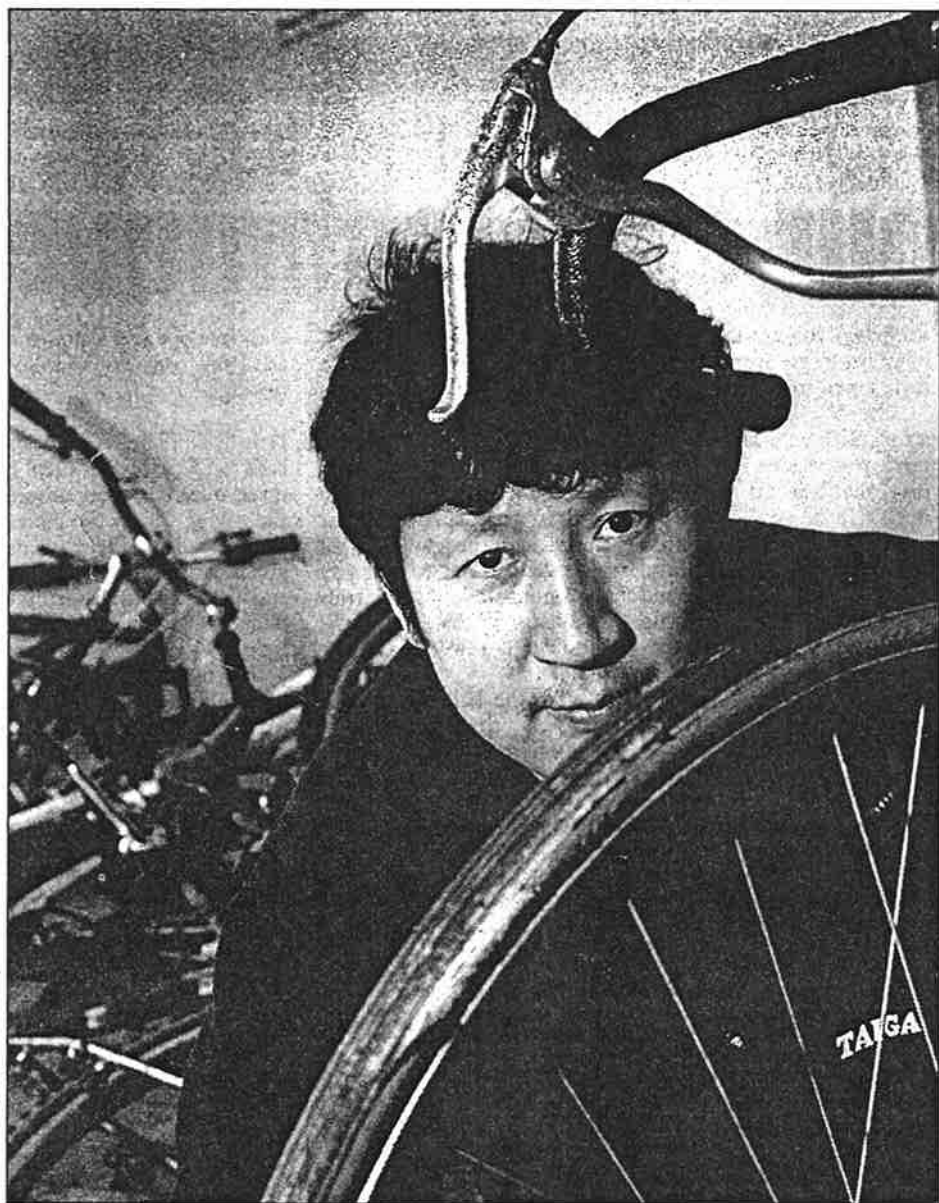
**HAUNTING:** Hiromi Tsuchida's photograph of a fountain pen, a reminder of the 1941 atomic blast that levelled Hiroshima.

Beijing. They used their bicycles to build surprisingly effective barricades at the entrances to the square. For this art work, Gu erects a replica barricade out of 140 bicycles. Locked together, handlebars through spokes, the bikes form a spikey and stable wall. Flooded with red light, the piece evokes the sunset, night, stress and martyr's blood. "One bicycle is one person," Gu writes in a short explanatory text. "Many bicycles are together. There is unity. It is people's power."

The most broadly conceptual of the works presented here is *The Corpse, the Treasure* by Eugenio Dittborn. A Chilean artist, Dittborn has been producing his *Pinturas Aeropostales* (Air-mail Paintings) since 1984. Dittborn is an example of the kind of artist that makes dictators nervous. His airmail paintings are extremely subversive, breaking through "the isolation and international confinement" of a totali-

tarian regime, as he explains. The painting itself, part silk-screen, part collage, is made on soft white felt, then folded to fit into airmail packets. This method of disguising a painting as a letter has made Dittborn famous. The piece on view here, along with its mailing packets — postage dutifully franked by the Chilean post office — concerns things that disappear and then reappear. Subjects include a childhood art book that reappears in adult life, an Incan mummy excavated in the 1960s and the body of a Chilean dissident (a "disappeared" person) that came to light in 1990.

After the Second World War, "technology and horror reached what was, for a time at least, critical mass," write War Zones co-curators Karen Love and Karen Henry. "These experiences cannot be represented except as fragments, icons that serve as memorials in the human psyche."



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

## Barricade of Bicycles

ONE hundred and fifty bicycles are needed for an artwork by Vancouver artist Gu Xiong, part of the War Zones exhibition series at Presentation House Gallery. Xiong's installation, Barricade of Bicycles, represents the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and speaks to the collective power of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Anyone with an unwanted bike to donate, functioning or not, is asked to call 986-1351. Drop-off is June 3, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the gallery, 333 Chesterfield Ave., North Van.



# Artists go beyond the headlines of life during wartime

By Mary Frances Hill

From the pens and mouths of journalists, coverage of war adopts an authority viewers have grown accustomed to, giving them little choice but to accept what they're watching as truth.

But when the artist or filmmaker turns his attention to war, the images of conflict are suddenly unpredictable, and take on a poignancy that lasts years after the ceasefire.

This month and into the summer, The Pacific Cinematheque, at 1131 Howe St., with five art galleries here and in North Vancouver, celebrate artists and filmmakers' approaches to war in War Zones, a series of art exhibits and films that explore and satirize political conflict and war.

The work of 20 artists will be shown through spring and summer at Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, and the Contemporary Art Gallery, Artspeak and Access galleries in Vancouver.

The series of three programs includes: "Siting Conflict", "Present Tense", and "Bearing Witness."

"The role of art is to offer a deeper, more profound, more reflective approach than the immediacy of journalism or reportage might offer," says Jim Sinclair, executive director of the Pacific



Above and left, stills from the Serbian anti-war film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, which will play at the Pacific Cinematheque in May, as part of War Zones, a collaboration between the cinema, Presentation House gallery and Veterans Against Nuclear Arms.

Cinematheque.

After exploring the work of artists from around the world, co-curators Karen Love and Karen Henry approached the other galleries to exhibit work centred around the conflicts in Rwanda, Somalia, Northern Ireland, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and World War II. War Zones continues May 15 to June 26 at the Contemporary Art Gallery, 555 Hamilton St., and Artspeak Gallery, 233 Carrall St. Access Gallery, at 206 Carrall, takes

on a show from June 5 to July 3. Some works in the War Zones project suggest more contemporary conflicts have been processed through media.

It's a concept that artists have reflected in their work at Presentation House, 333 Chesterfield Dr., North Vancouver.

Artist Martha Rosler uses a photomontage technique to place photojournalistic images of the Vietnam war onto pictures of the average Amer-

ican suburban home. In "The Gulf Channel", artist Barbara Alper juxtaposes 16 images from French TV covering the Gulf war, including English subtitles, as a way to express how information on war is filtered and screened for public consumption.

From May to July, antiwar images will be splashed onto downtown billboards created by Edward Poitras, Jamelie Hassan and John Lennon and Yoko Ono. To correspond with Presentation House's Siting

Conflict exhibits, the Pacific Cinematheque will show Alan Resnais' films *Night and Fog*, a short documentary on Nazi death camps, and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

"We wanted to show war films in a certain context, that had a sense of place," says Pacific Cinematheque executive director Jim Sinclair.

It's not all grim, however: the evening closes with Kubrick's satire *Dr. Strangelove or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

Cinematheque films on subsequent Thursdays, May 6 and May 13, dwell on Canadian conflicts and futuristic visions of war, respectively.

On May 20, the films centre on Eastern European conflict, featuring the film, *Pretty Village Pretty Flame*, a 1996 Serbian feature just released in North America.

"It's an amazing film a la *Doctor Strangelove*, a startling antiwar film that offers an interesting take on the events in Bosnia," Sinclair says.

# BORDER CROSSINGS

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

C R O S S I N G S

hue is a pale primrose. The exhibition also includes studies of flowers of similar scale and hue. As Norman Zepp points out in his introduction to the Rosemont catalogue, these flower studies are rendered in landscape terms—hence the title of the show, “Stillscapes.”

It is with these paintings that Dupuis enters what I have termed ‘the transcendental’ in Saskatchewan landscape painting. The eye is seduced by the illusion of vast distances as it passes from the foreground into the far horizon, where the land disappears, and from where it is launched into the huge sky. There the viewer is lost for a moment before returning to the horizon. The horizon is the most crucial point because, in the spiritual schema of the painting, this is where the material meets the immaterial. The mystery of the immaterial in the material is also conveyed by Dupuis’s extraordinarily luminous yellows, colours

I’d never thought capable of the spiritual charge they carry in his paintings.

I’ve linked Dupuis with the name of Otto Rogers. Dupuis was a student of Rogers but that is not to say that their work is similar, except in their generalized spirituality. Rogers’s is more universal; his tendency to use calligraphy is a case in point. Although in many of his paintings Rogers is clearly inspired by prairie landscape, his work is more abstract. It is as if he starts with an idea and then chooses landscape and other elements to express it. Dupuis, instead, starts from the landscape and derives feelings from it; he is more emotional and more literal.

Both artists, however, strive for some sort of super-reality, a search for the light on sea or land that never was. And something else. In conversation with me, Dupuis recounted the sensation he felt while gazing at the great Rembrandts in Amsterdam—it was a sort of stillness, he said, almost impossible to define. The best of these paintings in their own way reach towards calmness and peace. At the same time, they impart an energy that comes from a search carried out with vigour and integrity. ■

*“Stillscapes” by Lorenzo Dupuis was on exhibition at the Rosemont Gallery, Regina, September 1 to October 2, and at Buschlen Mowett Gallery, Vancouver, October 8 to November 4, 1999.*

*Peter Millard is an art critic who lives in Saskatoon.*

## VISUAL ART

### War Zones

by James-Jason Lee

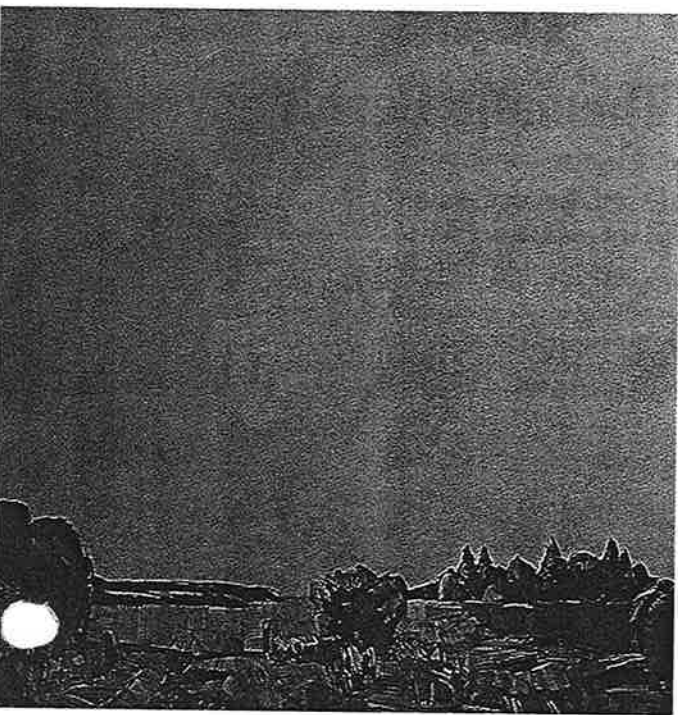
**I**mpeccable timing. That’s a perverse way to describe an anti-war art project that conveniently coincides with a bombing operation. Actually, the suggestion is downright parasitic and ghoulish. But that’s what happened last spring when “War Zones” opened three weeks into NATO’s air campaign against Serbia.

It was unforeseen. The organizers, Presentation House Gallery curators Karen Henry and Karen Love, started planning “War Zones” a year before the hostilities. Of course, they expected it to be relevant and topical—it was about war.

They envisioned the project as an important Vancouver-wide event involving other institutions—Access Gallery, Artspeak Gallery, the Contemporary Art Gallery, and the Vancouver Art Gallery. They knew that it would feature dozens of international and Canadian artists organized in three thematic shows. The series of exhibitions would begin with “Siting Conflict” in the early spring, “Present Tense” would be on exhibit through the spring and summer, and “Bearing Witness” would continue into the first week of autumn. And to top off the ambitious effort, there would be a film series at the Pacific Cinematheque and a number of panel discussions.

Karen Henry and Karen Love had it all organized, but they hadn’t

Lorenzo Dupuis, *Moon Valley*  
*Pasture #7*, 1999, oil on canvas,  
66 x 66". Courtesy the artist.

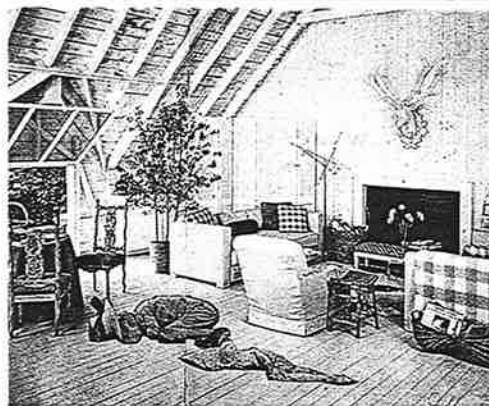




anticipated another round of inter-ethnic combat in the Balkans to provide a backdrop of immediacy to their show. There it was, however, Operation Allied Force, punctuating their thesis: that war is a constant in modern life.

In light of their premise, though, such a coincidence would have been hard to avoid. There's always a firestorm somewhere in the world, burning brightly enough to share its internecine glow with others. Recent history bears it out. If "War Zones" had opened six months earlier, it would have synchronized with renewed missile attacks on Iraq. If the project were mounted right now—I'm writing this review in the mid-summer—it would have resonated with the growing belligerence between India and Pakistan, and the Russian military actions against rebels in Dagestan.

All that said, "War Zones" was timely for another, more personal, reason. When the laser-guided munitions started falling on TV stations and public markets in Belgrade, I was convinced that NATO's attack was just, necessary, and effective. My usual pacifism had been replaced by a hodgepodge of hawkish and anti-fascist rhetoric that I had learned through osmosis. My theory was that the intervention didn't exacerbate the crisis in Kosovo; it simply accelerated the process. The West could start bombing in March or it could wait two more months, even two more years. But, eventually, NATO would be forced to wage war in the region. I felt it was conflagration either now



or later, I saw the situation as black and white. Perhaps it was millennial panic. For a time, I was without my doubts, my moral grey zone. I was sure the Canadian-sponsored war was all right. That is, until I saw "Siting Conflict."

Mounted at Presentation House Gallery, the group show focussed on the landscape of war. It consisted of video and photographic works that portrayed battle-worn places such as the Gulf, northern Ireland, Somalia, and Vietnam. The most memorable works were by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar and American artist Martha Rosler.

Rosler's 1966-1972 photomontage series, "Bringing the War Back Home: House Beautiful," was like shock therapy. Punchy and editorializing, the pieces were collages of news photos of the Vietnam War and pictures of house interiors taken from architectural and design magazines.

One depicted a modern post-and-beam vacation cottage looking over a view of GIS putting out a fire. Another showed soldiers in a foxhole staring through a bay window framed by an embroidered curtain. A third consisted of an elegant white staircase ascended by a Vietnamese adult carrying a wounded baby. These images, along with others, demonstrated that news coverage of the war and

domestic consumerism were two faces of one sinister appetite. Its juxtapositions suggested that no-stain carpets came out of the same factories as Agent Orange. And, more importantly, they provided a different way of understanding space.

It was in the early days of the Kosovo crisis that I received my first lesson in Albanian geography via the newscast graphic. It was like looking through a telescope the wrong way. Europe's recognizable outline was inset to the less familiar profile of the Balkans which, in turn, got nestled into a field of dots and lines that represented the theatre of action. Here, war was a spatial abstraction. It didn't bring me closer to the war. It did, however, reassure me that the bloodletting was truly far away. The seemingly informative war images that followed, like video pans of a refugee camp or ultraviolet night shots of an explosion, never overcame the geopolitical refinement of that first map. I had become accustomed to the cartography of conflict, where death had its very distant and acceptable place.

Rosler's Vietnam pictures challenged my remoteness. The front line and the home front were brought together. The intimate



(top left) Martha Rosler, *Roadside Ambush* from series "Bringing the War Back Home: House Beautiful," 1969-72. Photomontage printed as colour photograph 20 x 24". All photographs courtesy Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver.

(top right) Johan Grimonprez, *Dial HISTORY*, video stills, 1997.

(lower right) Hiromi Tsuchida, *Hiroshima Collection*, 1980-82. Black and White Photographs with text.

violence of "Bringing the War Back Home" corrected my faulty worldview or, at the very least, broke it up. The news offered the comfort of realpolitik rationalizations. Rosler offered up good old-fashioned guilt. Before I was sure, now I was unsure.

Alfredo Jaar's photo series, "Field Road Cloud," echoed my feelings of uncertainty. His pictures seemed to be innocuous landscapes taken in some equatorial clime. Thick verdant foliage, a luscious field, a wisp of a cloud revealed nothing about what took place there. They were pictures taken on Jaar's grim pilgrimage to Ntarama, Rwanda, where 400 people were massacred during Rwanda's civil war. Unlike the news, which filtered reality, and Rosler's collages, which morally flattened it, Jaar's photographs floated between explicit reportage and artfulness, brutality and beauty. The work's vague gentleness wasn't the result of cowardice. It was a product of anxiety: how is culture supposed to cope with such cruelty? How does an artist act as a witness?

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find any satisfying answers in the works presented in the following show, "Present Tense." Exhibited in three galleries—Access Gallery, Artspeak Gallery, and the Contemporary Art Gallery—this thematic group responded to the spectacle of war. And judging from what was selected, the only good retort to military spectacle was more spectacle.

Nothing could have been splashier than *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* at

Access Gallery. The 1997 video project by Belgian Johan Grimmonprez explored the relationship between media and terrorism, specifically skyjacking. Driven by a booming kitsch and disco soundtrack, it offered a pulsing chronology of terrorist tactics from the 1960s onwards. The work fused vintage news footage—exploding Boeings, flight attendants in mini skirts, Nikita Khrushkev thundering at the UN, guerrilla interviews, hostage stand-offs, et cetera—with anti-hijacking instruction videos. Occasionally, a lyrical passage with voice-over readings from Don DeLillo's novel, *Underworld*, would interrupt the funky rhythm, injecting some gravitas.

While the production was intended to be a contemplation on the pervasiveness of violence, its raciness is what overwhelmed. It did, however, make some good points: it argued that the rebellious voice of 19th-century writers and artists had been replaced by the articulate violence of the 20th-century terrorist. (It's true that both were trying to scratch away the thick dead skin of the complacent bourgeoisie. The artists applied piercing realism, and the Black Panthers and liberation armies used bloody trauma.) However, the true lesson of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* was this: clearly, it's time for Hollywood to shoot a retro flick about skyjacking in the same manner that the grainy Mel Gibson vehicle, *Payback*, and Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* recreate '70s action films.

"Bearing Witness," the final component of "War Zones," had its own

fair share of spectacle. Vancouver artist Gu Xiong piled hundreds of bicycles into a barricade at Presentation House Gallery in remembrance of Tiananmen Square. What the installation gained in broad emphatic clarity, it lost in specificity, intimacy and reflection. The wrangled metal blockade said no more about the tragedy than that famous photograph where a protester stops a column of tanks with his body, which, by the way, Gu Xiong had projected onto the gallery wall. *Barricade of Bicycles*—June 4, 1989 felt like an ersatz memory. Hiromi Tsuchida's *Hiroshima Collection* did not.

It consisted of 10 photographs taken by Tsuchida of objects from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Each black and white picture recorded one item against a white background. The self-descriptive photo-document, *Damaged lens with one frame*, was crisply detailed and without histrionics. However, the image's high-modern aloofness belied its accompanying text: "Although the body of Moto Mosoro (54 at the time) was not found, a part of her burned head was discovered on September 6, one month after the atomic bombing, at a place 1500 meters from the hypocenter. This was taken from an eye socket."

Tsuchida's act of witnessing had overcome distance and history. And I learned from it. Art is more than a form of memory. Art is also a form of conscience. ■

"War Zones" is a program of exhibitions and special events organized by



# BlackFlash

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PHOTO-BASED AND ELECTRONIC ART PRODUCTION



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vol. 17. 2



reviewed by Bob Sherrin and Keith Bell

Bob Sherrin

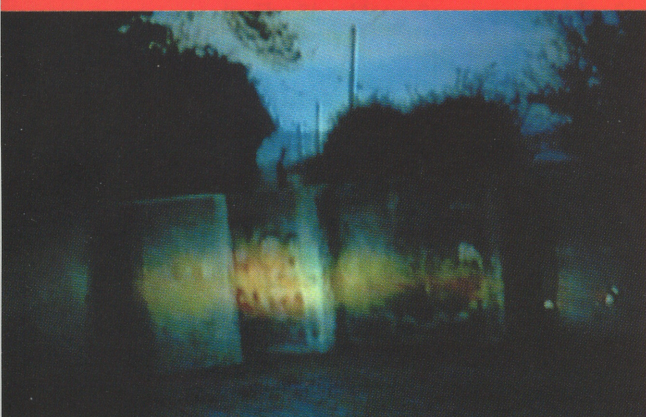
*Irony* can be traced back to Greek drama where we find the *alazon* and the *eiron*, the former being the supposedly wise individual who is ultimately exposed as a fool by the *eiron* who himself was initially thought to be the simpleton: thus our sense that irony encompasses the unexpected, the marriage in a variety of ways of opposites. "War Zones" operates within a similar context, raising a number of questions which on first glance query the purpose of such an exhibition but which also take us further into the idea of what an art exhibition can offer in response to armed conflict.

The art gallery is an unlikely place for effective protest movements: its relative isolation within our society, its limited numbers of impressionable patrons, the difficulty that art poses to people thoroughly adapted to the swiftly superficial culture of television all suggest that those who most often and seriously visit art galleries are the converted. In this instance, the converted are those who already accept that war is a terrible thing, that capital is complicit in its conduct, and that we should acknowledge—through our gallery admission fees, art purchases, and our very presence at such exhibitions—our alliance with the forces of pacifism, cultural independence, and intellectual enlightenment. Furthermore, the gallery system in this country is funded by a combination of (dwindling) government subsidy and (growing) corporate sponsorship—two groups eager for positive PR and ruthlessly quick to turn aside from those who question their motives, let alone their involvement in something as brutal as the wholesale extermination of humans. As well, every work in the gallery portions of "War Zones" ironically attempts to make

Willie Doherty

*At the End of the Day*, 1994

Video Projection



Eugenio Dittborn

*The Corpse, The Treasure*, 1991

Airmail painting

Installation photograph

by Diane Evans



I FELT AS IF A COSMIC IMPACT HAD  
 INTO THE EARTH UNTIL IT BECAME A  
 UNUSUAL. THERE WAS NO RETURN  
 FROM SPACES. I KNEW I HAD TO REMAIN  
 INSIDE THE BARRING DESTRUCTION  
 AS LATER I WOULD FEEL DURING EACH  
 EARTHQUAKE. I HAVE BEEN IN THE  
 NUCLEAR NEED TO GRASP INTO A CAPSULE  
 BEING WHICH IS MY ONLY WAY OF  
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 STUPID. ALSO FEEL AROUND OF ANOTHER  
 MADNESS. THE BRUTAL SENSATION THAT  
 OF DEATH. UNTIL JOCK WHO AMONG THE  
 THAT I WOULD HAVE  
 "EL MERCURIO" NEWSPAPER, MARCH 1981

[illegible]

THEY WERE TAKEN OF A 1960-1961-1962-1963-1964-1965-1966-1967-1968-1969-1970-1971-1972-1973-1974-1975-1976-1977-1978-1979-1980-1981-1982-1983-1984-1985-1986-1987-1988-1989-1990-1991-1992-1993-1994-1995-1996-1997-1998-1999-2000-2001-2002-2003-2004-2005-2006-2007-2008-2009-2010-2011-2012-2013-2014-2015-2016-2017-2018-2019-2020-2021-2022-2023-2024-2025-2026-2027-2028-2029-2030-2031-2032-2033-2034-2035-2036-2037-2038-2039-2040-2041-2042-2043-2044-2045-2046-2047-2048-2049-2050-2051-2052-2053-2054-2055-2056-2057-2058-2059-2060-2061-2062-2063-2064-2065-2066-2067-2068-2069-2070-2071-2072-2073-2074-2075-2076-2077-2078-2079-2080-2081-2082-2083-2084-2085-2086-2087-2088-2089-2090-2091-2092-2093-2094-2095-2096-2097-2098-2099-2100-2101-2102-2103-2104-2105-2106-2107-2108-2109-2110-2111-2112-2113-2114-2115-2116-2117-2118-2119-2120-2121-2122-2123-2124-2125-2126-2127-2128-2129-2130-2131-2132-2133-2134-2135-2136-2137-2138-2139-2140-2141-2142-2143-2144-2145-2146-2147-2148-2149-2150-2151-2152-2153-2154-2155-2156-2157-2158-2159-2160-2161-2162-2163-2164-2165-2166-2167-2168-2169-2170-2171-2172-2173-2174-2175-2176-2177-2178-2179-2180-2181-2182-2183-2184-2185-2186-2187-2188-2189-2190-2191-2192-2193-2194-2195-2196-2197-2198-2199-2200-2201-2202-2203-2204-2205-2206-2207-2208-2209-2210-2211-2212-2213-2214-2215-2216-2217-2218-2219-2220-2221-2222-2223-2224-2225-2226-2227-2228-2229-2230-2231-2232-2233-2234-2235-2236-2237-2238-2239-2240-2241-2242-2243-2244-2245-2246-2247-2248-2249-2250-2251-2252-2253-2254-2255-2256-2257-2258-2259-2260-2261-2262-2263-2264-2265-2266-2267-2268-2269-2270-2271-2272-2273-2274-2275-2276-2277-2278-2279-2280-2281-2282-2283-2284-2285-2286-2287-2288-2289-2290-2291-2292-2293-2294-2295-2296-2297-2298-2299-2300-2301-2302-2303-2304-2305-2306-2307-2308-2309-2310-2311-2312-2313-2314-2315-2316-2317-2318-2319-2320-2321-2322-2323-2324-2325-2326-2327-2328-2329-2330-2331-2332-2333-2334-2335-2336-2337-2338-2339-2340-2341-2342-2343-2344-2345-2346-2347-2348-2349-2350-2351-2352-2353-2354-2355-2356-2357-2358-2359-2360-2361-2362-2363-2364-2365-2366-2367-2368-2369-2370-2371-2372-2373-2374-2375-2376-2377-2378-2379-2380-2381-2382-2383-2384-2385-2386-2387-2388-2389-2390-2391-2392-2393-2394-2395-2396-2397-2398-2399-2400-2401-2402-2403-2404-2405-2406-2407-2408-2409-2410-2411-2412-2413-2414-2415-2416-2417-2418-2419-2420-2421-2422-2423-2424-2425-2426-2427-2428-2429-2430-2431-2432-2433-2434-2435-2436-2437-2438-2439-2440-2441-2442-2443-2444-2445-2446-2447-2448-2449-2450-2451-2452-2453-2454-2455-2456-2457-2458-2459-2460-2461-2462-2463-2464-2465-2466-2467-2468-2469-2470-2471-2472-2473-2474-2475-2476-2477-2478-2479-2480-2481-2482-2483-2484-2485-2486-2487-2488-2489-2490-2491-2492-2493-2494-2495-2496-2497-2498-2499-2500-2501-2502-2503-2504-2505-2506-2507-2508-2509-2510-2511-2512-2513-2514-2515-2516-2517-2518-2519-2520-2521-2522-2523-2524-2525-2526-2527-2528-2529-2530-2531-2532-2533-2534-2535-2536-2537-2538-2539-2540-2541-2542-2543-2544-2545-2546-2547-2548-2549-2550-2551-2552-2553-2554-2555-2556-2557-2558-2559-2560-2561-2562-2563-2564-2565-2566-2567-2568-2569-2570-2571-2572-2573-2574-2575-2576-2577-2578-2579-2580-2581-2582-2583-2584-2585-2586-2587-2588-2589-2590-2591-2592-2593-2594-2595-2596-2597-2598-2599-2600-2601-2602-2603-2604-2605-2606-2607-2608-2609-2610-2611-2612-2613-2614-2615-2616-2617-2618-2619-2620-2621-2622-2623-2624-2625-2626-2627-2628-2629-2630-2631-2632-2633-2634-2635-2636-2637-2638-2639-2640-2641-2642-2643-2644-2645-2646-2647-2648-2649-2650-2651-2652-2653-2654-2655-2656-2657-2658-2659-2660-2661-2662-2663-2664-2665-2666-2667-2668-2669-2670-2671-2672-2673-2674-2675-2676-2677-2678-2679-2680-2681-2682-2683-2684-2685-2686-2687-2688-2689-2690-2691-2692-2693-2694-2695-2696-2697-2698-2699-2700-2701-2702-2703-2704-2705-2706-2707-2708-2709-2710-2711-2712-2713-2714-2715-2716-2717-2718-2719-2720-2721-2722-2723-2724-2725-2726-2727-2728-2729-2730-2731-2732-2733-2734-2735-2736-2737-2738-2739-2740-2741-2742-2743-2744-2745-2746-2747-2748-2749-2750-2751-2752-2753-2754-2755-2756-2757-2758-2759-2760-2761-2762-2763-2764-2765-2766-2767-2768-2769-2770-2771-2772-2773-2774-2775-2776-



1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 1, 1861. It is a copy of the original letter, and is signed by Abraham Lincoln.

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Environ Biol Fish (2008) 81:115–126



SALES OF

IN A NEW REPORT, THE PANEL OF EXPERTS CONCLUDES THAT THE "RECENTLY DISCOVERED" DOCUMENTS WERE NOT FORWARDED TO THE FBI BY THE FBI, BUT WERE INSTEAD FORWARDED TO THE FBI BY THE FBI. THE PANEL CONCLUDES THAT THE FBI "HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE DOCUMENTS UNTIL AFTER THEY HAD BEEN DISCOVERED BY THE FBI." THE PANEL ALSO CONCLUDES THAT THE FBI "HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE DOCUMENTS UNTIL AFTER THEY HAD BEEN DISCOVERED BY THE FBI."

8. casa de madera



# The art gallery is a place for effective protest movements



Alfredo Jaar

*Field, Road, Cloud (detail), 1997*

Cibachrome photograph

articulate comment on acts of state-sanctioned brutality so extreme that even Paul Fussell admits they are "indescribable;" the former soldier, now holder of the Donald T. Regan Chair of Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, knows modern war as a form of unpredictable, unmanageable chaos combined with relentlessly barbaric terror.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the fundamental irony of this exhibition lies in the fact that Presentation House curator Karen Love and guest curator Karen Henry have assembled a huge body of works, many of which which exploit the very media that cause us so-called First Worlders to ignore and to accept war. By presenting so many works that use or refer to contemporary information media, Love and Henry also prompt us to

acknowledge our despicable need to forget while we indulge ourselves in the benefits of armed conflict. An exhibition that might seem to be an historical survey of antiwar art, thus also functions as a subtle and cumulative portrait of our collective passivity. More specifically, viewers of "War Zones" must ultimately recognise that the peace we have enjoyed since 1945 has been purchased through the loss of tens of millions of humans in the regional and "ethnic" wars that have raged without interruption since the end of that global conflict.

As John Ralston Saul points out in *Voltaire's Bastards*, though we live in a time of peace the West still operates a war economy in which

annual weapon sales worldwide, to friend or foe, comprise well over \$2.5 trillion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Anne Ying Der writes that weapon sales and the wars necessary to this marketplace are considered keystones of many economies. Ironically, the Aerospace North America seminar took place recently in Vancouver and "addressed defence-product opportunities in the new millennium."<sup>3</sup> This seminar was part of the annual aerospace trade industry show, a forum for arms manufacturers and governments which, in our case, reports that in the last fiscal year Canadian companies had an arms-related business volume of \$748 million.<sup>4</sup> Saul points out the absurd irony of spending extraordinary sums on products that are often stockpiled and remain unused—as fortunately have all nuclear weapons manufactured since 1945—and concludes that "whether stockpiled or used, weapons are the most extravagant of consumer goods."<sup>5</sup> Given both our individual tendency to support our country of birth or citizenship and its historical reliance on Canadian-US defence procurement agreements,<sup>6</sup> most Canadians would rather not be faced with war imagery that does more than reinforce the happy fact that such butchery happens elsewhere and at such minimal human cost to North Americans. So, directly and daily but in relative silence, we have grown so accepting of the need to protect our way of life that most Canadians no longer seriously question the propriety of two Prime Ministers in the last decade taking us to war without passing an act in parliament to declare it.<sup>7</sup> How terribly instructive it is to recall Brian Mulroney standing on the front lawn of George Bush's summer home



an unlikely  
effective  
moments:

WAR IS OVER!

IF YOU WANT IT

Love and Peace from John & Yoko

Budget



John Lennon & Yoko Ono

*War is Over*, 1969

Photo by Robert Keziere

WYSIWYG CUSTOMERS  
THREE SPACES ONLY



Roy Kiyooka

Japanese War Archive, 1950-77

(details from folio of 208

b/w photographs)

Installation photo

by Diane Evans

# WAR

Historic Date Blazed  
as Japan Surrenders

## Japs Are Ordered Cease Hostilities

The Second Great War has ended.  
Japan has surrendered. Hostilities  
cease. The creation of hostilities are  
now being terminated.

# ENDS

\$250,000,000 in Jap Treasure  
Uncovered by Allied Search

Japs' Political  
Prisoners Freed

Professor Named  
To Advise Kibaku

### CHURCHILL'S PROGRAM

### Jap Millions Four Chicks

and announcing with a smile that Canada would send men and women to serve in the Gulf War. Few recent Prime Ministerial acts make as clear a statement about Canada's servant status and the general disinterest of its citizens in our aiding in the slaughter of thousands to safeguard our right to buy gasoline. Given the degree of entrenched cynicism in our society, one wonders why Love and Henry bothered to mount as ambitious and demanding an exhibition as "War Zones." Perhaps irony holds part of the answer.

Paul Fussell writes about World War II in his book *Wartime*. In a chapter dealing with the huge gap between the soldier's exceptionally brutal reality and the fantasy generated to create and maintain public support back home, Fussell offers this bitter insight:

The real war was tragic and ironic, beyond the power of any literary or philosophic analysis to suggest, but in unbombed America especially [and Canada], the meaning of the war seemed inaccessible. As experience, thus,

the suffering was wasted. The same tricks of publicity and advertising might have succeeded in sweetening the actualities of Vietnam if television and a vigorous uncensored moral journalism hadn't been brought to bear. America has not yet understood what the Second World War was like and has thus been unable to use such understanding to re-interpret and re-define the national reality and to arrive at something like public maturity.<sup>8</sup>

Fussell goes on to point out the difference in the representation of war between the much earlier work of Shakespeare and Goya and such modern and contemporary sources as *Life Goes to War* (1977) and the visuals found in current media reportage.

In these, no matter how severely wounded, Allied troops are never shown suffering what was termed, in the Vietnam War, traumatic amputation ... The difference between the two traditions of representation ... is a difference in sensibility, especially in the

ability of a pap-fed mass public to understand unpleasant facts. [9]

The 'mistake' of allowing the press easy access to battlefields and soldiers at the front has been corrected, and certainly since the American invasion of Grenada, the role of western television and the mainstream press has been to ensure us back home that everything is fine and that the bombs really are smart. The current variant for Canadians is the recent war in Kosovo in which we participated, according to our External Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, because it was a humanitarian undertaking. It is instructive to note that not one Canadian flier died in this air war and that the greatest category of dead and wounded is civilian—on both sides.

The fact that very few of the artists in the gallery segments of "War Zones" have been in a war zone—as combatant, civilian, or recorder—has little to do with the significance of their work. More importantly, the exhibition as a whole can nudge the viewer into a heightened awareness of the moral vacuum we occupy as citizens. Certain works—such as Nancy Paterson's *The Machine*



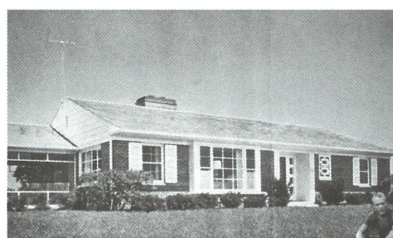
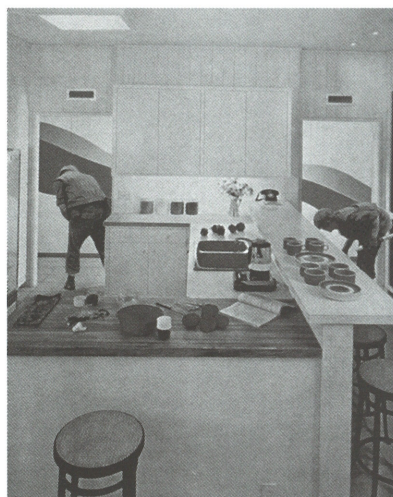
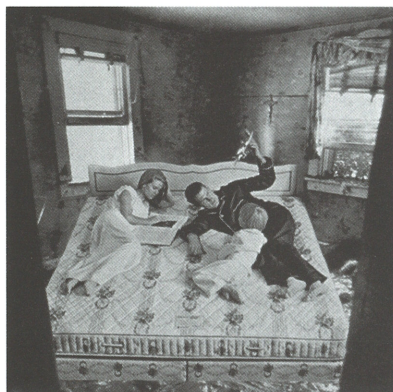
in the Garden, Johan Gimronprez's video *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, John Scott's bloated motorcycle ("the most evil vehicle"), Barbara Alper's photo installation of French TV news about the Gulf War, Allan Harding MacKay's video *Somalia Yellow*, Martha Rosler's Vietnam era collage work *Bring the War Home: House Beautiful*—point out the impact of broadcast media in shaping our perception of armed conflict as a form of news which now edges further into the turf of entertainment. The works themselves, ironically, risk the ephemerality of the media they both exploit and criticise, though they offer the opportunity to view, re-view, and contemplate our complex relationship to broadcast representations of armed conflict. Thus we are eventually able to confront the romanticised carnage that TV packages for our consumption, but unlike mainstream broadcast media which wrap war in the guilt-free neutrality of information, the gallery settings (plus the billboard at Georgia and Homer, the public forums, and the films at Pacific Cinematheque) prompt an accumulating recognition of our collective shame: that we do consume images of war on a daily basis and shrug it off as simply another aspect of a suspect western diet. Further irony results when we sense that this diet is designed to trim away our desire to demand change, to be individually committed through a series of small acts to work consciously for a reduction in war and its ultimate abandonment. At certain moments, for example when viewing Hiromi Tsuchida's *Hiroshima Collection*, Eugenio Dittborn's *The Corpse, The Treasure*, or Roy Kiyooka's *Japanese War Archive* (all in "Bearing Witness"), we contemplate the racism and cultural repression that often fuel war and are used by media and government to demonise (i.e., literally dehumanise) the enemy, thus seducing us into an acceptance of the butchery of relatively innocent civilians. The very static and repetitive nature of the gallery insists that we think beyond the swift, electro-chic frame which media place around war in order to exclude its most

Martha Rosler

*Bringing the War Back Home*

(*House Beautiful*), 1967-72

Colour photograph



physically and morally unpalatable aspects—thereby extending the forgetfulness that daily news is ultimately about.

The crowning irony of this exhibition perhaps is found in the third and final billboard work at the bustling intersection of Georgia and Howe Streets. The billboard in question is the work of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, arguably one of the most famous celebrity couples in world history, thus the epitome of packaging, ephemerality, and huge wealth. Younger observers may not know of Ono's much earlier involvement in the Fluxus movement and the risks still inherent for Japanese artists who work far outside traditionally accepted or adapted media. They may also have forgotten Lennon's antiwar writings and film work or the use of his fame as an ex-Beatle to work publicly with Ono through performance art and music in the antiwar movement. Even historically aware viewers may snicker at Yoko Ono increasing her profile through her involvement in this exhibition until they learn that she waived her artist's fee and insisted that the postcard version of the billboard be given away, not sold. The billboard, which contains the statement "**WAR IS OVER!**/if you want it/Love and Peace from John & Yoko," draws tourists who photograph each other in front of it, and Vancouverites who pause in the midst of a commercial district to contemplate this non-ad. As a declaration or proposition, the billboard at first seems both genuine and naive, but the size of the object and directness of its text can draw the viewer to a halt, and a few moments of contemplation reveals the power and critical irony of the message. The large, bold-face declaration mimics the headlines of countless newspapers in this century, particularly since 11 November 1918, the date which marks, of course, the conclusion of the war to end all wars. This irony is unavoidable, sad, and condemnatory of those forces who insist on war's repetition and thus the regular, momentary redeclarations of peace. The second line speaks both to the power of desire in our consumerist society while





Gu Xiong

*Barricade of Bicycles: June 4, 1989*

Photograph by Robert Keziere

simultaneously (through the “if”) pointing out how trapped and passive we are within that manipulated desire. The second line further points out that global change happens only because individuals desire something with sufficient power that they act collectively—as have the powers that profit so tremendously from armed conflict, principally nations such as our own. The valediction is heartfelt, ironic, and likely self-critical, Ono only too well aware now that personal commitment made public can be instantly “spun” by the media in any direction that suits its purposes. Yet the billboard, like “War Zones” as a whole, forces the spin to stop for a moment, allowing the viewers in any of the exhibition’s venues to reassess their complicity, to acknowledge the sources of their inability to act, to contemplate the frustration that arises when we are reminded in a variety of ways that Von Clausewitz’s famous dictum has undergone a transformation that now ensnares us all: war is free market capitalism by other means.

## NOTES

1. Paul Fussell. See both *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford UP, 1989) and *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford UP, 1975). Fussell consistently points out the utter chaos of war and the inability of those who experience it directly to adequately convey their experiences to others—partly because of the bizarre horrors they witness but also because noncombatants are trained through a variety of media to envision a far nobler and less bloody process than actually takes place.
2. See John Ralston Saul. *Voltaire’s Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Penguin Books, 1993): 141-171. In this segment of the book, Saul focuses on the economic absurdities and ironies of the arms race, as well as making clear the degree to which western economic health depends on such activity.
3. Annie Ying Der. “Military Brass Attend Show,” *The Georgia Straight* (19-26 August 1999): 12. Her sources include interviews with forum participants and statistics from Canadian Commercial Corporation, a crown corporation that reports to the federal Minister of International Trade.
4. Ying Der: 12.
5. Saul: 151.
6. Ying Der: 12.
7. The government of Louis St Laurent committed Canadian Troops to the Korean War by Order in Council which requires a debate in the House within ten days of the order. This technique was also employed by Mulroney in the case of the Gulf War. Chretien committed the Canadian Armed Forces to the NATO war in Kosovo by virtue of Canada’s NATO membership. No debate was held in the house, but an all-party vote was sought—and duly taken—to endorse his government’s actions.
8. Fussell. *Wartime*: 268.
9. Fussell. *Wartime*: 270.



At the time the “War Zones” exhibitions opened, the air assault on Serbia and the Serbs in Kosovo was in full swing. In NATO briefings, flunkies were providing cheerful reports on the destruction of “assets,” while practising high “G” turns to confuse reporting on bombing mistakes, which in the supposed dead certainty of military technology were not supposed to happen. Suddenly missile videos became strangely hard to read and former soldiers turned experts on military matters found it remarkably difficult to distinguish the scars of mortar explosions (“theirs”) from bomb craters (“ours”). In this country, air force participation in the bombing was played down by the government. The notion that Canadian citizens were involved in attacking those of another country being carefully blended into the theme of Canada’s role under the NATO umbrella. By the time the exhibitions were down, the “war” too was over and the visual record came to a halt as the press moved onto other matters. From a political and military point of view the event had been a success. The process of “pre-censorship” developed by the Pentagon after the invasion of Grenada in 1983—in which media access is predetermined by the military, as outlined by John Taylor in *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe, and War*<sup>1</sup>—worked fairly smoothly and the official narratives slipped easily from war to peacekeeping and the administration of UN protectorates.

The question now arises: what role, if any, a series of gallery exhibitions might play in providing an effective intervention in the near seamless structure of the official representations of this and all the other nasty little wars and acts of oppression in contemporary society? None, might be the response in a public gallery environment which increasingly emphasises easy pleasures for rainy afternoons. Artist-run galleries operate using a more issue-based approach but here again small size and a shrinking funding base often preclude effective

responses to current events. Even if a gallery does seek to address difficult issues some critics have suggested that audience response might be limited by the popular media term, “compassion fatigue.” Taylor quotes Mort Rosenblum of Associated Press who comments: “A basic problem is that no human drama stops the moving eye any longer unless correspondents find some new angle that tugs the heartstrings in a new way. And each tug stretches them further” until the elasticity gives out.<sup>2</sup> Taylor himself is dubious about the absolute force of this idea proposing

instead that photographic images (with which he is primarily concerned) may keep memories alive, even “acting as ethical reference points” when properly mediated by historians and others.<sup>3</sup> A point of view which runs contrary both to Rosenblum and to the writer Susan Sontag who has argued that images “transfix” and “anaesthetise” people until they become incapable of making further moral judgements.

Fortunately, the two curators of “War Zones,” Karen Love and Karen Henry, have taken the more optimistic point of view proposed by Taylor. ► 30



Lunch box  
Reiko Watanabe (15 at the time) was doing fire prevention work under the Student Mobilization Order, at a place 500 meters from the hypocenter. Her lunch box was found by school authorities under a fallen mud wall. Its content of boiled peas and rice, a rare feast at the time, were completely carbonized. Her body was not found.

Hiromi Tsuchida  
Hiroshima Collection, from  
Hiroshima, 1976-1983



19 ◀ Their approach was to fill as many Vancouver galleries as possible with exhibitions which look at memories and ideologies of war; not just the present ones but past events reaching as far back as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and the Irish "troubles." With a timetable stretching through the summer and venues which covered not only different types of galleries but also billboards, the program addressed the problems of limited exhibition space and narrow audiences. The rolling series of exhibitions which ran throughout the summer, accompanied by artists' talks, films, and symposiums, further broke with the limited duration of most visual and other responses to war and gave audiences a rare opportunity to engage with both the issues and the artists' ways of responding to them.

Returning to my hotel room after the opening of "War Zones" exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Gallery and Artspeak Gallery, which were showing work by John Scott, Jochen Gerz, Mona Hatoum, and Nancy Paterson, the first program I turned to on the TV was a documentary on a massacre in Bosnia. This was the kind of thoughtful investigation which dealt with the issues and generally avoided creating the conditions ripe for compassion fatigue. Coming from watching Nancy Paterson's Artspeak installation, *The Machine in the Garden*, in which three video monitors and a slot machine provided a near random access to TV news bites of war, I now had a sharpened sense of the possibilities and shortcomings of television. Having pulled the lever of the slot machine to bring up an ever changing mix of disasters for viewing in Paterson's piece, I was now reminded at the hotel of the potential for aimlessness in my selection of channels for viewing. The ease with which these

Roy Kiyooka,  
Japanese War Archive, 1050-77  
(details from folio of 208  
b/w photographs)  
Installation photo by Diane Evans



# WAR ZONES



Nancy Paterson,  
*The Machine in the Garden*, 1993  
Installation with 3 video monitors  
and slot machine  
Photo by Robert Keziere

scenes floated past, even when as in the case of the documentary they demanded a certain concentration, made me more conscious of the way TV ultimately tends to separate out the image from the specific occasion, emptying the event of meaning and placing it conveniently "somewhere else."

Encounters like the one above give some idea how "War Zones" worked—at least for me. In addition, the variety of approaches presented in the artists' works addressed other matters too. While space is limited, two representative examples should be cited here. First, earlier commentaries on war still often hold good today: Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-72), showing familiar Vietnam war scenes through the windows of elegant American suburban homes, still has a biting edge despite (or because of) the pre-digital construction of the pieces. Second, Alfredo Jaar's six-part photo-piece at Presentation House Gallery showing three views of the approach to a massacre site in Rwanda, suggests that Sontag's theory of anaesthetisation can be effectively countered. In this case Jaar never shows the death scene itself, only the approaches to the site: an innocent looking tea estate road by the road, the tress arching over the road, and a single cloud floating in the sky. The expected piles of bodies—familiar from press reports and TV—do not materialise and the viewer is forced to participate in the experience, following the route Jaar travelled and, finally, imagining the scene at the end of the journey. The knowledge that this apparent normality has been perverted in an unbearable way by the murders, and that the road we are invited to travel was probably also the one taken by the killers, breaks our familiar expectations of the event by creating a sense of dread (and guilt) which is overwhelming.

## NOTES

- [1] Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe, and War*. (Routledge, 1998).
- [2] Taylor, 23.
- [3] Taylor, 23.