

If It Weren't for the War

Curated by Virginia Eichhorn

September 21st, 2014 to January 11th, 2015

One hundred years ago, what became known as “The Great War” began. It was a war like none other and irrevocably changed the world. This year, the centenary anniversary, has seen many kinds of commemorations, reflections and ruminations upon the Great War, its reasons for being, its consequences and long-ranging results. Within that framework ruminations about war in general come to mind. War and battles have been with humankind from the earliest days of our existence.

Ideas around war have varied greatly. At times war has been glorified, considered a noble and heroic pursuit, been vilified, been objected to, been considered justified and necessary.

Perspective on wars and battles has depended on culture, time and cultural sensibilities. It is a subject that no one is dispassionate about.

The four artists who were selected to be part of **If It Weren't for the War**, were chosen because of their unique and personal experiences with war and its consequences. As a participant in the Canadian Forces Artists Programme, Dick Avern documents the experiences of peacekeeping troops in the Middle East. He documents the many faces of those who served – men, women, young, old – highlighting and humanizing the myriad of individuals behind the amorphous term “troop”.

Allan Harding MacKay served as official war artist in two of the most heinous war zones in recent history – Somalia and Afghanistan. His works were documents but also metaphoric evocations of what he experienced and witnessed while there. In 2012, as an act of protest against the current federal government's policies, MacKay destroyed five of his art works that he had created from his experiences in Somalia and Afghanistan. He also created a multiple art work titled “Gift of Conscience” that he sent to 163 MPs, the Speaker and the Leader of the Senate. He continues his acts of protest, battling against what he perceives as unjust policies and actions of government.

For several years now, Tina Poplawski has explored and been inspired by events in her family's history, placed in the greater context of world events. In particular she has referenced and responded to the aftermath of her parents' abduction by the Russians during the Second World War. Within Poplawski's work, it hasn't been so much the actual events themselves that have inspired her art making, but rather the after-effects and ramifications within her family.

Originally from the United States, Tim Whiten served overseas as a soldier during the Viet Nam war. The work included in this exhibition doesn't deal directly with his experiences in the armed forces, but rather looks at conflict within the individual, the personal “war” that we deal with daily in making the choices that inform the life that we lead. How we connect with others, and with the world around us, determines whether we are at peace with who we are and how we live our life. The transcendental approach roots the larger issues of “war” down to the responsibilities that each and every one of us shares as individuals and the consequences of our actions.

If It Weren't for the War offers up the opportunity for viewers to consider war in a myriad of different contexts through the diverse works presented by the artists in response to this theme.