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Satish Padiyar, Philip Shaw, and Philippa Simpson, eds., *Visual Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. x + 252 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$165.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4724-4711-1.

Review by Gemma Betros, The Australian National University.

When we think of the visual culture of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, we generally think of the great canvases that evoke—in their carefully staged moment of stillness or activity—the glory of war. With their roots in the history paintings of the eighteenth century, works such as those commemorating Napoleon’s battles offered contemporary viewers a chance to experience for themselves something of the conflicts taking place, giving them a stake in current or recent events, (ideally) stimulating patriotic sentiment, and perhaps providing some indication of where their labor, taxes, and family members might be going. Yet as Katie Hornstein, one of this volume’s contributors, points out, paintings like these in fact “constituted a rarefied and exceptional form of imagery” (p. 22).

Since David Bell’s controversial but game-changing *The First Total War*, scholars have been asked to consider the conflicts of the revolutionary and Napoleonic era as a new type of war, one that moved away from a stately battle for territory toward a more intense, more violent conflict that drew in every member of society.<sup>[1]</sup> Yet what do we know of the visual worlds of those who lived through this period? And how did changing ideas about—and experiences of—war transform its visual representation? The papers gathered here explore such questions through an impressive range of visual material spanning paintings and prints, maps and games, and new forms of visual representation made possible by new technologies.

This volume is the product of the 2012 conference *Contested Views: Visual Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*,<sup>[2]</sup> hosted by Tate Britain and partially funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellowship awarded to Philip Shaw, author of the influential *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination*.<sup>[3]</sup> For the volume’s editors, the period was “a decisive era, both for the history of war and for the cultural imagination of conflict” (p. 1). Yet beyond the images of war and wars of image under examination in the collection, they identify a larger “war of images of war’ as it emerged at the birth of political modernity, with its purpose to rationalize, perpetuate, memorialize, broadcast, explain—and, if more rarely, to contest—its founding and foundational acts of violence” (p. 1). At a time when war was “unprecedentedly total” (p. 2), the visual world, and those who created and controlled it, assumed new levels of power.

The visual culture of war in this era still merits further investigation, especially in terms of its scope and influence. Albert Boime's series on the social history of art (referenced by several of this volume's contributors) and Barbara-Ann Day Hickman's *Napoleonic Art: Nationalism and the Spirit of Rebellion in France (1815-1848)*, on the spread of mass-produced prints in rural France, offer some insights,<sup>[4]</sup> but thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte's use of art to bolster his hold on power scholars have been drawn more frequently to the major artists of the period and the iconography employed. This volume, with its close attention to diverse forms of visual communication and its role in educating audiences, opens up new understandings of how the conflicts of the era were refracted throughout European visual culture in the nineteenth century.

Part one, on "cultures of participation", considers public engagement with representations of the wars. Katie Hornstein's essay, one of the collection's strongest, begins with a bang: the explosion in fireworks of a giant cardboard globe of over twenty-three meters in diameter, flaunting France's victorious path across Europe. Displays like this, Hornstein argues, transformed the physical movement of the French army into a "territorial imaginary" (p. 14) and provided lessons in political geography for members of a nation whose borders changed so rapidly that mapmakers struggled to keep pace. Yet such representations tended to conceal the violence of the period, as well as the chaos of the battlefield and the political ruptures with which the wars were entwined, themes pursued in this section's subsequent essays. Essays on the spectacle of the guillotine, and on such items as secret letters and hidden silhouettes, printed board games, and lithographs investigate the often intriguing relationships between medium and intent, while examining how these diverse forms of visual culture must have challenged and confused as much as they informed public understanding of current events.

Part two highlights just how contested these representations could be with essays that indicate the many ways in which visual culture could function as a tool of war. Essays on the (much-criticized) marine landscapes of J.M.W Turner and the influence of legendary Scottish bard Ossian in the work of Anne-Louis Girodet show artists seeking to make sense of recent upheaval through carefully chosen references to the past. The following two essays remind us that not everything made it to public view: Francisco de Goya's *The 2nd and 3rd of May*, commissioned in 1814 to commemorate Spanish resistance to the French, was considered unsuitable for public display by the restored absolutist regime, while a series of Portuguese images about the French invasions, designed to corral resistance, lagged too far behind current affairs to be of use. Both essays also remind us that public experience of art in Spain and Portugal at the time was previously dominated by religious imagery, a point whose wider European significance is often overlooked.<sup>[5]</sup> In this parallel war of images of war, we are again reminded that governments could not always trust their artists' production--nor their public's consumption--of visual culture. The section concludes with an essay on soldier-poet David Roberts's 1815 comic poem *The Military Adventures of Johnny Newcome* which, illustrated by British caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson, combined humor with often candid detail to lampoon the glory and heroism of war.

Part three returns to public engagement, this time regarding the remembrance of the wars. Focusing on Britain, essays on technological innovations in theatrical re-enactments, and on items from the fascinating collections of Sarah Sophia Banks demonstrate how the nexus of commemoration and public entertainment heightened audience understanding of recent conflicts while shaping public memory. The role of visual culture in manipulating public sentiment is further revealed in an essay on the long creation of the National Gallery of Naval Art at Greenwich with its strategic promotion of narratives of individual sacrifice and national triumph.

The final paper, by Susan L. Siegfried, surveys how visual representations of the Battle of Waterloo changed over time as British, French, Dutch and German artists negotiated the tensions between documenting events with accuracy, communicating the battle's significance to viewers and accommodating the demands of contemporary politics...themes that recur throughout the book. Despite pressure to contribute to the construction of national myths, artists seemed increasingly inclined to lay bare for the viewer the confusion and contingencies of the battle's key moments. Here perhaps lies the answer to the second question posed above: where visual representations of war had previously sought to provide an inspiring synopsis of battle that emphasized the transcendent qualities of war, the revolutionary and Napoleonic conflicts seemed to bring a growing concern with representing war's unadorned realities, even if those realities were messy, unpleasant and not always in keeping with governing ideologies.

This is a tightly edited collection, with care taken to ensure dialogue between essays. While not all contributors engage closely with Bell's *First Total War*, works such as Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* and Mary Favret's research on affect and the experiences of those at home furnish shared conceptual and theoretical frameworks.[6] The editors are, in addition, to be applauded for having contributors supply quotes in the original language as well as English translation, although with most essays focusing on France and Britain, it is a reminder of how much we have to learn about, say, Polish or Russian visual culture from the period. A sounder understanding of historical context could have strengthened certain contributions (use of the term "propaganda" in particular sometimes feels out of place), while links to recent art exhibitions and modern forms of visual representation raise interesting connections but are not always effective and may date quickly. Several contributions may also have benefited from further research into reception, especially given the collection's broader emphasis on the contested nature of visual culture. This in turn could have helped address the relative absence of women in the volume: with the exception of the essay on Sarah Sophia Banks, one risks coming away with the impression that there were surprisingly few women in Europe with an interest in the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and their depiction or commemoration.

Importantly, the book is supported by a generous number of illustrations (including some full-page), which will prove useful in the classroom. While it is often all too easy to rely on Google to help us reconstruct the visual worlds of the past, *Visual Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* reminds us how much remarkable material is still sitting neglected in the archives. Flaming cardboard globes, board games, and exhibition tickets are the types of sources that, until recently, might have been relegated to the footnotes or overlooked altogether, but as this volume proves, they are crucial for introducing us to the many, and often contested ways in which those who lived through the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods imagined and interpreted their changing worlds.

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## NOTES

[1] David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

[2] <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/conference/contested-views> (October 1, 2019).

[3] Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic imagination* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002).

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[4] Albert Boime, *A Social History of Modern Art, vol. 1. Art in an Age of Revolution, 1750-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *A Social History of Modern Art vol. 2. Art in an age of Bonapartism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Barbara-Ann Day Hickman, *Napoleonic Art: Nationalism and the Spirit of Rebellion in France (1815-1848)* (Newark: University of Delaware Press and London: Associated University Presses 1999).

[5] On this topic, see Nigel Aston, *Art and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

[6] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

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