

David Cotterrell: Krieg und Medizin

Venue: Deutsches Hygiene Museum, Dresden

Curators: Colleen Schmidt

Date: 4th April 2009

Co-exhibitors:

Max Beckmann, Georg Grosz and Conrad Felixmuller.

War and Medicine: Its hard to imagine more contradictory disciplines. On the one hand the destructive power and the human misery of war; on the other the medical vocation to heal people and keep them healthy. The ethical conflict of wartime medicine has yet to be fully explored. How do physicians and nurses, and for that matter soldiers and civilians, experience it? What are their experiences of injury and death, of hopelessness and despair? What can we learn about their courage and willingness to help others? These very personal points of view are at the heart of the exhibition War and Medicine, A joint project of the Wellcome Collection, London and the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden.

Drawing on historical and contemporary exhibits, documents, photographs and film, and on the works of renowned artists such as Max Beckmann, Georg Grosz and Conrad Felixmuller, the exhibition demonstrates the complex and often paradoxical relationship between war and medicine. The historical dimension ranges from the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq back to the humanitarian catastrophe of the Crimean War. In the mid 19th century, inadequate medical care claimed the lives of more soldiers than the battlefield. Both warfare and the role of medicine have changed drastically since then. As technology has increasingly changed the face of war, military medicine has taken on a strategic importance. While modern weapons systems have been developed to wound soldiers more terribly, medicine has tried to keep pace with more efficient treatment methods. At the same time, medicine in wartime is increasingly concerned with the civilian population, who are more severely affected, directly or indirectly by modern warfare.

What are the ethical dilemmas facing a medical profession that saves lives and eases suffering, yet at the same time has become a crucial part of the military machine? How can we reconcile the right to military defence with the humanitarian duty to provide the victims of war with the best possible standard of medical care? Approaching this unsettling moral dilemma from the viewpoints of cultural studies and medical history, the exhibition enables visitors to undertake an informed, emotional exploration of the motives and stories of the individuals involved. In Germany today these topics have taken on a new urgency, as not only members of the armed forces, but the society as a whole must come to terms with military missions abroad.

Text extract reprinted from Krieg und Medizin exhibition literature.



Exhibition Publicity (2009)