

## David Cotterrell: [creativereview.co.uk](http://creativereview.co.uk) : Saving lives and losing lives

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As the economy plunges, optimists are clinging to the truism that great creativity comes out of times of recession. A new show at London's Wellcome Collection links innovation to the hardest times of all - war.

War + Medicine explores the relationship between medical developments and warfare. The show is a fascinating look through the history of this uneasy association, which has seen some of the greatest leaps forward made at the times of greatest peril: saving lives and losing lives going hand-in-hand.

The exhibition displays a selection of historical artefacts - including posters, artworks, medical implements and clothing - that demonstrate the part that design has played in these advancements, from the development of instruments used to tend to the injured to the way that graphic design is used to articulate health messages to both soldiers and civilians. An example of the latter is a series of posters by Abram Games from World War Two, which stress the need for general fitness and cleanliness, as well as urging people to ward against sexually transmitted diseases and to give blood.

Elsewhere we see how art is used as a form of rehabilitation for the victims of war, with a number of drawings by young children in Afghanistan showing how they have been affected by the recent conflicts in the country. Despite the inclusion of these, and the many images and films of injured soldiers, the exhibition avoids directly tackling the moral question that lies at the heart of this subject - the conundrum of medicine being used to treat soldiers who will then only return to face and take part in more destruction.

This theme does appear within the contemporary artworks by artist David Cotterrell, who travelled to the hospital at Camp Bastion in the Helmand Province in Afghanistan as part of a commission by the Wellcome Trust. His films emphasise the split between where an injury takes place and the return to civilian life and rehabilitation by focusing on the flights that take the injured out of the conflict zone. Cotterrell offers a glimpse into military life, and its calm and methodical treatment of the injuries sustained, but in doing so also reiterates how this orderly response also disguises the chaos of war.

Writing of his time in the Helmand Province for the Guardian, Cotterrell sums up by saying: For me the incongruity between what I had seen and what was presented as the public face of conflict was, and continues to be, profound and irreconcilable.

As War + Medicine shows, this division between the reality of war and how it is presented to the world is one that has occurred throughout history, with design and art used to both enhance the impact of warfare and increase the chances of surviving it, as well as presenting it in a way that is palatable to the general public.

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