

Nicholas Raynov

Art and War¹

The greatest painter of our time, Nicholas Roerich, is the compiler of the famous Treaty – the "Pact Roerich," which many countries have already accepted. Thus, in time of war, they will raise the "flag of peace" over all cultural institutes and artistic monuments: churches, museums, libraries, universities, academies, etc. This fact speaks enough about the attitude of art to war.

Art creates, war destroys. They are mutual enemies. In his best painting – "Napoleon on the battlefield at Eylau" –, Antoine-Jean Gros, the most talented military painter of all times, has inherently expressed the tragic of the war, and the indignation of the war commander. It is, as if Napoleon tells to the conquerors of all time: "Woe to you fools, your bloody celebrations sow darkness and cover the earth with corpses. You drag backwards the human culture for thousands of years."

Besides Gros, other painters also expressed their outrage at the war, the most terrible sign of barbarism that humankind still carries, – Vasily Vereshchagin, Francisco Goya, Diego Velázquez, Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, Otto Dix, just to name a few.

There is no person with heart and soul who does not share the deep indignation of the great artists. War transforms earth into ash, tomb, and desert for the personal benefit of a small number of people who produce weapons, and who are the only ones to benefit from the fratricide of the peoples.

In his novel *Alexander in Babylon* (1904), Jakob Wasserman portrays the miserable death of Alexander the Great in the East, after he has captured the world. Historians tell us the stories of the destruction of many peoples and nations who have disputed power over the earth: Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Romans, Huns, and Vandals.

King Simeon is great not with his victories, but with the literature he has protected. Julius Caesar has only one merit, namely that he wrote about the Gaelic war and not that he led this war. It is not a merit to fill the space with bloody cries and to ruin the ground with grenades: nothing will grow in such a field except disgrace. The struggle for power of the peoples who challenge the earth that belongs to God is ridiculous. Every historical atlas will show us how volatile this power is. Compared to eternity, which is the age of the world, the kingdom of longest duration takes only a day.

Art creates for eternity. It saturates the universal spaces with ideas, images, and inspirational experiences that no one's sword will destroy. The names of the conquerors will remain on the list of international badgers, names for which no ink is black enough.

What is Tamerlane (Amir Timur) compared to Rembrandt, or Napoleon compared to Tintoretto? Let us remember Charles V, who – after so many wars – humbly backs down to pick up Titian's brush and hand it to him.

This gesture is the greatest that a ruler has ever made.

Translated from the Bulgarian by Yvanka B. Raynova

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