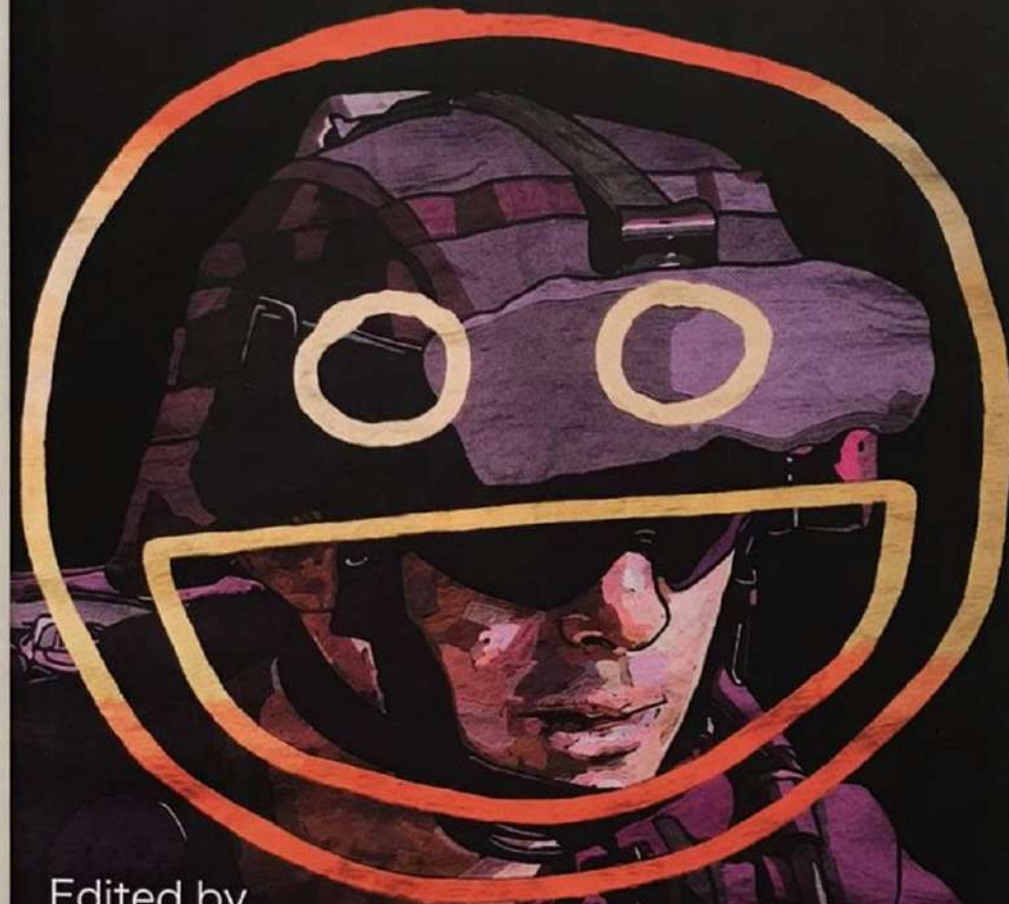


The Politics of Artists in War Zones

Art in Conflict



Edited by
Kit Messham-Muir, Uroš Čvoro
& Monika Lukowska-Appel

BLOOMSBURY

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Edited by
**KIT MESSHAM-MUIR,
UROŠ ČVORO AND
MONIKA LUKOWSKA-APPEL**

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To Loretta, Marijana and Eric

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NOTES ON THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

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Associate Professor Uroš Čvoro is an Associate Professor in Art Theory at UNSW Australia. His research interests include contemporary art and politics, cultural representations of nationalism, post-socialist and post-conflict art. His recent books are *Post-Conflict Monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Unfinished Histories* (Routledge, 2020), *Transitional Aesthetics: Art at the Edge of Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *Turbo-Folk Music and Cultural Representations of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia* (Ashgate, 2014). With Kit Messham-Muir, he is co-author of *Images of War in Contemporary Art: Terror and Conflict in the Mass Media* (Bloomsbury, 2021) and *The Trump Effect in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture: Populism, Politics, and Paranoia* (Bloomsbury, 2023). He is a Chief Investigator on Art in Conflict, a three-year Australian Research Council funded linkage project in partnership with the Australian War Memorial and in collaboration with an international team of researchers.

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Francisco Art Institute, USA in 2014 and PhD from Curtin University Perth in 2018. Her artworks have been widely exhibited internationally, and she is a recipient of several awards and scholarships. She works as a sessional academic and research assistant at Curtin University. She has been a research assistant on the Art in Conflict project.

Contributors

Professor A. Carden-Coyne is Director of the Centre for the Cultural History of War (CCHW) at the University of Manchester. She is a historian and curator. Her publications include *The Politics of Wounds* (Oxford University Press, 2014), *Reconstructing the Body* (Oxford University Press, 2009), (ed.) *Gender and Conflict Since 1914* (Palgrave, 2012) and a special edition of *European Review of History* on disability (2007). She co-curated a major exhibition with Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery, *The Sensory War, 1914–2014* (October 2014–February 2015), attracting over 203,000 visitors, and for the Somme centenary, *Visions of the Front, 1916–18* (Whitworth Art Gallery). Other current projects include a special edition of *Cultural and Social History* on Young People and the Two World Wars (with Kate Darian Smith); a project on the Art of Resilience with the Dutch military academy; and an exhibition with Manchester Art Gallery and Whitworth Art Gallery on *Artists, War and Humanitarianism*. Prof. Carden-Coyne is a Partner Investigator (International) on the Australian Research Council Art in Conflict project.

Professor Charles Green is Professor of Contemporary Art in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, and an authority on contemporary international and Australian art, biennials and exhibition histories, war art and artist collaborations. His books include *Biennials, Triennials and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (2016, co-authored with Anthony Gardner), *The Third Hand: Artist Collaborations from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (2001) and *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970–94* (1995). He is also an artist, having worked in collaboration with Lyndell Brown as one artist since 1989; their works are in most Australian art museum collections and they were Australia's official war artists in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007. He has been awarded several Australian Research Council grants to explore the intersection of war and art, and is a Chief Investigator on the Australian Research Council Art in Conflict project.

Dr Anthea Gunn is Senior Curator of Art, Australian War Memorial. She completed a PhD in art history for her thesis *Imitation Realism and Australian Art* in 2010 at the Australian National University. She worked as a social history curator at the National Museum of Australia (2008–13) and

has been at the Australian War Memorial since 2014, where she is Senior Curator of Art. She has published in the *Journal of Australian Studies* and the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, amongst others. She has curated contemporary commissions and exhibitions and was lead curator of the online exhibition *Art of Nation: Australia's Official Art and Photography of the First World War*. Dr Gunn is a Partner Investigator on the Australian Research Council Art in Conflict project, and is co-curator of the exhibition arising from that project.

Dr Paul Lowe is an award-winning photographer, author, critic and educator. His photography has covered some of the most important world events of recent decades, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the release of Nelson Mandela, famine and massacres in Africa, and war in the former Yugoslavia. His work has been published in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *The Observer* and *The Independent*. He is the Course Leader for MA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography (Part Time/Online mode) at London College of Communication, University Arts London. His research interests focus on the representation of conflict in photography and the ethical issues this raises. Dr Lowe's books include *Bosnians* (2005), *A Chronology of Photography* (2018), *Understanding Photojournalism* (with Jennifer Good, 2017) and *Photography Masterclass: Creative Techniques of 100 Master Photographers* (2016).

Dr Lisa Slade is Assistant Director, Artistic Programs at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Her recent curatorial projects include *Quilty*, a national touring exhibition that surveyed the work of Australian artist Ben Quilty; *John Mawurndjul: I Am the Old and the New*, a retrospective of Australia's premier bark painter; the 2016 *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Magic Object*; and *Sappers & Shrapnel: Contemporary Art and the Art of the Trenches*. Several of these curatorial projects have been informed by her PhD research into *Kunst* and *Wunderkammern* culture, colonial collecting and contemporary art.

Laura Webster is the Head of Art, Australian War Memorial. She has worked in the Art section of the Australian War Memorial since 2006 and has been Senior Curator of Art since 2015, and is currently acting Head of Art. Her major projects have included the Anzac Centenary Print Portfolio (2016), the contemporary diorama commissions in the redeveloped First World War galleries by artists Arlo Mountford and Alexander McKenzie (2015), *Ben Quilty: After Afghanistan* (2013), *Perspectives: Jon Cattapan; eX de Medici* (2010) and *Sidney Nolan: the Gallipoli series* (2009). At the Memorial she has been part of the transformation of the art commissioning programme and regularly commissions contemporary works of art and publishes on the collection. Webster is a Partner Investigator on the Australian Research Council Art in Conflict project.

Interviewees

Abdul Abdullah, artist, Sydney, Australia

Karen Bailey, artist for Canadian Forces Artists Program, Ottawa, Canada

Joanna Bourke, war historian, London, UK

Philip Cheung, photographer for Canadian Forces Artists Program, Los Angeles, US

Baptist Coelho, artist, Mumbai, India

David Cotterrell, artist for Wellcome Trust, Sheffield, UK

Derek Eland, UK official war artist, Lake District, UK

Alana Hunt, artist, Northern Territory, Australia

eX de Medici, Australian official war artist, Canberra, Australia

Mladen Miljanović, artist, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Baden Pailthorpe, artist-in-residence at Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia

Andrew Sneddon, academic, Edinburgh, UK

Todd Stone, artist, New York, US

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication may contain the names and images of deceased persons.

This book is part of the Art in Conflict project, led by Prof. Kit Messham-Muir (Curtin University), in collaboration with Prof. Charles Green (University of Melbourne), A/Prof. Uroš Čvoro (UNSW), Ryan Johnston (University of Melbourne) and Prof. Ana Carden Coyne (University of Manchester), and Partner Investigators Dr Anthea Gunn and Laura Webster (Australian War Memorial). The Australian War Memorial and National Trust (NSW) are Partner Organizations. Art in Conflict is a three-year project funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council. Art in Conflict (LP170100039) receives a Linkage Project grant of \$293,380. An earlier version of a short section of Chapter 6 by Kit Messham-Muir and Uroš Čvoro, 'Soldier/Artist: Negotiating the Complexities of Military Service and Critical Practice', was previously published in *The Trump Effect in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture: Populism, Politics, and Paranoia* (Bloomsbury, 2023).

We would like to thank the artists and academics who we interviewed in the course of the Art in Conflict project, and particularly those whose edited interview material appears in this volume. These are Prof. Joanna Bourke, Karen Bailey, Baptist Coelho, David Cotterrell, Derek Eland, Alana Hunt, eX de Medici, Mladen Miljanović, Andrew Sneddon and Todd Stone. Interviews were conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, under the approved protocols of Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HRE2018-0100) and in accordance with data legislation under the various jurisdictions in which it was conducted. All final edited transcripts for publication have been approved by the interviewees. For generously granting us image reproduction permissions, we would like to thank the many artists whose works appear in this volume. Thanks to Rhubarb Academic Editing for line editing of the interview material and to Angela Roberts for copy editing of the authored chapters of the manuscript.

Kit, Uroš and Monika give their deepest gratitude to their partners, respectively Loretta Tolnai, Marijana Čvoro and Eric Appel, for their love and support throughout this project. Thank you.

Introduction

Contemporary War Art

*Kit Messham-Muir, Uroš Čvoro and
Monika Lukowska-Appel*



IMAGE 0.1 Still from *POV: mirror sequence (Tarin Kowt)*, 2009–10, by Shaun Gladwell. Two-channel synchronized HD video, stereo audio, 16:9, 8 minutes, 22 seconds, ART94193, official war artist, 2009 Afghanistan. © Shaun Gladwell 2009. Courtesy the Australian War Memorial.

What exactly is contemporary war art? And what is a contemporary war artist? In the first section of this book, Anthea Gunn and Laura Webster draw on Terry Smith's now well-established notion of 'contemporary art', in which 'contemporaneity itself is the most evident attribute of the current world picture, encompassing its most distinctive qualities, from the interactions between humans and the geosphere, through the multitude of cultures and the ideoscape of global politics to the interiority of individual being'.¹ That is, whereas we may have talked in terms of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' in twentieth-century discourses on art, contemporary art in the twenty-first century is primarily reflective of the *now*, without necessarily enlisting to any overarching and contended historicism.² This particular understanding of the 'contemporary' of contemporary art has

been dominant since the 1990s, and is well and truly naturalized at this point. Dropping the word 'war' into the middle of that term seems to unsettle the certainty around Smith's definition of contemporary, potentially in a number of different ways. 'Contemporary war art' may even jar in our ears, perhaps because 'war art' suggests something outmoded, such as heroic, fanciful and sanitized depictions of the battlefield that no longer fit with our ideas of what real war is like, mostly gleaned from the news media and war movies.

Yet another deeper reason may be the way in which the temporalities surrounding war – its visibility and invisibility, its paradoxical ubiquity and absence, amongst the gamification of conflict and the weaponization of everyday life – make it difficult for us to conceive of what 'war time' and 'war zones' even are when we seek to map them visually onto the contemporary. In 2011, Derek Gregory's discussion of the United States's upscaling of drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan under the administration of US President Barack Obama introduced the notion of the 'everywhere war'.³ The reach of drones, piloted remotely out of the US, extends the potential spatiality of the 'war zone' into, in effect, *everywhere*. And as the potential ubiquity of drone strikes spreads globally it also dissolves 'war' into atomized individual action. As Gregory notes, 'representing each drone strike as a separate act of self-defence obscures the systematic cumulative nature of the campaign'.⁴ While US President George W. Bush very visibly installed American military infrastructure in Afghanistan and Iraq in the all-encompassing 'Global War on Terror', Obama increased the number of attacks on foreign soil while appearing to dismantle Bush's seemingly monolithic war machine and rebrand it as the more bureaucratic-sounding 'Overseas Contingency Operation'.⁵ War is over; long live the 'OCO'.

A decade later, war has also become *everywhere* as it has become, in effect, *everything*. In recent years, civic infrastructures, spaces and time have become weaponized. Hot war, declared violent battle of the kind that Russia launched in its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, becomes only one tool at the disposal of conflict, often enlisting and deploying peacetime structures as an effective means of conducting the work of war and terror. In Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, we see in practice what has been termed the 'Gerasimov Doctrine',⁶ referring to ideas in an article originally written by Vladimir Putin's Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov.⁷ Mark Galeotti's translation of the Russian-language article begins with the observation that, 'In the 21st century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template'.⁸ According to this idea, contemporary war is mostly undeclared, and adversaries engage each other through denial-of-service attacks and cyber-attacks, troll farms and fake news, electoral interference, trade wars, expulsion of diplomats, incarceration of foreign business people, harassment

and murder of journalists. Importantly, these undeclared wars are fought through subverting civil and peacetime mechanisms. They are, as Galeotti says, 'not the prelude to war, but the war itself'.⁹ In 2018, Galeotti apologized for the term 'Gerasimov Doctrine', and said that to coin the term was a 'big mistake'.¹⁰ He argues that this approach was not 'a doctrine as such, and that this formulation was simply a placeholder for the ideas evolving in Russian military thinking'. Citing Lord Haw Haw in the Second World War or even Octavian's disinformation campaign against Mark Antony, Galeotti acknowledged that distraction, disruption and disinformation are neither 'a new way of war' nor a distinct form of war.¹¹ However, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' *qua* doctrine is actually in full force during today's hot wars: false accusations from Russia that victims of a maternity hospital bombed by Russia in Mariupol on 9 March 2022 are merely 'crisis actors'; denials by Russia of the massacre of civilians in the Ukrainian town of Bucha as 'fake news';¹² retaliation from the West with swingeing economic sanctions on Russia and its oligarchy. We have seen clearly that previous forms of wartime disinformation and those used today are both central and consistent throughout both hot and cold war, to degrees that have never been seen before in the history of conflict.

This resonates with Giorgio Agamben's idea of 'zones of indistinction', which in turn produce a paradoxically permanent 'state of exception'. Agamben compares the current notion of the state of exception with that of Adolf Hitler's decree of a state of emergency following the burning of the Reichstag, barely a month after taking power. The decree was never repealed, and so 'the Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years'.¹³ In the conditions of 'global civil war' that have dominated the previous decade, which is worldwide, ubiquitous and even now still only partially declared, the state of exception is the dominant paradigm of geopolitics. The state of exception is no longer provisional but rather a technique of government to suspend 'normal' rights: 'the state of exception appears as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism'.¹⁴ The War on Terror was an everywhere war, an everything war, and a permanent state of exception – the 'enemy' were the sleeper cells within who were plotting to weaponize civil aviation, agricultural crop spraying or the postal service, and, as Agamben discusses, the Patriot Act put the United States in a perpetual legal state of exception. We were only too happy to scan our shoes and be bullied by TSA staff at American airports if it caught the 'evildoers'.

We were perhaps not even sure whether that two-decade long state of exception was still in effect when the world was plunged into another state of exception with the COVID-19 pandemic. As states of emergency were declared, lockdowns imposed, borders closed and vaccines later mandated, the COVID-19 pandemic became a global state of exception more pervasive than the War on Terror. And, unlike the immediate post-9/11

world, social media spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about the pandemic, the vaccines and the cures supposedly suppressed by Big Pharma. The ensuing polarization of whole populations has torn the social fabric, particularly throughout Europe and the United States. Is this the intended outcome of nefarious state-sponsored actors spreading misinformation and discord through troll farms and factories? Many of us have personal and familial relationships that have not survived culture war conflicts over COVID-19 vaccines, Trump vs Biden, or progressivism vs conservatism, a phenomenon which Anne Applebaum addresses in her recent book *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*.¹⁵

Beyond the as-yet localized war in Ukraine, seen from the perspective of the 'Gerasimov Doctrine', the escalating tensions with China in the South China Sea and over Taiwan, and the new AUKUS treaty between Australia, UK and the US suggest that 'the war itself' on a global scale may well be already under way.

In the context of these seismic disruptions throughout the political sphere, from the geopolitical to the interpersonal, in which conflict is often both omnipresent and invisible, how does contemporary war art address the visibility of conflict? What role does contemporary war art play in this ambiguous, distributed and often invisible world of conflict into the third decade of the twenty-first century? It is within this uncertain and often contradictory nexus of political, social and military conflict that this book attempts to create new understandings of the relationships between contemporary art and war. This is a field that is presently marked by rapidly shifting ground, raising factorially expanding questions and concerns that are impossible to cover in a single volume. Our aim here is not to attempt to capture an impossibly expansive field, and it is important that we acknowledge what this volume does and, indeed, does *not* address.

The particular focus of this book is to address three overlapping themes: first, memory and amnesia in relation to colonization; second, the complex role of 'official' war art, which is a subgenre of contemporary war art peculiar to Australia, Canada and the UK, each with a tradition of official war art that has significantly evolved over the last century; and third, questions of testimony, knowing and, indeed, unknowing. The artists mentioned in this volume – Indigenous Australian Anangu artists, Khadim Ali, Derek Eland, Mladen Miljanović, David Cotterrell, Philip Cheung, Karen Bailey, Lana Čmajčanin, Tony Albert and eX de Medici – address diverse concerns and conflicts. The discussions presented here speak to contemporary war art that has arisen within the Anglosphere – particularly Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States – in relation to these nations' military engagements in places such as Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as involving Indigenous populations in Australia and Canada. We acknowledge both the limitations and strengths of this approach, which effectively reinforces the largely Anglophone

emphasis of this volume. Moreover, while this book aims at an international focus, it is one that is from a particularly Australian perspective. The reason for this is that many of the authors included in this volume and their choice of topics, derived from a three-year project (2018–21) titled *Art in Conflict*, which was a collaboration between Australian universities, Curtin, UNSW and University of Melbourne, as well as the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom, in partnership with the Australian War Memorial.

Indeed, the three main themes came from a key part of this project: the four international War, Art and Visual Culture symposia held in Sydney, London, Los Angeles (all in 2019) and Perth (2021). These symposia were accompanied by a series of interviews with many of the symposia keynotes and participants, as well as with contemporary artists working in Australia, the UK, the US and Canada. In this respect, the selection of both the interview subjects and the foci of this volume were determined by the networks into which each of these symposia tapped, which were different across the locations. A more exhaustive study may well have included discussions of war art in relation to Syria, Palestine, Northern Ireland, Yemen, Congo, and other recent and current sites of conflict. And there are hundreds of other equally significant artists that might have been addressed, some of whom crossed paths with the *Art in Conflict* project, including Sophie Ristelhueber, Hrair Sarkissian, Razan Al Naas, Emily Jacir, Zehra Dogan, Steve McQueen, Alketa Xhafa Mripa, Simon Norfolk and Willie Dougherty. This more inclusive approach necessitated an expansive series of volumes well beyond our aims here. Thus, we do not present this series of essays to suggest that the artists who feature in the book are more vital to our discussions than any of these potential others, but rather as a 'core sample' from across this expansive and expanding field relating to our three main themes.

Colonization, Memory and Amnesia

The first key theme of this volume, opened by A. Carden-Coyne's essay 'Unsettling Colonial Postamnesia', is the current and critical issue of memory and amnesia as related to the ongoing effects of colonialism. Carden-Coyne addresses the political dimensions of the personal experience of artists in war zones. In particular, she explores the dynamics of cultural memory and forgetting, the use of popular national platforms to address wider audiences, and the global historical amnesia around imperial war, colonial forces and marginalized histories. Carden-Coyne focuses on key artworks by French artist Kader Attia, British artist John Akomfrah and two recent Australian official war artists, Tony Albert and Megan Cope. She explores how contemporary art can actively intervene in the historic and ongoing amnesia surrounding the two World Wars, which were underpinned by imperial ambitions and the marshalled labour and efforts of colonized people. The roots of racism and empire in these conflicts are a conspicuously forgotten

aspect of their legacy. She considers how Australian artists have intervened during the centenary celebrations of the First World War and through official war artist schemes to reckon with colonial amnesia and to reclaim a blighted history, thus remaking the present through a judicious engagement with the past through personal connections.

Carden-Coyne's discussion of Albert and Cope, both Indigenous Australian artists, leads to Lisa Slade's chapter, 'Above All Else: Art as a Weapon'. Slade demonstrates the extent to which contemporary Indigenous art continues to make steady and significant progress in the larger field of Australian contemporary war art. Slade, an outstanding Australian curator and assistant director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, examines the vital importance of art in providing agency for the communities of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the northern regions of that state. Many APY artists directly experienced some of the most traumatic wrongs perpetrated by the Australian nation state on its First Nations people, particularly the systematic attempted genocide of the Stolen Generations, the Maralinga Nuclear Tests in Australia at the Woomera Range Complex and the theft of Indigenous land. Slade's chapter discusses art projects *Niningka's Tjukurpa*, *Kulata Tjuta* and the installation work *Tjituru-tjituru* as assertions of Anangu identity and connection to Country, and of the centrality of Country as a source of food and as a place to obtain materials for weapons, tools and art-making. Slade reveals the ways in which all three projects demonstrate the unsuppressed strength of Anangu culture, both in making traditional cultural material and in its adaptive ability to find new forms of creative expression. Slade, firmly holding to the principle of 'nothing about us without us', worked with and sought the approval of these communities.

The third chapter of the 'Colonization, Memory and Amnesia' section is Anthea Gunn and Laura Webster's exploration of contemporary art acquired and commissioned by the Australian War Memorial (AWM) since 2007, which now forms part of the Memorial's art collection. Like Slade, Gunn and Webster are curators as well as theorists of art, and their chapter draws on direct experience implementing significant conceptual shifts in the curation of contemporary war art at the AWM over the last ten to fifteen years. With limited space in the AWM's Canberra galleries for contemporary art and little capacity to tour curated exhibitions since 2014, the AWM's radically shifting curatorial vision has gone largely unseen by the wider public, both in Australia and beyond, for nearly a decade. This drought ended with the *Art in Conflict* exhibition, which toured Australia during 2022 and 2023, which included the official contemporary war art of Australian artists such as Angelica Mesiti and Shaun Gladwell, as well as artists and themes that challenge the authority of the official and institutional. Gunn and Webster's chapter, titled 'War (Art): What Is It Good For?', emerged from the curatorial research that led to this exhibition. In their chapter, they argue that the post-2007 contemporary art



IMAGE 0.2 *Tjituru-tjituru*, 2015, by Niningka Lewis (dec.), Janet Inyika (dec.), Mary Katatjuku Pan, Freda Teamay, Lucille Armstrong, Erica Shorty, Rene Wanuny Kulitja, Judy Ukampari Trigger and Fiona Hall. Tjanpi, raffia, acrylic wool, jute/linen string, wire, acrylic paint, camouflage garments, plastic flowers, mixed media and found objects, dimensions variable. Photo: Rhett Hammerton. © Tjanpi Desert Weavers, NPY Women's Council. Reproduced with permission of the artists.

collection at the AWM straddles two traditional uses of art: 'to offer a visual element alongside other collection items, as well as the artists' unique perspectives and nuanced approaches to history'. In addition, and importantly, the fifteen-year period of collecting marks 'ambitious acquisitions of conceptually rigorous, uncompromising contemporary art, away from commissions of well-regarded but fairly traditional figurative painters'.

Within a contemporary art context this may well be regarded as core business; however, within the context of what is a deeply conservative national institution, a contemporary art approach to war art has the potential to create internal tensions. It is true that the AWM is an institution geared towards the reiteration and reinforcement of national mythologies and is not naturally encouraging of questioning and self-interrogation. This is not only because the AWM is seen as the guardian of the nation state's



IMAGE 0.3 Still from *A Hundred Years*, 2019–20, by Angelica Mesiti. Single-channel video, 21:24 minutes, AWM2019.57.1. © Angelica Mesiti 2019–20. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

official memory, but also, importantly, because it has been directed by Dr Brendon Nelson for most of the last decade. Director from 2012 to 2019, Nelson – a former leader of the Liberal Party, former Australian Minister for Defence and now President of Boeing International – was criticized for his dogged refusal to allow the AWM to address Australia's violent colonization of Indigenous land during the frontier wars. Despite this, and to his credit, Nelson also oversaw the construction of Daniel Boyd's *For Our Country*, the AWM's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander memorial on Anzac Parade, Australia's sacred national mall in Canberra, and, as Gunn and Webster discuss, the significant expansion of Indigenous contemporary art in the display and collection of the AWM.¹⁶ Many artworks commissioned since 2007 – which are the focus of this chapter – have catalysed national and international public debates around contemporary warfare, both its impacts and wider implications.

Each of the three thematic sections of this volume concludes with an 'interview chapter' that draws from an extensive body of interviews conducted with over twenty Australian and international contemporary artists in the field, as well as some theorists, as part of the Art in Conflict project during 2018–20. Interviews took advantage of the keynotes and speakers who attended the symposia. A total of around 200,000 words were transcribed from these recordings and then analysed by Monika Lukowska-Appel using Nvivo software. Although there are geographical and language limitations to this approach that are important to acknowledge, our analyses of these interviews proved to be valuable in reinforcing the importance of

the three themes of this volume. It is perhaps unconventional for a critical academic book of this kind to include a significant volume of interview material; however, we felt it was important to give a platform to contemporary artists themselves. The interviews are selectively edited and abridged for readability, but their largely unfettered voice adds a valuable dimension to this volume beyond that of academia.

This first section, 'Colonization, Memory and Amnesia', thus concludes with material from Indian artist Baptist Coelho, and Australian artists Alana Hunt and Abdul Abdullah. Following three very substantial chapters in this section, this first interview section complements the preceding chapters by exploring the complex and sometimes vexed circumstances of contemporary artists working around issues of conflict across cultural lines. Coelho is a Mumbai-based artist who we interviewed during a residency at Artspace's Gunner Studios in Sydney following his performance work at the Sydney War, Art and Visual Culture symposium in February 2019. The cultural significance of food was the focus of Coelho's performance. In his interview, he discusses the complexities of conflicting Indian identity within the colonial relationship with Britain during the First World War. In her interview, Hunt discusses works such as her *Cups of nun chai* (2010), which addresses the ongoing conflict in Kashmir using a distinctly humanist approach. Hunt talks about the ethics of creating work about conflict elsewhere as a white Australian woman, that is creating work addressing the political violence of the disputed territory while consciously avoiding 'speaking for' the local Kashmiri population. She recounts an instance in which her positionality was seen as necessarily precluding her from engaging in the topic of Kashmir. Abdullah, on the other hand, was embroiled in a media controversy surrounding two works included in the Violent Salt group exhibition as its national tour began in Artspace Mackay, in northern Queensland. His Muslim background was a central factor in how the situation unfolded in the public debate that followed.

War Art, Official and Unofficial

With official war art schemes, most notably those in Australia, Canada and the UK, the collision between the criticality of contemporary art and the conservatism of national institutions for war remembrance is a situation ripe for both conflict and compromise. For these national war museums, the period of 2007 to the present marked a particular shift in the nature of its appointments of official war art. Artists were invited to engage the topic of war with an independence that, according to Ryan Johnston, former Head of Art at the AWM, previous commissioned war artists would have envied.¹⁷ Catherine Speck also notes in the Australian context a shift towards more diverse and often contentious viewpoints, as well as better representation of Indigenous artists and women artists, who were largely, though not

completely, excluded from AWM's earlier commissions.¹⁸ Similarly, Britain's Imperial War Museum, which commissions the UK's official war artists, invited contemporary artist and Academy Award-winning film director Steve McQueen (Afghanistan, 2007) and the high-profile contemporary artist Derek Eland (Afghanistan, 2011) to create work for the institution. In both cases things did not always go smoothly: McQueen complained that he was not allowed out beyond the protection of the bases, and Eland met with resistance from troops. When former Australian official war artists Lyndell Brown and Charles Green (2007) gave gallery talks about their war artwork after returning from Iraq, they were confronted with 'a palpable sense of discomfort within the audience'. Amelia Douglas noted that it is 'as if the artists were "irresponsible"'. As if they were, perhaps, "selling out" to Empire by taking on the commission in the first place.¹⁹ Around the same time in Canada, the newly opened site of the Canadian War Museum came under fire for displaying paintings by official war artist Gertrude Kearns that addressed the moral ambiguities at play in the 1990s 'Somalia Affair'.²⁰ The Head of the National Council of Veterans Associations called Kearns's paintings a 'trashy, insulting tribute' and called for a boycott of the opening of the new museum building,²¹ while curator Laura Brandon received abusive emails from members of the public.²² These conflicts within the museum are themselves indicative of the radical transformation of official war art towards a more contemporary art frame, and the expectation that official war artists should produce challenging and uncompromising work. Well-established and highly independent contemporary artists have been engaged not only as official war artists, but also for one-off commissions, portraits, group projects and artist-in-residency programmes at these national institutions.

The section on 'War Art, Official and Unofficial', begins with Charles Green's chapter 'The War at Home' and discusses his collaboration with Lyndell Brown and Jon Cattapan in Timor-Leste, which gained independence in 1999 following a violent struggle against forces that favoured Indonesian rule. Brown and Green were Australian official war artists sent to Iraq in 2007 as part of the AWM's shift in direction and Cattapan was sent as an official war artist to the peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste in 2008. Green's chapter poetically captures the visit of these three former Australian official war artists to Timor-Leste in 2013. He discusses the ways in which contemporary art responds to conflict from the perspective of aftermath, particularly through the discussion of two artworks, *Scatter 2 (Santa Cruz)* and *Church Panels*. Cattapan, Brown and Green's large-scale piece reflects on the turbulent and complex history of conflict in Timor-Leste in relation to the overarching humanitarian issue issues of genocide, military violence, colonialization, loss, mourning and memory. *Church Panels*, created by Yolngu artists from Yirrkala, negotiates the violent past, imposed settlers' oppression and the neocolonial era which questions the sovereignty of this Indigenous group. Green encourages contemplation about contemporary

war art and its role by looking through a decolonized and post-national lens. This is especially important in the current realm of art. In the second chapter of this section, Kit Messham-Muir and Uroš Čvoro examine the work of Derek Eland and Mladen Miljanović, two artists and former soldiers who draw on the subjective experience of soldiers to amplify the social aspects of their practice. Eland, unlike any British official war artist before him, created a site-specific social practice work, titled *Diary Rooms*; Miljanović, on the other hand, creates works that often involve and depict former combatants, often adversaries, in the Bosnian War of the mid-1990s. Messham-Muir and Čvoro argue that while Eland and Miljanović address soldiers' physical injuries, neither operates through a performance of emotional empathy. In both cases, and in very different ways, a sense of resilience prevails that moves beyond a fixation on mute trauma to a more pragmatic assertion of voice and agency.

Like the other two sections, the 'War Art, Official and Unofficial' section includes an 'interview chapter'. Following the chapters by Green, Messham-Muir and Čvoro, this second section includes edited interviews with four artists engaged as official war artists: Australian official war artist eX de Medici, Wellcome Trust official war artist David Cotterrell, and Canadian official war artists through the Canadian Forces Artists Program, Karen Bailey and Philip Cheung. Can contemporary artists bring particular and valuable perspectives to war zones, or are they always compromised by the limitations inherent in embedding with troops, the dangers of the war zone, or the broader institutional and ideological constraints within the culture of the military? When de Medici was sent to the Solomon Islands in 2009 to cover the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), a peacekeeping and policing mission, her deployment pushed her to the limits: torrential rain hampered her intention to draw and paint on site, while tensions with the military and police personnel led to, at one point, the deleting of some of the photographs she had taken. Cotterrell was sent as an official artist of the Wellcome Trust to Helmand Province in Afghanistan with British armed forces. He discusses the ways in which he negotiated the role of the official war artist in the midst of the life and death situations of a British military field hospital. Cotterrell then returned later to Afghanistan, this time on a tourist visa, which granted him rare insight into the UK's military deployment from both inside and outside 'the wire' of the bases. Ottawa-based artist Bailey was similarly embedded as an official artist in field hospitals in Afghanistan in 2007, under the Canadian Forces Artists Program, and her interview reveals an interesting tension within the military establishment that emerged when her works were seen to heroicize regular frontline personnel. Los Angeles-based Canadian artist Cheung likewise worked with the Canadian Forces Artists Program, photographing the Canadian Rangers in the Arctic Circle. Cheung also spent time photographing in Kandahar, and he compares that experience with his time as an official artist in the Arctic.

Knowing and Testimony

The third and final section of this book is on the related themes of knowing and testimony. Contemporary war art is often attended by the assumption that it attests to some form of 'truth', albeit a subjective and perhaps a psychological or emotional truth. The chapters in this section consider different ways in which knowing and testimony can be problematized in the relationship between war and art. In the first chapter of this section, Paul Lowe reflects on the act of bearing witness to trauma in the works of Vladimir Miladinović and Adela Jusić. Positioning their works in relation to contested histories of the events in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Lowe argues for art as a testimonial process, which transforms the evidential and primary materials. His essay also addresses the way in which testimonial art raises questions about the idea of art as a vehicle for post-conflict reconciliation in the region. This is illustrated by his discussion of Miladinović and Jusić's participation in a series of interventions known as *Reconciliations*, which took place in the Historical Museum of Bosnia Herzegovina in Sarajevo 2018–19. Discussing the works produced for *Reconciliations*, Lowe argues for art that offers a parallel narrative to the political and nationalist dogmas shaping historical remembrance in the region. In Chapter 9, Messham-Muir asks how national war museums address the inconvenient narratives surrounding moral ambiguity in the national war museum. This chapter focuses on two painted portraits of Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG, Australia's most decorated former serviceman. These were commissioned by the Australian War Memorial from the contemporary artist Michael Zavros. Roberts-Smith is currently (at the time of writing) engaged in a legal battle with a major Australian news media group, which he is suing for defamation after a series of stories alleging that he committed war crimes. This chapter considers the ways in which 'culture war' politics has impacted on the public discourse surrounding Roberts-Smith and looks back to instances in which other national museums have addressed the moral complexities of war.

This volume concludes with the final interview chapter, bringing together edited interviews from New York-based Todd Stone, art theorist Andrew Sneddon and acclaimed war historian Joanna Bourke. Each of these interviews addresses an aspect of knowing and testimony. Stone witnessed 9/11 from the rooftop of his apartment building, six blocks north of 'ground zero', and he talks of trying to work through the trauma by capturing the transformation of the World Trade Center site back to a vibrant piece of downtown New York. In the years since 9/11, Stone has continued to create work around the destruction of the Twin Towers, the trauma that followed and the rebirth of the site, which is documented in his book *Witness: Downtown Rising*. Sneddon addresses the ways in which testimony and knowing are approached in the work of Willie Doherty, whose works often address the aftermath of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and portrayals of

the trauma of conflict. Sneddon also looks at the work of Jeremy Deller, whose *Battle of Orgreave* re-enacted a battle between the police and the striking members of the National Union of Mineworkers near Sheffield, in the North of England.

The Politics of Artists in War Zones: Art in Conflict is the third book to emerge from the Australia-based Art in Conflict project, following Čvoro and Messham-Muir's co-authored *Images of War in Contemporary Art: Terror and Conflict in the Mass Media* (2021) and *The Trump Effect in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture: Populism, Politics, and Paranoia* (2023). Like those previous publications, this book has a marked Australian locus, which, nonetheless, resonates with wider issues that surround contemporary art addressing war in its manifold incarnations now. And while this volume has very particular foci, its themes – contemporary war art, and its relation to colonization, memory, amnesia, knowing and testimony – can be applied to other conflicts that are not directly addressed in this volume. Ultimately, our aim here is to establish a more effective set of approaches to thinking about war art in the contemporary, and to move beyond the worn-out war art dichotomy of pacifist agit prop versus heroic narrative.

Notes

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- 10 Mark Galeotti, 'The Mythical "Gerasimov Doctrine" and the Language of Threat', *Critical Studies on Security*, vol. 7, no. 2, (2018): 2.
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- 17 Ryan Johnston, 'Recalling History to Duty: 100 Years of Australian War Art', *Artlink* 35, vol. 35, no. 1 (2015): 16.
- 18 Catherine Speck, 'The Australian War Museum, Women Artists and the National Memory of the First World War', paper presented at the *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 Conference Proceedings* (Brisbane, 2009), 278.
- 19 Amelia Douglas, 'The Viewfinder and the View', *Artlink* 38, no. 3 (Sept.–Nov. 2009): 204.
- 20 Laura Brandon, 'War, Art and the Internet: A Canadian Case Study', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2007): 10.
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- 22 Brandon, 'War, Art and the Internet', 12.

PART ONE

Colonization, Memory and Amnesia

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CHAPTER FOUR

Colonization, Memory and Amnesia

Interviews with Baptist Coelho, Alana Hunt and Abdul Abdullah

We conclude this first section, 'Colonization, Memory and Amnesia', with three edited interviews. Each thematic section concludes with an 'interview chapter', drawn from an extensive body of interviews conducted with over twenty international contemporary artists in the field, as well as some theorists, creating a total of around 200,000 words transcribed from the recordings. The interviews are edited and abridged for readability, but they present the mostly unfettered voice of the interviewees. In this first of the three interview chapters, we hear from three artists who were interviewed in Australia during 2019: Mumbai artist Baptist Coelho, and the two Australian artists Alana Hunt and Abdul Abdullah. Each of these artists bring very different perspectives on the role of contemporary art in relation to colonization; and each addresses aspects of memory and memorialization of those caught in conflicts. Coelho is a Mumbai-based artist interviewed during a residency at Artspace's Gunnery Studios in Woolloomooloo, following his performance work at the Sydney War, Art and Visual Culture symposium in February 2019 in which he focused on the cultural significance of food in war. Here, Coelho addresses the complex relationships between different Indian cultural identities and the subsequent simplification of those identities in relation to their British colonizers during the First World War. Hunt lived for a period of time in Kashmir and while she was there produced a number of works that dealt directly with political violence in that disputed territory. Her interview raises important and vexed issues surrounding making work about conflicts in another culture and country, and addresses

criticisms she has received about her work potentially enacting a form of Western cultural imperialism. Thirdly, Abdullah recounts an incident in late 2019, in which two of his works – picturing two soldiers in battle fatigues – were included in the *Violent Salt* group exhibition in Artspace Mackay, in northern Queensland, and sparked a ‘culture war’ conflict. It becomes clear in the interview that Abdullah’s ‘provocative’ name and thus his Muslim background were central factors in how the situation unfolded in the media and public debate that ensued.

Baptist Coelho, 28 February 2019, Woolloomooloo

At the War, Art and Visual Culture: Sydney symposium held on Monday [25 February 2019, SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney, Australia] you realized a performance entitled ‘They agreed to eat biscuits and European bread, but our regiment refused’. The performance was based on Indian soldiers’ letters and photographs from the First World War. In the performance you dressed in a khaki-coloured uniform like those worn by Indian soldiers from that period and were kneading dough to create ‘chapattis’ [Indian flatbread] accompanied by an audio-video projection. For most of the performance, you were silent but would suddenly break into a monologue. Can you tell me more about that performance?

For my research on the experiences of Indian soldiers during the First World War in Europe, I’ve tried to look at various aspects of their everyday life. What were they eating? Did they have any discreet political alliances? What were their ideas of patriotism? What kind of clothes did they wear? Or how did they cope with the extreme weather conditions? And so on. And oh... above all, the fact that they were fighting a war, far away from home, a war that wasn’t even theirs to fight. I was curious to know what did they think of being part of such a war? During my research, I came across a book by David Omissi [*Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914–18*]. The book is a selection of various letters, but sadly the original letters no longer exist. What survived are reports of the letters, written in English by British officers and can be found at the British Library in London. The audio-video that is projected on the wall during the performance is a selection of those translated letters that references food and eating habits of the Indian *sepoys*.

A few years ago in Delhi, I met the military historian and veteran of the Indian Air Force Rana Chhina and he told me that Omissi’s book is a good account to get a glimpse into the lives of Indian soldiers. I personally believed that all this while we only had access to photographs and documents of Indian soldiers that were authored by white Europeans, who had their own ulterior motives of power and propaganda. The Eurocentric gaze was

biased and limited, since it didn’t really tell us anything much about the Indian soldiers and colonial armies in general. So, these letters, to a large extent, help us understand what these soldiers were thinking, feeling and eating. But having said that, these letters sent between soldiers and their families back home (to an undivided India) would have been censored by the British officers, and this led to a lot of editing and loss of information. Most soldiers couldn’t read and write, so scribes were required, and this added another set of thoughts and understanding. It’s also difficult to judge if the soldiers deliberately wrote something or were asked or forced to write, since there is a lot of glorification of the British Empire. Maybe the soldiers strategically suggested such praises, so that their letters would go past the censors. One will never know.

These letters show the constant push and pull by the soldiers within their religious groups, and how they tried to abide with their specific food habits. There were Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. The Hindus and Muslims also had separate kitchens. In Santanu Das’s book [*1914–1918: Indian Troops in Europe*] he talks about a controversy that erupted in October 1914, when Sikhs soldiers were given lamb mince that was in a tin with a



IMAGE 4.1 *They agreed to eat biscuits and European bread, but our regiment refused*, 2019, by Baptist Coelho. Performance still from War, Art and Visual Culture: Sydney symposium, 25 February 2019, SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney. Courtesy of the artist; Project 88, Mumbai. Photo: Kit Messham-Muir

picture of a cow on it, and for the Muslims soldiers halal practices were introduced for meat, which caused considerable curiosity from onlookers. From various letters one also notices a resistance by soldiers to merge food habits, but at the same time, one also recognizes the immense camaraderie and respect between soldiers and their religious beliefs.

Growing up, I remembered eating biscuits; brands like Parle G [glucose biscuits] and another brand Marie, which still exist in India, and I relish them till today. As a child I thought the whole of India ate biscuits, and I associated it with something that originated in India, but now I think it's a British thing. Part of me was not surprised that the Indian soldiers resisted eating biscuits. In India, we are very passionate about our food habits. Back home, there is a whole specificity about how, say a Goan, or Gujarati or a Sikh will cook their food – 'Oh, you do it like that, and we do it like this', 'We fry it like this, a bit, but you are doing it like that' – there is always that discussion. I also found it very intriguing that Indian soldiers were trying to maintain their respective eating customs, in a faraway country, right in the midst of a war.

Where I grew up in Mumbai, bread for that matter was by and large what Christians mostly ate as part of their daily food. I was raised Catholic, and there was a slang word '*pav wala*' which simply meant 'the one who sells bread' and at times I also thought the term meant 'bread people'. Part of me was never sure how to understand this term: was it an insult or was it to poke fun? Or was it just making fun of one's eating habits? It was always confusing. As I grew up, my friends at home and at school and college would at times address me as a *pav wala*. During my childhood, this term got into my head, and I resented hearing it, and was always embarrassed, as I thought it was demoralizing and stereotyping, and implicitly derogatory and insulting. However, today I don't care, but as a teenager it was not easy to digest. Whenever I travel outside India, I try to manage and cook something easy like pasta and sauce, but if I haven't eaten rice within, let's say, four days, I start getting anxious and feel uneasy in some way. In David Omissi's book, I found many letters that mention food, rations, and meat and so on. In one of the letters, a Muslim soldier describes how he has not eaten meat for the last two years and asks the recipient to check what are the *halal* laws around what can or cannot be consumed.

In my performances, I am very interested in the notion of ritual and transformation. In a kitchen, various ingredients blend and manifest into a meal that nourishes the body and mind. The word *atta* is a Hindi word for flour. You knead the *atta* and it can be transformed into various types of Indian flatbreads such as *chapatti*, *roti*, *naan*, *paratha*, *puri* and so on. *Atta* is also a source for making biscuits. I wanted to draw attention to the idea of kneading, because kneading is also *manipulating*, one *manipulates* the dough. And within the context of the performance, I wanted to put it out there as questions for all, as to [who] was *manipulating* [who] during the First World War? Who was persuading the soldiers to go and fight? How did

the British Forces manipulate the Indian Princely States? How did the soldiers manage to keep up to their intricate dietary requirements, whilst also dealing with extreme cold temperatures and hostility from their British commanders? So, kneading as an action to express all these queries was employed as part of the performance. When you knead, there is also this entire strategy of *pressing* and *pushing*. There was water in an enamel jug, water and flour were kneaded on enamel plates – all these were placed on a white fabric. These props are all symbolic for me, as each one has a story to tell, which I'm not going to try and explain. I'll let the audience come up with their own understanding.

I also use salt along with the flour and water. And for me, salt not just adds flavour, but highlights Mahatma Gandhi and his revolutionary protest of the *Salt March*. This twenty-four-day protest march was an act of non-violent civil disobedience in colonial India that lasted from 12 March to 6 April 1930, as a direct action campaign of tax resistance against the British salt monopoly. I am an admirer of Gandhi, but at the same time, he also had some inconsistencies. His autobiography [*My Experiments with Truth*], written and published around the 1920s, is clear evidence that he had some contradictions. Well, no one is perfect. Using salt was also in many ways to evoke Gandhi in this narrative as he encouraged Indians to join the British Indian Army during the First World War and believed [Home Rule] without military power was useless, and the war was the best opportunity to get it. At the same time in his autobiography Gandhi dedicates a few chapters to try and explain [why] he encouraged civilians to join the war efforts. I guess it was also Gandhi's way of justifying and intellectualizing his support for the war, so that history would not judge him, given his non-violent position. After all, he was a politician! He says, *we* [Indians] were slaves, and *they* [British] were masters. How could a slave co-operate with the master in their hour of need? Salt was also used in the performance to reference the complexities of patriotism that soldiers faced. They had to fight for the British who at the same time had colonized their homelands. In India salt is still a symbol of [loyalty and fidelity]. Many references are made to salt in the letters in Omissi's book.

Apart from the subtle ambient audio soundscape, which accompanied the projection, I chose to keep the performance mostly silent. I was thinking about how the letters were censored which suppressed and silenced the thoughts and words of these soldiers and their families and friends. So just saying a few words during the performance was to recognize the subaltern, that limited voice that these soldiers had, on and off duty. I usually never plan, what I will really do in my performances. It is all organic with some sort of parameters in my mind, which act as guidelines, and these guides keep shifting. When I perform, I am just responding to what I am thinking and feeling at that very moment. I prefer to keep my actions and bodily movements spontaneous, which makes room for a lot of random accidents. Such uncertainties within the performance also resonate the catastrophes of

war and how precarious and unfortunate were the lives of these Indian soldiers who were used as 'cannon fodder' by the imperial armies, a thought also passionately shared by Dominiek Dendooven, researcher and curator at the Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, Belgium.

During the performance, various letters are projected on the screen behind me, which appear and disappear, sometimes blurred, sometimes overlapping, to almost make it difficult to read. These subtle effects suggest the complexities of these letters. And so, during the performance the complexities of language usage and its translation kept passing my mind. I was thinking, how did the soldiers speaking Indian languages understand European languages and all this within the framework of a bloody war?! So ... during this performance I wanted to include some of these language trepidations, and so I spoke a few words in Hindi, because some of the letters were written in Hindi. Letters were also written in Gurumukhi and Urdu, and since I can't speak or write in those languages, I preferred to break the silence of the performance by shouting the word 'क्यों?' which means 'why?' in Hindi and is written in roman letters like this, 'kyun?' If the audience understands Hindi, they will recognize it, but if not, that's also okay. This feeling of not knowing what I said echoes that sentiment of what must have been going on in the mind of British soldiers when the Indian sepoys were communicating amongst themselves and vice versa. They might have wondered: 'What are they saying?', 'Could he be saying something against us?' So, the idea of language and its translations has always played a very important part within my practise.

Alana Hunt, 9 December 2018, Melbourne

Tell me about your work Cups of nun-chai (2010).

In mid-2010 I was leaving Kashmir by road back to Delhi. While I was travelling, a young boy named Tufail Ahmad Mattoo – he was seventeen – was killed by a tear gas canister that hit his head when he was walking past a protest on his way home from tuition. He was carrying school books in his bag and [he] was not the first person to die that year – in fact some very young children had been killed earlier that year by the armed forces. And other people had been murdered in a 'fake encounter' in which the army lured civilians into a forest and killed them. The army then said that the civilians were terrorists from Pakistan and claimed rewards, whereas, in fact, they were locals who were told that they were getting a job.

Tufail's death sparked off a series of protests across Kashmir that lasted almost the whole summer. During those protests over 118 people were killed, unarmed civilians, at most throwing stones at the army or state police. On my return to Australia after an absence of almost three years – this was also the period when I started using social media [such as] Facebook – I was watching this death toll rise while I was sitting in Sydney. I was communicating



IMAGE 4.2 *Cups of nun chai*, by Alana Hunt. From the body of work *Cups of nun chai* (2010–ongoing). © Alana Hunt. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

with friends in Kashmir who felt utterly suffocated by the violence going on around them. There is often a feeling in Kashmir that India has liberty to execute this kind of extreme violence on Kashmiri civilians, and the world does nothing ... I was watching on social media this horrible three or four months of protest unfold where people were dying every day, and no one around me in Australia knew what was taking place, so there was a massive gap that emotionally was really strange to deal with. One day the death toll reached sixty-nine people; it sort of clicked in my head that there would be sixty-nine cups of Kashmiri tea, *nun chai*, Kashmir's most common drink, that would no longer be poured inside these homes.

There was some really amazing journalism coming out of Kashmir at this time but it just wasn't having the reach that it needed. I was thinking of writing a journalistic piece; it felt so urgent to try to do something. But people in Kashmir knew a lot more than me, and their writing was much better than I could [produce], so I was thinking how to connect on a more personal level.

I decided to have one cup of *nun chai* for every person who had passed away, and I invited people to share that tea with me. There were no rules so long as people understood that we were sharing this tea as an accumulating memorial for this loss of life in Kashmir. And from there, the conversations would go in all sorts of directions. I would write about our conversation and take a photograph of each person holding their cup of tea. Holding the cup

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What exactly is contemporary war art in the West today? This book considers the place of contemporary war art in the 2020s, a whole generation after 9/11 and long past the 'War on Terror'. Exploring the role contemporary art plays within conversations around war and imperialism, the book brings together chapters from international contemporary artists, theorists and curators, alongside the voices of contemporary war artists through original edited interviews.

It addresses newly emerged contexts in which war is found: not only sites of contemporary conflicts such as Ukraine, Yemen and Syria, but everywhere in western culture, from social media to 'culture' wars. With interviews from official war artists working in the UK, the US and Australia, such as eX de Medici (Australia) and David Cotterrell (UK), as well as those working in post-colonial contexts, such as Baptist Coelho (India), the editors reflect on contemporary processes of memorialization, the impact of British colonization in Australia and India and its relation to historical conflicts. The book focuses on three overlapping themes: firstly, the role of memory and amnesia in colonial contexts; secondly, the complex role of 'official' war art; and thirdly, questions of testimony and knowing in relation to alleged war crimes, torture and genocide.

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