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Frist Center pairs work of Goya and Mumford in exhibitions

From Staff Reports

Through the pairing of the exhibitions Goya: The Disasters of War, and Steve Mumford's War Journals, 2003-2013, the Frist Center for the Visual Arts offers two powerful artistic portrayals of conflict and life in a combat zone.

In *The Disasters of War*, the eminent Spanish painter and printmaker Goya graphically depicts the ravages of war as a means of expressing his horror with humanity's capacity to inflict harm, whereas the contemporary American artist Steve Mumford takes a more journalistic approach to his paintings of 21st Century combat.

Both exhibitions will be on view in the Frist Center's Upper-Level Galleries from Feb. 28 through June 8.

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), widely considered the last of the Spanish "old masters" as well as the first modernist, created the eighty prints that comprise *The Disasters of War* in reaction to the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in the Peninsular War (1808–14) and the ensuing political turmoil.

"Unlike previous works of 'war art,' these prints were not commissioned by 'the winner,'" explained Frist Center Curator Katie Delmez. "Therefore, they provide insight into the artist's unbiased private feelings about the historical events, and do not glorify individual leaders. Rather, they are brutally frank reflections of the impact conflicts have on ordinary individuals, soldiers and civilians alike. In this way, Goya can be seen as one of the first truly modern artists."



Steve Mumford. *A patrol from 1st Cav 4/9 checks in with Iraqi checkpoints throughout Haifa Street and Khark in Baghdad in 2007.* Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York. © Steve Mumford

Still relevant after 200 years, the prints have inspired artists from Édouard

Manet and Pablo Picasso to Leon Golub and the Chapman brothers; they have been reformatted to serve as a cover for Susan Sontag's book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*; they appear as illustrations in political commentary.

Given their subjects of death, brutality and the impact of war on civilians of all ranks and ages, *The Disasters of War* are not easy to look at, and have rarely been exhibited in their entirety.

"Perhaps because of their criticism of both France and the Spanish crown, or the acknowledgement that such gruesome images would not find buyers, the etchings were not published until 1863, thirty-five years after the

Goya's death," said Delmez.

A collaboration of the Pomona College Museum of Art and the University Museums, University of Delaware, this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue present all eighty prints of the first edition from the collection of the Pomona College Museum of Art.

Curated by Goya scholar Janis Tomlinson, director of the University Museums, University of Delaware, the exhibition proposes a departure from the traditional installation that follows the sequence of etchings imposed some years after they were created and standardized in the first edition of 1863.



Steve Mumford. Capt. Calvin Allen, 16 Engineers, 1st Armored Division, receives therapy to his wounded hand at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 2006. Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York.
© Steve Mumford

Tomlinson invites us to consider Goya's endeavor within its historical context by presenting the etchings in five groups: Carnage, Atrocity, Martyrdom, Famine and Emphatic Caprices. This organization reveals Goya's clear stylistic evolution over the four years (1810–14) during which he etched these plates.

While Goya concentrates on war's inhumanity, Steve Mumford (b. 1960) explores the humanity of day to day life, especially the routine downtime, in combat zones. Trained as a painter and strongly influenced by Winslow Homer, Mumford has worked since 2003 as an artist with a press pass embedded in occupied Iraq and the war zones of Afghanistan.

Frist Center Chief Curator Mark Scala explained, "His intention was to capture—in drawings, watercolors and written journals—the experiences of American troops and the people living and working in the areas he visited."

Throughout his extended trips, Mr. Mumford observed and depicted scenes that are rarely shown in the news.

"Among Mumford's most affecting images are those that show wounded soldiers receiving therapy at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.," said Scala. "It's clear that the works do not just portray individual traumas, but are also universal symbols for the damage of war and the healing—physical or emotional, personal and cultural—that now must follow."

A different perspective on the nature of the conflict appears in the last gallery of the exhibition, which contains scenes from the prison camp at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba, which Mr. Mumford created in 2013 to

illustrate a story in Harper's Magazine on the trial of an accused terrorist.

Addressing the conscious decision to paint rather than to photograph, Mr. Mumford says: "Making a drawing is more about lingering with a place and editing the scene in a wholly subjective way. It's never comprehensive of the visual facts, which are filtered through one's senses, selected, exaggerated, or left out over the hour or so it takes to make a drawing... . For me, the act of drawing slowed down the war, recording the spaces in between the bombs."

As part of the exhibition planning process, the Frist Center invited a group of veterans and staff counselors from Soldiers and Families Embraced (SAFE), a Clarksville, Tenn.-based nonprofit organization offering free counseling for active duty, veterans and their families, to discuss the exhibition concepts and materials.

The group provided insightful feedback on public programming, docent training and how to best accommodate visiting members of the military community.

"These exhibitions will undoubtedly spur emotional responses, especially from members of the military who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan and may have witnessed the types of events shown by both artists, but especially by Steve Mumford," said Mr. Scala. "We asked our focus group to weigh in with us on how Mumford's works relate to their own experiences of the war zones, which reflect our own moment in history in a very different way than Goya did his."

The group noted that many returning service members are hesitant to speak openly about war time experiences and that the exhibitions could serve as a catalyst for conversation and a sharing of experiences and memories.