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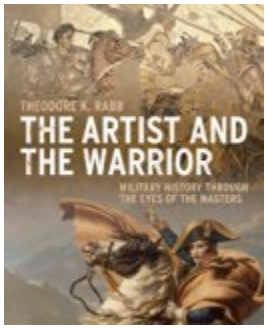
Theodore K. Rabb. *The Artist and the Warrior: Military History through the Eyes of the Masters.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Illustrations. xviii + 228 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-12637-2.



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Inspiring Violence: Artists' Responses to War

Theodore K. Rabb's book, *The Artist and the Warrior*, examines two seemingly opposite subjects, war and art. Yet, as Rabb argues, there has been a close relationship between the two for centuries, and his book surveys the connection between the art of the warrior and that of the artist. The book explores this relationship from the seventh century BCE to the twentieth century, considering the key technological developments in the warfare of each period and their impact on different forms and styles of art.

Rabb is not the first to address this; many scholars have published on art created in response to war. However, while there have been numerous detailed studies of the relationship between specific wars and the art they inspired and shaped, there has been little analysis of the overriding trends between different periods. The originality of Rabb's book is his focus on the "larger contours of the theme" (p. xvii). His aim is to suggest some categories and broad connections and to provide an overview that will be useful for more detailed future studies of war and art. Laura Brandon's study, *Art and War* (2007), is perhaps the only other recent publication to offer a brief survey assessing the broader trends in this relationship. The books are similar in scope, although Brandon's exceeds Rabb's by tracing the subject into the twenty-first century. However, while Brandon considers questions about how scholars might begin to define war art and explores both high and low art created in response to conflict, Rabb's particular objective is to assess the meaning of individual masterpieces shaped by war and the artists' purpose in creating them. His research is centered on one question: "how have artists responded to war? " (p. xv). In examining this issue, he covers a range of periods and artistic responses in a variety of media, which allows him to draw out the key themes of each era and connections between artists' work across the centuries.

Rabb presents a survey of artists' responses to war from "Assyria to Guernica" for the general reader as well as a foundation for further study. Taking a chronological structure, he sketches the trends between artists' responses to war and the numerous ways in which warfare has shaped art. The first two chapters focus on the representation of war in art from ancient Assyria, Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe. Rabb shows that heroism in combat dominated artists' work across these civilizations and examines the range of forms their response to war took, from Assyrian stone reliefs and Greek vases to Roman statues and medieval textiles, such as the Bayeux Tapestry. In the following chapters, he discusses the slowly evolving attitudes to warfare during the Renaissance, which saw artists inject more nuanced interpretations of conflict into their work, seen in such art as Andrea del Verrocchio's *Colleoni*.

It is Rabb's analysis of the turning point in war and artists' depiction of the inhumanity of it that forms the finest section of the book. In chapter 5, he examines the military revolution during the sixteenth and seven-

teenth centuries with the introduction of gunpowder to the battlefield and its impact on artistic traditions. Exploring the work of such masters as Pieter Brueghel and Jacques Callot, Rabb shows that across these two centuries art "lost irrevocably its singular association with nobility and grandeur," and while "it might still imply such virtues ... it also could convey the inhumanity of man toward man" (p. 125). In chapter 7, he focuses on just two masters, David and Goya, and analyzes the way their depictions of perpetrators of violence and their "nameless victims" consolidated the trend for artists to respond to the savagery of war in their work (p. 165). The connections that Rabb makes between these masters and his discussion of their profound influence on later artists affords an insight into the themes of war that continued to inspire artistic responses.

The sweeping nature of Rabb's subject raises issues about how to categorize subjects and which examples to include. Although his expertise in European history means that the emphasis of his book is on the Western canon of art, he does include examples from other cultures. An important addition is his chapter on feudal Japan. Here, Rabb discusses images from the Heiji Scroll to show the universality of themes about war in art across national lines, namely, the ability of art to glorify the brutality of war. He also explores a range of forms within which artists have depicted war, including their decorative use. In chapter 6, Rabb presents not only an important discussion of this use but also further examples of art from other cultures, seen in his depiction of the *Akbarnama* miniatures, which provide decoration for the history of the reign of Akbar the Mughal Emperor. These examples offer an important addition to the book and extend Rabb's analysis of the themes that persist throughout the work of artists from various cultures.

By making a conscious decision to end with Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, arguably the greatest piece of antiwar art of the twentieth century, Rabb reinforces the change in artists' responses to warfare, from glorifying it to condemning it. While Rabb argues that artists' responses to war after the 1930s and the horror of the Holocaust became more personal and focused on "violence and anguish, but not the events that are their cause," his afterword on film provides insight into the ever evolving ways and changing media through which artists have responded to war in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries (p. 202).

Rabb makes it clear that his selection of visual examples is based on the quality of the art and not the historical events they depict. To this end, the book is centered on works that Rabb believes are "remarkable artistic achievements," an approach that he takes in deliberate opposition to historians' more traditional practice of letting events dictate the visual evidence they analyze (p. xvi). This means that the ninety-five glossy images presented in the book, as well as the other pieces of art discussed but not shown, are chosen because he considers them masterpieces. Though Rabb's choice is subjective, his focus on "notable landmarks in the history of art" is an important methodological distinction and sets his work apart from other studies that attempt to tell a history through visual evidence. Indeed, Rabb cites such works as Flavio Febbraro and Burkhard Shwetje's *How to Read World History in Art: From the Code of Hammurabit to September 11* (2010), which selects visual evidence based on their depiction of certain historical events, as an example of the antithesis to his approach (p. xvi).

Rabb's methodology is unsurprising given his long interest and expertise in the use of visual evidence for historians. He has written extensively on this subject, arguing that an interdisciplinary approach between historians and art historians is beneficial, if not crucial, to both fields of research.[1] Although eschewing overt theoretical discussions in his book, Rabb goes someway toward putting this interdisciplinary approach into practice, blending a history of warfare with its cultural responses. Indeed, the value of the book lies in Rabb's ability to integrate historical and artistic analysis, effortlessly weaving between discussions of military innovation and their representation in artists' work.

In applying this method to such a vast subject, Rabb has had to base his study on secondary material rather than primary sources. While his analysis of the art is based on seeing it first hand, Rabb's conscious decision to sketch out the broad context of military events and central ideas about art means that he relies heavily on the scholarship of experts in the field. However, as his objective is to provide not only a book for the general reader but also a template for further scholarship, footnotes or endnotes rather than general chapter bibliographies would have been more useful for an academic readership interested in the specific historiography of the subject.

Rabb's book provides an accessible and eminently readable survey of individual artists' responses to war for the general reader. Importantly, his book highlights major advances in warfare in each period, the way these shaped artists' work, and connections between artists' re-

sponses. For the scholar, he gives a rough template for future studies that, taking Rabb as a starting point, might explore in more detail issues about context and agency. Although he presents very little new research, in providing a commentary and his personal insights and judgments on the masterpieces discussed, he offers a synthesis of images and their historical context. The clear value of this book is Rabb's ability to guide the reader through centuries of military events which he presents through the eyes of the masters.

Note

[1]. Rabb has written extensively on the benefits to be gained from collaboration between historians and art historians. Some examples are Theodore K. Rabb and Jonathan Brown, "The Evidence of Art: Images and Meaning in History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 1 (July 1, 1986): 1–6; and Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

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