# They Had No Choice

by

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"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

Eleanor Roosevelt

**I** am finishing this paper today on July 16th, 2013, 68 years after the explosion of the first atomic bomb that changed our history. And we are still at war. In memory of those animals and people, who so innocently gave their lives for others.

# Abstract

Photographs offer a first impression of structures that represent countries and cultures. Our preconceived notions shape our overall understanding of an unfamiliar place. Perception, which involves interpreting sensory information, is essential to comprehending our surroundings. This process engages all our senses, but when it comes to processing photographs, vision takes on the most significant role. Our perceptions are influenced by past experiences, education, and learning.

Through my research, I aimed to explore the emotional and spatial impact of negative images, which personally reflect my perception of war - an unfortunate phenomenon that I experienced as a child and has become an inseparable part of my life. Trauma, which is a betrayal of trust, leaves an indelible mark on individuals and remains with them forever. Growing up in an atmosphere of fear leaves a universal imprint on children, as the moulded image of terror keeps us all as prisoners of war. Raising awareness of such traumatic experiences becomes a social responsibility towards those who have no such memories, nor can they ever experience such events in their lifetime.

The objective of this study was to investigate whether negative images, when used in an aesthetic context, could evoke sensory and emotional responses that convey the experiences of horror, fear, and trauma. The research was written in two chapters. In the first chapter, I examined the techniques and methods used by artists who worked with monochromatic imagery. The second chapter provided a more in-depth analysis of the historical context of imagery and iconography relevant to my research.

*Chapter 1*

"I stand for life against death; I stand for peace against war"
Pablo Picasso

Depicting fear, a deeply personal and subjective experience, is a challenging task. One approach is to manipulate the visual sensory system, distorting familiar images into ghostly and emotionless forms. This can effectively convey the concept. The ugliness of war stands in stark contrast to the innocence of its victims, a quality shared by all living things. To symbolize the plight of children affected by war, I have used the wartime pigeons as a metaphor for children. The nuclear flash has inspired the use of negatives in my work, which aims to transform the symbolism of war and mitigate its harmful psychological effects. The overarching theme is one of death and transfiguration.

Robert Grudin wrote[1]: "Design is the purest exercise of human skills. To add a new instrument or process to the design treasury is to engage in the force of evolving nature. Each new design is a new discovery conveying specific truth about our relationship to nature and to each other". To create a genuine design that conveys the actual stories of war, I delved into narratives that could potentially capture a fraction of its reality through the medium of art. To understand the process of translating abstract concepts into tangible designs, I initiated my research by deepening my understanding of wars.

I was born in Iran and moved to America as a young adult, where I received a western education in a society that condemns war and violence while also promoting these terrifying acts. As a child, I experienced the Iran-Iraq war, and in my 20s, I was moved to tears by images of Iraq and Afghanistan being bombed by American missiles on TV. I have spent countless hours watching documentaries about the destruction of indigenous tribes, cultures, and countries, from Native American Indians to genocides in Africa. With all this exposure to violence, I assumed that everyone understood the impact of wars. However, I have come to realize that history has become a victim of commercial interests, causing us to forget the lessons we should remember for a lifetime. During the summer of 2012, I had the opportunity to visit John Day, a small town in eastern Oregon. While there, I took a few trips to Pendleton, a neighbouring town, where I was introduced to Native American communities living, working, and creating art together.



Arthur Amiotte & James Auchiah

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[1] Design and Truth, 2010, Chapter 1, P. 5

It was during my time in Pendleton that I was first exposed to the significance of birds in their culture. The story of the Thunderbird, a mythical bird symbolizing power and strength, resonated with me deeply. I also delved into the world of Inuit art, literature, and their use of birds in designs and storytelling.
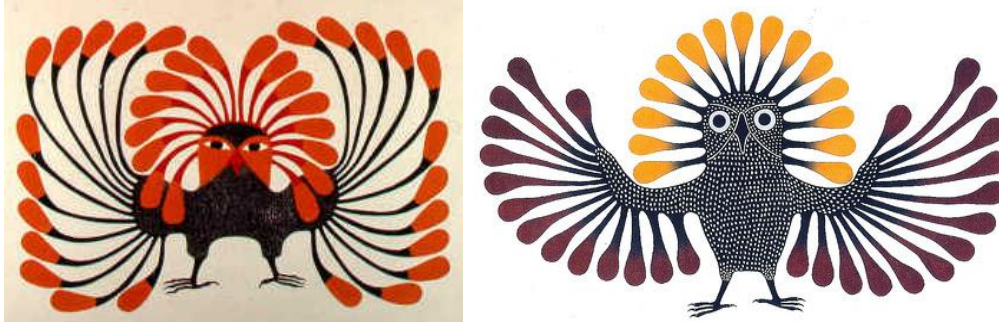


Inuit design by Kenojuak Ashevak

Birds have diverse symbolism across cultures. In Inuit culture, various birds represent power, luck, medicine, fertility, good and evil. For Native American Indians, the Thunderbird represents a sign of war. Christians associate doves with peace and the Holy Spirit, while falcons are a symbol of hope, and eagles represent power, royalty, and enlightenment. Pigeons, on the other hand, are often associated with ignorance and gossip. Regardless of cultural background, birds are viewed as symbols of freedom as they can fly and escape from any situation. From my perspective, we are at our most liberated as children. Our freedom, peace, serenity, and innocence are forever lost once we become involved in a war. In my artwork, I use pigeons as a symbol for children to create a fresh symbolism for birds that sacrificed their lives to protect people and possibly alter the negative connotations associated with them.

I have had the privilege of living in London and speaking with survivors of the World War II, as well as visiting actual bomb sites, which has left a profound impact on me. London's abundance of movies, documentaries, monuments, memorials, and symphonies about these wars has made it an ideal location for studying them. Selecting London and the two world wars to retell the story of war was based on the significant impact that these events had on so many individuals. The English society has a long history of conflict and war, making it one of the most well-known tragedies of the past century. The lasting effects of these wars have permanently changed numerous countries and cultures, leading to many artists dedicating their lives and careers to their victims.

The possibility of another world war and its potential consequences still haunt millions of people. The two world wars have transformed the physical appearance of many towns and cities, as places and spaces that were once associated with a particular culture were irreparably altered, damaged, or destroyed. In terms of global events that have caused such immense devastation, sorrow, and misery, it's hard to think of any other conflicts on such a scale. This is not to downplay the significance of other wars that have occurred and are still happening around the world, but rather to highlight the magnitude of these two world wars that took place in the recent past and have left a lasting impact on so many people and cities. Although I use pigeons as a symbol for children in my work, they also represent the heroic messenger pigeons that were used during the two world wars. My primary sources of inspiration in studying the two world wars included poems of Siegfried Sassoon, sculptures of Frank Gaylord, paintings of Henry More, and later Georg Baselitz, Jean

Dubuffet, Philip Guston and Emilio Vedova. Photomontages of John Heartfield were also a great source of inspiration.



| Emilio Vedova | George Baselitz | Jean Dubuffet | *John Heartfield* |

During the initial phase of my research, I delved into the works of various artists who primarily used black and white mediums. Among the artists I explored, Donald McCullin's war photography captivated me the most as it vividly documented the events that were not easily visible to the global audience.



Donald McCullin

The newest collection of photographs of the world by Sebastiao Salgado, titled Genesis, became my main source of inspiration for creating The Legion project, in which I crafted a suspended sculpture of war pigeons.



Sebastiao Salgad                    The Legion

After creating an extensive series of sculptures, photo-graphics, installations, and a movie, I began working with transparencies or film negatives.

Reflective

In the book German Photography, Power of a Medium[2] Wolfgang Ruppert observed that cultures shape human beings, and that specific instruments such as cameras play a role in moulding an individual's character and conscious orientation towards places, people, values, and functions. People, places, and cultures all have stories to tell. Drawing inspiration from this, I decided to retell the story of war's impact on life, death, and space by transforming it through the projection and inversion of images. The resulting wall installation, called Reflective, features thirty-two negative images of homing pigeons who were awarded the Dickin medal for their bravery and contributions during the two world wars. The work portrays the aftermath of an atomic explosion as colourless pieces, representing an overwhelming light that causes flash blindness. To our eyes, the result is a series of blurry and spot-covered black and white images. As the bleaching of retinal pigment wears off, memories of war also fade away. Psychological damage can be temporary or permanent, much like flash blindness.

The negative images were chosen not only to mimic the effect of an atomic flash, but also to explore the idea that negative images do not fade away like photographs often do, as Gretchen Bender noted: "Pictures are not always what they seem". Other artists, such as Jorma Puranen with his installation Imaginary Homecoming that uses film negatives, and Eric Hilton with his glass sculpture Innerland, creatively manipulate transparent mediums to play with the concept of visual perception. Together with light, these create a powerful and enduring image.



Imaginary Homecoming                    Innerland

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[2] 1997, chapter 2, P. 20

Artistic images can serve a purpose beyond aesthetics. They can be employed as a tool to uncover what is concealed at first glance. Nick Veasey, a British artist who captures X-ray images of ordinary objects, once commented: "Contemporary society is preoccupied with appearance and image... I strip away the layers and reveal the beauty within." By removing the distracting layers of playful colours from an image, its intrinsic qualities become more apparent.
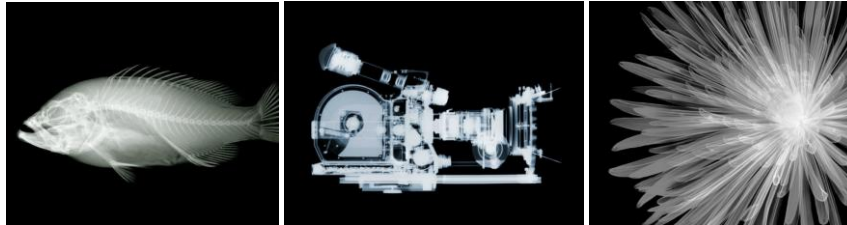

Nick Veasey

One particular story amidst the numerous tales of the two world wars that caught my attention was that of a young girl, Sadako Sasaki. Her home was situated two kilometers away from the point where the atomic bomb struck Hiroshima, yet she miraculously survived being thrown out of a window. Sadly, she later succumbed to leukemia at the tender age of 12. During her illness, Sadako was visited by her best friend, Chizuko Hamamoto, who folded a paper crane from a sweet wrapper for her. According to the ancient Japanese legend, folding a thousand paper cranes would grant a wish. Although Sadako was only able to complete 644 cranes, the paper crane has become a symbol of the impact of the nuclear bomb. Her memorial statue depicts her holding a golden crane aloft with the inscription: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the World."


Golden Crane          Butterfly Installation

I created Birds of War, a floor installation consisting of 500 origami doves to pay tribute to the victims of war. Inspired by Rebecca J Coles' butterfly installation, I used origami, a form of art that served a more significant purpose than mere decoration due to the high cost of paper. In Japan, people exchanged gifts with a noshi, a folded paper envelope containing a strip of dried fish or meat. I found the process of folding the papers meditative, and as I spent 35 hours folding them, I concentrated and thought more compassionately than ever before.
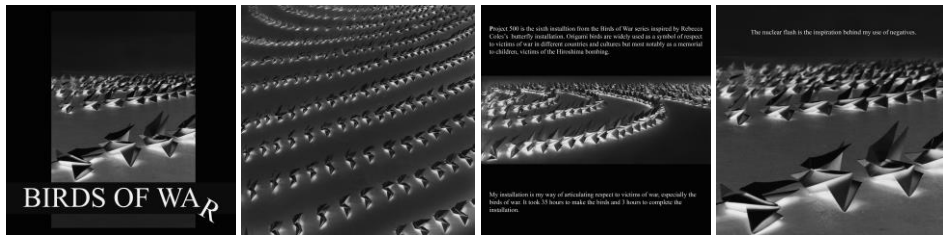
Birds of War

To achieve the desired psychological effect, I inverted original photographs from my installations into negatives as my work progressed. The theory of photopsychology, which seeks to identify and analyse the relationship between psychology and photography, has noted that negatives have a more profound psychological impact on the human brain than the actual photographs. This may be attributed to the association of negatives with X-ray images, which are often conceptually frightening and taken to identify broken or damaged limbs or organs. Man Ray's enigmatic rayographs are perfect examples of how simple objects become indefinite and inexplicable when presented as negatives. He created these images by placing objects directly on light-sensitive paper, which he then exposed to light and developed. Man Ray explored several related techniques that produced similar textures, including image solarisation.



Solarised image (left), and Rayographs by Man Ray

Patric Caire, a French artist residing in New York City, produced a video piece featuring animated MRI portraits of herself. In this work, she investigates the concept of visual perception by manipulating images of limbs that may not draw as much notice if presented as regular photographs. Her work delves into the realm of physics and the theory of light as elementary quanta particles.
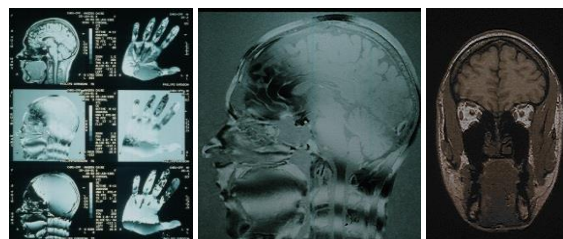


Patric Caire's MRI

The relationship between emotions and imagery, a key element of photopsychology, is not limited to visual and compositional aspects alone. Colours also play a vital role in this process. Negative images are

composed of two primary colours - black and white. Black is an intense colour that creates barriers and absorbs energy from its surroundings. It obscures personalities in the absence of light and can be menacing. White, on the other hand, is a total reflection of light. It creates barriers in a different way than black and can often be difficult to look at. It conveys the message "Do not touch!" White represents purity and is, like black, uncompromising, clean, hygienic, and sterile. However, the concept of sterility can also have negative connotations. Visually, white provides a heightened perception of space. The negative effect of white on warm colours is that it can make them look and feel garish.
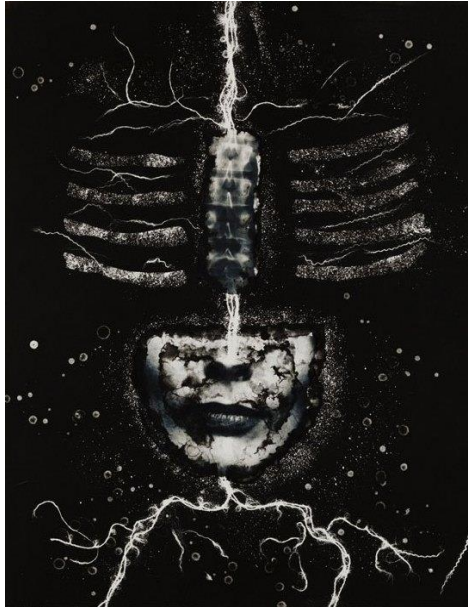


Susan Aldworth's Prints

Susan Aldworth, an Artist in Residence at the Institute of Neuroscience at Newcastle University, aims to create contemporary portraits using MRI images of people's brains. Her subjects suffer from epilepsy related to hyperactivity in the brain, and she uses layering techniques with black and white ink to explore the relationship between the physical brain and personal identity. Aldworth's goal is to engage her audience on a deep level and provoke questions about their own identity, emotions, and perception of the world around them. As an artist, my highest goal is to show my audience how to look deeply into an image to see its message beyond just its colours and composition. I want to awaken emotions in my audience that will make them think about the origins of wars and why they are unnecessary. I hope to inspire people to question the ethics of war and how it goes against the peaceful nature of humanity. Wars often arise from a lack of understanding between people, countries, and cultures, and it is essential to explore and understand the stories behind these conflicts to create a better future.

In his book On War Carl von Clausewitz wrote[3]: "absolute war" is merely a philosophical abstraction or a "logical fantasy" that cannot be realized in practice because it lacks direction and constraint from political motives or concerns and is not limited by the practical constraints of time and space. He defines war as "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will". But how can I illustrate the cost of our greed and desires? Children are killed, people are left homeless, and refugees from all nations except their own are created. Our cruelty

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[3] 1873, chapter 2, p. 43

does not end there, as animals are also killed to achieve our objectives in war. They had no choice, but we did. We always have a choice.

*Chapter 2*

"My last word is that it all depends on what you visualize"
Wolfgang Ruppert

The culmination of my war story is embodied in my final installation, a stained-glass memorial piece. In 2011, I journeyed to Biot in the south of France, where the age-old tradition of glass making still thrives. There, I closely observed, filmed, and studied the artists who pour their hearts and souls into creating glass works that transcend mere household items. I also visited the Chagall Museum in Nice, where I gained a deeper understanding of Marc Chagall's stained-glass creations.



Oldest medieval glazier known[i]

"Each of us is carving a stone, erecting a column, or cutting a piece of stained glass in the construction of something much bigger than ourselves."
Adrienne Clarkson[ii]

According to Sarah Brown in her book Stained Glass, An Illustrated History[4] the origins of medieval stained glass can be traced back to the Eastern Mediterranean, where it was initially made in black and brown, with yellow and other tints being added over time. Although the art of stained glass lasted for centuries, it was nearly lost during the 15th to 17th centuries before being revived in the 18th century. Stained glass began to be used in Christian churches after Constantine allowed Christians to worship openly in 313 A.D. The Byzantine style of stained glass was prevalent during this period, and the Gothic era introduced stained glass as an art form. The use of vibrant colours, embellishments, and figures helped to illustrate biblical stories and the lives of saints with light shining through them. In the Renaissance, stained glass became a symbol of heaven.

Through the process of firing sand grains, glass windows are created. Minerals in the glass confine specific fractions of the white light spectrum, allowing humans to see various colours in translucent pictures. The stained glass imagery was designed to symbolize truth by retelling stories using light. As light radiates through the glass, it adds life and beauty to the images, making them transcendent and spiritual. Light, as seen throughout biblical and classical literature to modern art and poetry, often represents goodness, love,

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[4] 1994, Chapter 1, P. 2

and happiness, as well as truth. The quest for truth is a fundamental piece of all philosophical movements. The role of light in art and philosophy is particularly significant in the Illuminationist movement. Early Christian philosopher Augustine spoke of the divine illumination's importance in our thinking process, stating that the mind must be enlightened by external light to participate in truth. This idea of divine aid in human thought is also seen in Persian poetry, where it is believed that God provides insight beyond our mind's capabilities. Illuminationist philosophy originated in 12th-century Persia and has remained influential in Islamic philosophy, particularly Persian philosophy. It critiques Aristotelianism, arguing that its distinctions are misguided, and emphasizes the importance of essence over existence and intuitive knowledge over scientific knowledge. The concept of light is central to this philosophy, exploring the connection between God, the Light of Lights, and creation. This perspective sees reality as a continuum, with the physical world being an aspect of the divine. Its mystical language has made it closely associated with Islamic mysticism.
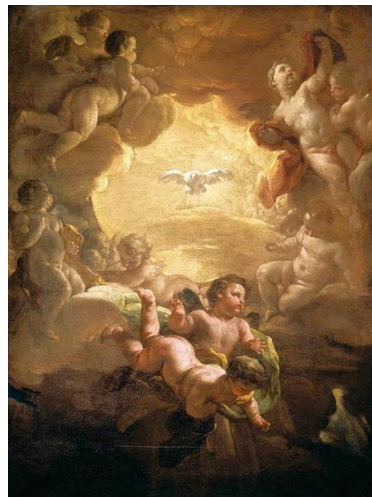


Corrado Giaquinto

The fusion of light and glass in Christianity serves to represent a significant symbol - the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit represents the third component of the Holy Trinity, alongside the Father and the Son, and is considered to be Almighty God. The notion of the Trinity is shared among several religions, including Hinduism. The Holy Spirit is believed to be the projection of God that denotes His presence in areas where He cannot be perceived. In Christian Iconography, the dove is a representation of the Holy Spirit.



Examples of the Holy Spirit in stained glass[iii]

Michelangelo's depiction of Adam and God in the Sistine Chapel's ceiling shows that their fingers are not touching. This detail in the painting is meant to convey the idea that God, who is the source of life, is reaching out to Adam who receives it; Adam is reaching out to a being that is neither God nor an angel. The gift of life from God to Adam is often depicted as a ray of light, which is the same light that illuminates the background of the dove's image representing the Holy Spirit.



Michelangelo (left) and the 12th Century New Roman Mosaics of the Cathedral of the Nativity (right)

The Holy Spirit, also known as the Holy Ghost, is the third element of the Christian Trinity. The ghostly images of the nuclear flash were aligned with the holiness of the atomic bomb, representing a generation's expectation to conquer evil with the ultimate weapon that would transform into fear itself. The complexity of duality embodied in the Hindu god Shiva, the transformer, was also present in the Trinity, which marked the beginning of the atomic age. The Trinity was the code name for the first detonation of a nuclear device on July 16, 1945, in the Jornada del Muerto desert in New Mexico, conducted by the United States Army. For those who believed in the power of killing to win, the Trinity marked a new beginning. The solution to end a seemingly everlasting war was death, as stated by Robert Oppenheimer, who quoted an ancient Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, when he said: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds". This same poem was described as Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual dictionary. The communion between good and bad is an inexorably feminine connection, whereas the masculine seeks a definition of good or bad, with inherent hypocrisy in these ideals. The female is at peace with the coexistence of black and white, which are ultimately interchangeable.

[i] Stained Glass, An Illustrated History, Book: www.amazon.co.uk/Stained-Glass-An-Illustrated-History/dp/1858911575

[ii] Adrienne Clarkson, Journalist: www.adrienneclarkson.com/En/biography.php

[iii] Stained Glass Images, Curtsey of www.Google.com