



Josh Kline, *Personal Responsibility*, 2023-, video installation

*Adaptation*, 2019-22, depicts an orange rescue boat traversing the waters of a flooded Manhattan. Presented in a black box space in which floors are lined with plastic tarp and storage bins, we see, one by one, survivors brought aboard; they rinse their faces and bodies, and socialise over provisions - granola bars, cigarettes - the way friends might on a lazy Sunday. They then stare out at the wreckage from the deck, their faces dispassionate, their futures uncertain. Staleness and stasis permeate the slow scenes, in which life on the boat, among the lucky survivors, becomes the new - and startlingly insufficient - norm after the urban environment is destroyed. Shot on 16mm, *Adaptation* imagines a future nostalgia couched in the idioms of mid-century science fiction; it shows, too, the limits of our imagination when it comes to picturing the preservation of humanity.

In an adjacent gallery painted an 'emergency' orange hue, several tents hold microcosms of civilisation that have survived a large-scale catastrophe: bunkbeds, clothing racks, packages of pet food, paper towels and potato chips. Each tent contains a video monitor and camping chairs on which museum visitors are invited to sit. This massive installation, titled *Personal Responsibility*, 2023-, presents fictional interviews with climate refugees and those privy to their plight. In one video, an unsympathetic university student rails against the asylum seekers who have come to her town, trotting out familiar arguments used against refugees of war, poverty and persecution. Her tirade takes us down the same avenues of shock, combativeness and preservation biases that characterise contemporary social media. We can easily imagine ourselves as the inhabitants of these makeshift shelters, surviving on bags of Lay's and Takis crisps, and exposed to constant vitriol from others.

Civilisation, as Kline portrays it, will soon be nothing more than a broken toy. It is useless, his exhibition suggests, to try to preserve its brokenness for posterity. To be preserved in a static extension of the present would not be the same as living. One might as well be a decapitated head or a dismembered arm - a spare part for the Anthropocene machine. Oddly enough, the better preserved the specimens are in this show, the less evocative they become; for instance, Kline's life-size mannequins are ultimately one-dimensional caricatures of US culture. It would perhaps prove more fruitful for any future survivors to search for clues of our existence in the rotted and illegible detritus.

**Jenny Wu** is a US-based writer and independent curator.

## Artists in a Time of War

Castello di Rivoli, Turin, 15 March to 19 November

Over eight rooms, each dedicated to either one specific war or a cluster of conflicts, 'Artists in a Time of War' brings together 140 works by 30 artists responding to a war they have lived through. Obviously there has never been a time when artists were *not* responding to war, and curators Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marianna Vecellio rightly do not offer a grand theory of war and its causes. Instead, the focus remains on two current wars: Russia's depraved invasion of Ukraine and the aftermath of the failed 'war on terror' in Afghanistan.

The walls of each gallery are painted in a different colour, for example a dark grey covers the room featuring works by Fabio Mauri that reference the local tragedy of the bombing of Turin. Contrastingly, two rooms feature a wan pale yellow that obliquely suggests a link between the Napoleonic invasion of Spain (featuring works by Francisco Goya), the Second World War (Anton Zoran Mušič, Lee Miller, Alberto Burri), the Spanish Civil War (Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí) and the Six Day War (Bracha L Etinger). A room featuring Dinh Q Lê's installation *Light and Belief: Voices and Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War*, 2012, is painted orange to remind us of the US Air Force's use of the cancerous chemical herbicide Agent Orange to flush out Viet Cong soldiers by systematically defoliating the jungle.

The exhibition prompts us to ask how our moral responses to these wars have been shaped by earlier wars. A viewpoint clearly shaped, in part, by classic artworks. Examples such as Goya's depiction of bloodied Spanish rebels fighting Napoleonic forces in an etching from 'Disasters of War', 1810-15, and the howls of the mangled in Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, refracted here in his portrait of Dora Marr in *Head of a Woman*, 1942, become historical lodestars through which the exhibition's themes emerge. A further understanding of recent horrors is expressed in Mušič's fraught ink and pencil drawings and Miller's photographs of the wretched piles of corpses from Dachau and Buchenwald, and the psychic wounds after the Balkan wars in Anri Sala's 1999 video *Nocturnes*.

The exhibition also asks questions about the way individual and state-led sympathies align or diverge. Alberto Burri, for example, was on the 'wrong side' of the Second World War and ended up with other Italians in a prisoner of war camp in Texas, the featureless landscape and intense heat we see in his early oil painting from 1945. Lê's selections, however, are lighter



Rahraw Omarzad, *New Scenario*, 2022-23, video installation

and almost celebratory in tone, capturing Viet Cong soldiers eating, talking, preparing for battle and tramping through the jungle. Yet the viewer's sympathies are by no means guaranteed; they are equally shaped by those opposing the horrors of the Vietnam War and official anti-communist rhetoric and imagery.

Nikita Kadan's *The Shelter II* is a life-size two-storey bomb shelter: an upper space is crammed with books mirroring how Ukrainian civilians have safeguarded their homes from all-too-possible shattered glass and shrapnel. The lower level resembles a tomb with a cast bronze hand reaching out of the black dirt. Kadan is partly based in Bucha, where Russian forces tortured and murdered hundreds of Ukrainian civilians in March 2022. The work reveals how ordinary people living under fire are forced to find refuge from slaughter every day. The installation's lower level appears at first like a black rectangle, perhaps alluding to the Kyiv-born Kazimir Malevich, painter of *Black Square*, 1915 – an artist who is now rightly being recoded not as a member of the Soviet 'Russian' avant-garde, but part of an autonomous Ukrainian artistic culture. As viewers enter the work, the pure black rectangle looks not just painterly, but flat. Step closer and it becomes clear that this is a space with cavernous depth. The result is emotional vertigo: a bottom step missed in the darkness, a sudden rush of grief, or an unhealable inner wound. It is difficult or perhaps impossible to recapture one's initial view by moving backwards and looking again. The work partially confirms the exhibition's central premise: to startle us into reconsidering how we perceive war.

The Afghan artist Rahraw Omarzad's *Every Tiger Needs a Horse*, 2022-23, has a similar effect. It comprises six works, in which countless tiny specks of black-and-white paint are splattered in a seemingly arbitrary formation across the canvases. Three of the canvases were subject to two controlled explosions under the supervision of the Italian military. While Kadan's installation partly shows us how an ethics might be found in art, Omarzad's works are the closest the exhibition comes to making a general statement about what war looks and feels like. It doesn't just reflect on the way in which military forces put cold, hard technological rationality to irrational ends – mutilation, death and destruction – but may well show us the sheer terrible quantity of possible effects in war.

For those of us who have been spared the experience and the consequent chaos caused by even the briefest of military bombardment, the exhibition is but a tiny, bitter taste of the unimaginable things seen in war: poor boys mashed into trenches; civilians cowering in the ruins of some once-quiet place; the mangled citizens of the swelling necropolis; all creation battered amid the broken glass.

**Max L Feldman** is a writer based in London.

## London Gallery Weekend

To take part in the third iteration of the London Gallery Weekend (2-4 June), some 140 galleries paid what, compared with art fairs, was a modest fee on a sliding scale according to their number of employees. They were then part of an advertised scheme with extended opening hours, organised tours and special events. Only commercial galleries were involved and, even then, not all the main players took part – David Zwirner, for example, was closed ahead of an opening the following week. Nevertheless, around half the city's main art venues of all types took part, providing a focus comparable to October's 'Frieze Week'.

Contemporary painting made up around 30% of the shows – after all, it's what sells best. Chris Ofili at Victoria Miro, Frank Auerbach's self-portraits at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, Callum Innes at Frith Street and George Rouy at Hannah Barry were the pick, but this was by no means a dominating mode of production. At the other commercial extreme, there was a lively performance programme repeated Centre, South and East over the three-day span and, at Phillida Reid, Edward Thomasson provided filmed and live performances. Both tackled the awkward subject of ... awkwardness, and how that plays out in private and in public. In the film *Grace and Harmony*, 2023, Thomasson chooses to show the first time that a group of collaborators sing a new number together. Imperfect synchrony becomes the thematic point rather than a shortcoming, as flagged by the lyric: 'let's pretend we're in control'. In the ten-minute *Security*, performed regularly through the five-week run, a solo actor reveals his own mental insecurities, in monologue and song, through how he frets about the physical security of his flat. Yet, just as we think we have him sussed, he launches into a fantasy that revels perversely in the vulnerabilities he has conjured.

Painting won't be replaced by NFTs – in what could be a sign that their moment has passed, the Mayfair gallery dedicated to the form has closed after just a few months – but mainstream galleries do continue to engage with new technologies. Gazelli Art House has done so consistently and adventurously, so it was no surprise to find it mounting a comprehensive display of works by Jake Elwes, who uses the products of auto-generative programmes to reveal the biases built in to machine learning. *The Zizi Show*, 2020, concurrently displayed at the V&A, entertainingly highlights how straight data normally dominates the feed into facial creation programmes by adding queer examples to the database. In *CUSP*, 2019, variants of birds (sourced from the AI assessment of their most recognisable features) are projected onto a live screen filmed in the landscape. Bird watching becomes on the one hand easy, on the other hand troublingly artificial – perhaps all too predictively so, given the fall in avian numbers this century. The three screens of *AI Interprets AI Interpreting 'Against Interpretation'*, 2023, bring a light touch to Susan Sontag's seminal 1966 essay.

# détour

Selected works from the FRAC Bretagne collection

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The Glucksmann, University College Cork, Ireland | www.glucksmann.org | info@glucksmann.org | +353 21 4901844

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