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Exhibition 'The Beauty of War. Waterloo 1815-2015' opens in Brussels on 17 June

Can war be beautiful?

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. In view of this event, historian and artist, Koen Broucke bases an exhibition on this paradoxical assumption: in its representation, the horror of war is given an aesthetic character and even leads to sublime beauty.

The curator stages an artistic dialogue between books, prints and drawings from the past and contemporary creations

An exhibition investigating the link between art and history

Alongside well-known works of Joseph Mallord William Turner, Francisco Goya and James Ensor, some lesser-known and surprising material has surfaced

This exhibition is an initial phase in Koen Broucke's PhD arts research.

Horror and sublime beauty

Curator [Koen Broucke](#) has produced a series of works based on his many years of research into the Battle of Waterloo. He stages a fascinating dialogue between these works and books, prints and drawings from the collections of the Royal Library of Belgium.

In these 18th and 19th century prints and books the Napoleonic battles are depicted in a very aesthetic way. Colourful uniforms and the heroism of the waves of French attacks in beautiful landscapes turn war into art.

A shocking title

Koen Broucke wants to make the present-day visitor reflect on the way war is represented. In view of this, the title 'The Beauty of War' is somewhat shocking.

"This exhibition should in fact have been called 'The Beauty of the Depiction of War', or better still, 'The astonishing conclusion that art (at the time mainly paintings and drawings) was able to transform something as terrible and cruel as war into something beautiful.' The omission in the title creates an ironic tension, which makes it even clearer how horrific and ugly war is. "

Koen Broucke, Exhibition Curator

Hidden gems

Alongside well-known works of Joseph Mallord William Turner, Francisco Goya and James Ensor, some lesser-known and surprising material has surfaced.

Specifically on the Battle of Waterloo, several never before seen visual sources from shortly after the battle are on exhibit. For instance, an old rather unremarkable grey folder in the Royal Library's Print Room turned out to be an 1815 album filled with small sketches of costume studies by Jean-Baptiste Rubens.

Donation

The exhibition also prompted the artist to donate several acrylic drawings, pen drawings and etchings to the Royal Library. The Royal Library is delighted to accept this donation, as it is an illustration of the crosspollination between academic research and contemporary art.

Practical information

The Beauty of War. Waterloo 1815-2015

17 June to 15 September 2015

Royal Library of Belgium

Mont des Arts / Bd. de l'Empereur 2

1000 Brussels

Free entry

Open Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 5 pm, except when the Library building is closed. In July and August, the Library is closed on Saturdays. More information (in French or Dutch) on www.kbr.be.

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