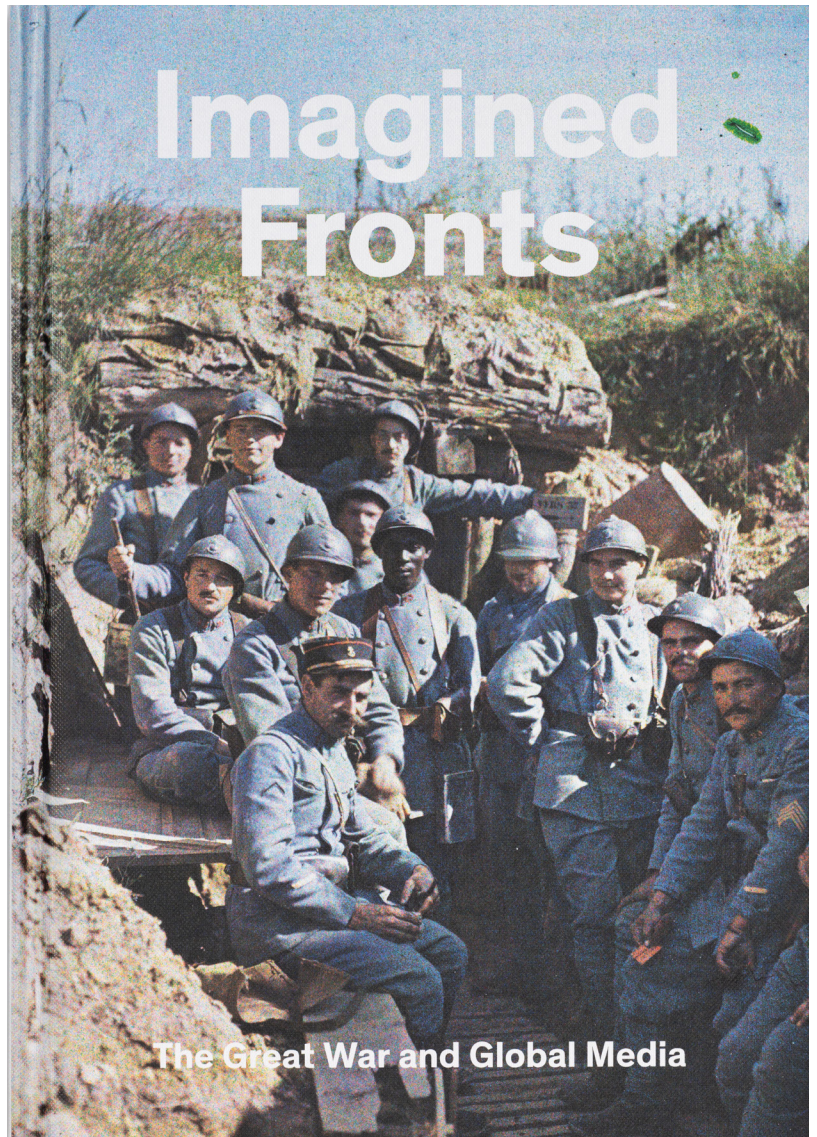


LACMA

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE SUPPLEMENT



## Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media

This supplement is produced in conjunction with *Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, December 3, 2023–July 7, 2024.

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART | [LACMA.ORG](http://LACMA.ORG)  
5905 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA 90036

# Exhibition Introduction

World War I (1914–18), originally known as the Great War, engulfed the geographic extent of Europe and its colonies around the globe and disrupted the lives of hundreds of millions of people across all social strata. Never before had a war been so truly international, encompassing an extraordinarily diverse array of forces from Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Australia and the Pacific, and North and South America. And never before had an event been conveyed to the public in such an immersive way through the burgeoning mediascape of illustrated newspapers, photography, advertising, and the rapidly advancing medium of cinema.

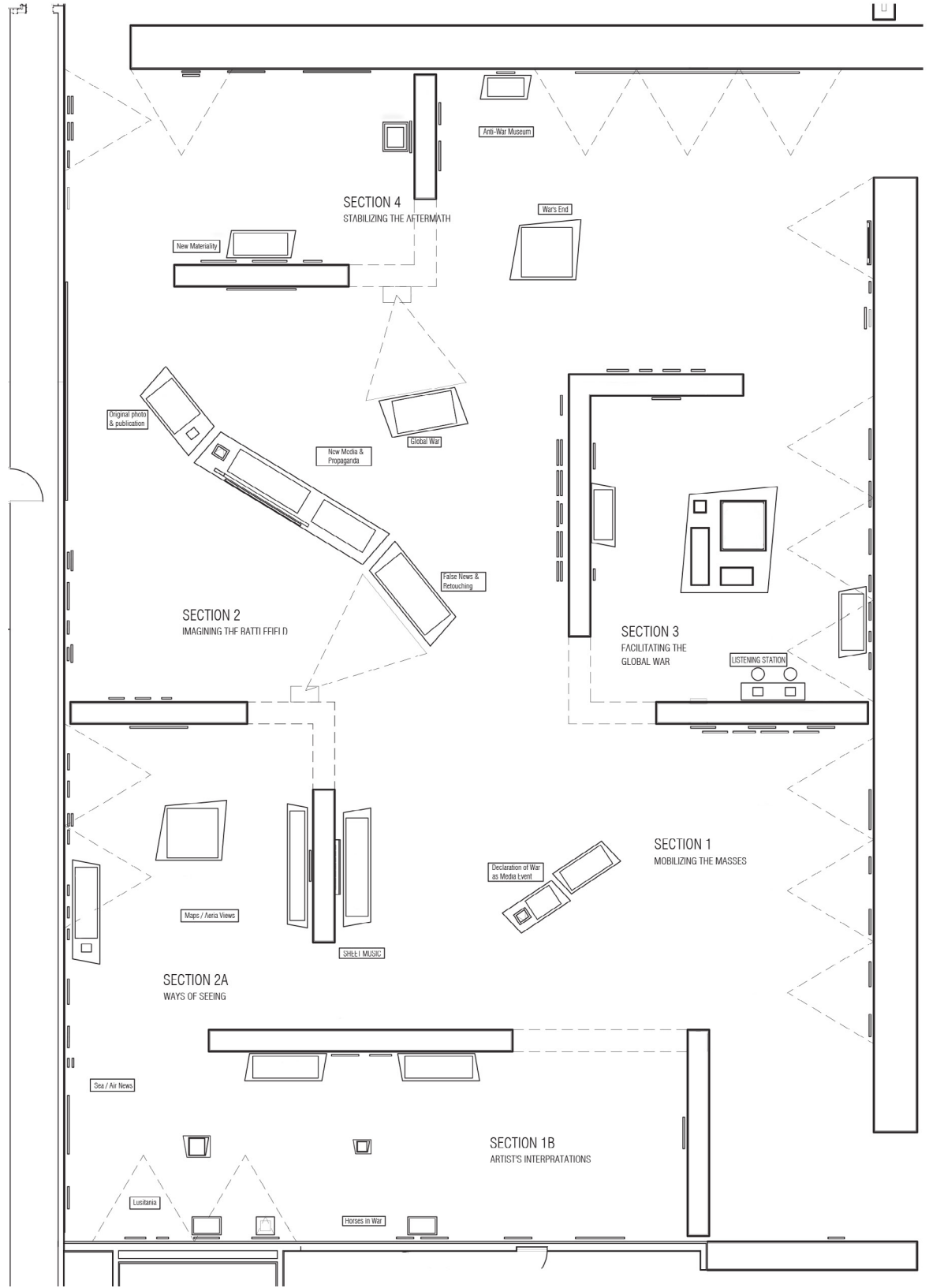
All of this meant that the conflict became, in essence, a global media war. Whether through newspapers read by soldiers in the field; aerial photographs, maps, and panoramas that generals relied upon to make strategic decisions; posters and films encouraging populations around the world to act in the service of their countries; or paintings and drawings made by artists attempting to convey the moments of horror or humanity they had witnessed, these representations of the reality of the war were, above all, imagined.

*Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media* explores the ways in which this “total war” was perceived—and in no small part implemented—through an expanding world of images, as well as how artists participated or responded to the war. To the degree that the media serves propaganda, it not only stimulates emotion, but also closes off debate. As such, the effectiveness of media depends less on whether it conveys truth or falsity and more on what it asks a viewer, reader, or listener to do. For the purposes of this exhibition, we can understand the media of the Great War as having four essential tasks: **mobilizing the masses, imagining the battlefield, facilitating the global war, and containing the aftermath** of a conflict that ended in a tortuous ambiguity. A century later, these are not issues merely of historical interest; they remain relevant to the complex ways in which mass media and geopolitical conflicts intersect in the further-ance of war.

**Timothy O. Benson**

Helgard Field Curator of the Robert Gore Rifkind Center  
for German Expressionist Studies

# Exhibition Floor Plan



# Installation Images





# Exhibition Design

The gallery design of *Imagined Fronts* follows the curatorial narrative by situating the visitor within a destabilized space. We created an embodied, perceptual experience that would amplify the exhibition's stories by using visual elements seen in many of the artworks on display, particularly fragmentation and sharp/angled lines.

For example, the cases are constructed without right angles and their orientation is staggered, recalling aerial views of battlefield trenches. Along with the great variety of visual media on display, these visual irregularities cumulatively create a sense of disorientation as the viewer moves throughout the exhibition.

The idea of rupture or segmentation is also suggested by the paint scheme, which consists of angled lines and contrasting colors. This translates the “dizziness” of many of the Expressionist works on display, but also aims to capture the thematic groupings within each section.

Towards the ceiling, a ribbon of projections—including newsreels, propaganda films, avant-garde cinema, and documentary footage—leads the visitor throughout the space. This superposition of films highlights the major role cinema played in the war and amplifies the visitor's sensorial experience, particularly with the inclusion of sound in the war films of the early 1930s.

**Noemi Dolci**

National Science Foundation Exhibition Design Fellow



# New Acquisition

Willy Jaeckel's *Memento 1914/1915* portfolio was the first antiwar work of its kind published in Germany. Inspired by Spanish printmaker Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* (1810–20), Jaeckel turned an unrelenting eye to the depravity and cruelty of World War I. So visceral were the ten lithographs that, fearing censorship, the Grafik-Verlag declined to publish *Memento*; it was eventually published by art dealer I. B. Neumann in 1915. An issue of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German Art and Decoration) featuring Jaeckel's work was planned, but was ultimately prohibited by German censors.

All ten prints are on display in *Imagined Fronts* due to the generosity of the artist's grandniece, Marianne Nienaber, who donated this extremely rare portfolio to LACMA's Rifkind Center in 2023. Just a handful of museums hold complete sets of *Memento 1914/1915*, with LACMA the only one outside Germany. In 1937, Jaeckel's work was declared "degenerate" by the Nazi regime. Many of his works were destroyed during World War II when his Berlin teaching studio was hit by a bomb in November 1943; Jaeckel was killed in an air raid in January 1944.

## Timothy O. Benson

Curator, Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Art



left: Willy Jaeckel, *Direct Hit*, from *Memento 1914/1915*;  
right: the full portfolio, plus title page, on view in *Imagined Fronts*

# Prisoner-of-War Recordings

Hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers were held in German prisoner-of-war (POW) camps during the conflict, hailing from locales across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. German anthropologists and musicologists used this opportunity to make more than 2,600 recordings of prisoners reciting poems, performing songs, or providing other types of speech samples, cataloging more than 250 languages for the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission. Often the recordings were transcribed, coded phonetically, and translated into German.

A listening station featuring ten of these recordings, selected by curator Timothy Benson and accompanied by translations or summaries, enables visitors to *Imagined Fronts* to hear the actual voices of colonial recruits who are often forgotten when discussing the Great War. For example, Tunisian soldier Sárdak Berrefíd recounts his horrifying treatment by German forces upon his capture in Belgium. Irish soldier James McAssey sings the traditional song “No One to Welcome Me Home.” And Punjabi soldier Mall Singh yearns for the comforts of home, praying for peace so that he may return to India to enjoy the food he has missed for three years.

**Sara Cody**

Senior Editor, Publications Department

Lfd. Nr. ....

**PERSONALBOGEN**

Laute Aufnahme Nr.: *P.R. 619* Kriegsgefangenenlager: *Wunsdorf*  
 Datum: *11/10 1916*  
 Zeitangabe: *4 Uhr*  
 Dauer der Aufnahme: ..... Durchmesser der Platte: *25/221*  
 Raum der Aufnahme: .....

Art der Aufnahme (Sprechaufnahme, Gesangsaufnahme, Choraufnahme, Instrumentenaufnahme, Orchestraufnahme): *1. Sprechprobe des dicit selbst. 2. Lied. 2507-1*  
*Punjabi*

Name (in der Muttersprache geschrieben): .....  
 Name (lateinisch geschrieben): *1. Mall Singh - 2. Sardak Singh*  
 Vorname: *M. Singh*

Wann geboren (oder ungefähres Alter)? *24 Jahre*  
 Wo geboren (Heimat)? *Ranasthli*  
 Welche größere Stadt liegt in der Nähe des Geburtsortes?  
 Kanton - Kreis (Ujezd): *Siroogau*  
 Departement - Gouvernement (Gubernija) - Grafschaft (County): *Punjab*  
 Wo gelebt in den ersten 6 Jahren? *Ranasthli*  
 Wo gelebt von 7. bis 20. Lebensjahr? *am 19. Januar 18. Jahre, Minsker (Beland)*  
 Was für Schulbildung? *Regimentschule*  
 Wo die Schule besucht? *Minsker*  
 Wo gelebt von 20. Lebensjahr? *Minsker*  
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt die Vater? *Ranasthli*  
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt die Mutter? *Dorki (Lithuan)*  
 Welchem Volksstamm angehörig? *Sikh*  
 Welche Sprache als Muttersprache? *Punjabi*  
 Welche Sprachen spricht er außerdem? *Hindustani*  
 Kann er lesen? *ja* Welche Sprachen? *Englisch, Punjabi*  
 Kann er schreiben? *ja* Welche Sprachen? *Englisch, Punjabi*  
 Spielt er ein im Lager vorhandenes Instrument aus der Heimat? *kein*  
 Singt oder spielt er modern europäische Musikweisen? *kein*  
 Religion: *Sikh* Beruf: *Zemlester*

Beschaffenheit der Stimme:  
 1. Urteil des Fachmannes (des Assistenten): .....  
 2. Urteil des Kommissars: *Matte delle Stimme mit guter Resonanz*  
 3. Urteil des Technikers: *gillbogen.*



left: Personnel sheet for Punjabi soldier Mall Singh, used in making his recording at Wunsdorf POW camp in 1916; right: Listening station for POW recordings in *Imagined Fronts*



## Selected press clippings

“World War I is something of a blank spot amid the general American habit of forgetfulness. The epic bloodbath has almost disappeared down the memory hole. It returns now as the focus of an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where its representation as perhaps the first ‘media war’ gets examined.”

— “The Trauma and Slaughter of World War I Is Examined in a New LACMA Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2023  
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-12-07/wwi-lacma-show-imagined-fronts>

“More than a century after World War I, all is not quiet on the Western Front. The aftershocks of the Great War continue to resonate, in part due to the revolutionary ways the conflict was depicted in art and media.... The exhibition offers numerous ways to relate to individual and collective experiences, even if, in the end, the entirety of war remains incomprehensible.”

— “As Empires Clashed During World War I, a Global Media Industry Brought the Conflict’s Horrors to the Public,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 18, 2024  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/as-empires-clashed-during-world-war-i-a-global-media-industry-brought-the-conflicts-horrors-to-the-public-180983605/>

“Some of the most interesting works in the show have nothing to do with the battlefield. Instead, they’re propaganda posters, designed not to document the actual war but to change civilian hearts and minds back home.”

— “The Great War’s Battles for Hearts and Minds,” *Cultural Daily*, January 15, 2024  
<https://culturaldaily.com/the-great-wars-battles-for-hearts-and-minds/>

“These are tough times, with simultaneous conflicts in many different parts of the world making headlines regularly—and, as this exhibition goes to show, this was also the case a little over a century ago, when the Great War had engulfed the world.”

— “33 Must-See Exhibitions to Visit This Winter,” *ARTnews*, December 1, 2023  
<https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/news/museum-shows-to-see-winter-2023-us-international-1234687898/>

# Image Credits

1: Cover of *Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media* exhibition catalogue, showing detail of Paul Castelnau's *First Line Trench, Hirtzbach Woods, France, 1917*. Castelnau photo courtesy of the Collection of the Archives de la Planète, Albert Kahn Departmental Museum, Hauts-de-Seine, digital image © 2024 Museum Associates/LACMA

3–6, 8 (right), 10: digital images © 2024 Museum Associates/LACMA

7: Willy Jaeckel, *Memento 1914/1915*, 1915. Portfolio of ten lithographs. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Marianne Nienaber (M.2022.295.1–.11). Art © 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, digital images © 2024 Museum Associates/LACMA

8 (left): Photo courtesy of Lautarchiv, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

