Object: Catalogue - War Pictures at the National Gallery (1942)

Dr Veronica Davies examines a catalogue produced for an exhibition of war artists' work at the National Gallery in 1942.

This video will help you think about art in wartime, how works of art are exhibited, and what a catalogue might tell us about a historical exhibition, the circumstances in which it was produced and the kind of art that was on show.

Before watching the film

Before you watch the video, think about and discuss the following questions:

1. What do you know about the period of World War Two (1939-45) in Britain?
2. What do you think would be the difficulties faced by artists employed as war artists?
3. What do you think would be the difficulties in putting on an exhibition during wartime?

After watching the film

1. Questions for discussion and debate

The War Artists’ Advisory Committee (WAAC) was part of the wartime Ministry of Information, which, among other things, was tasked with raising public morale and providing propaganda.

a. Are these appropriate roles for art?
b. Should art ever be censored?

2. Looking closer

a. The two works highlighted in the video are both now in the Imperial War Museum, which was given a large proportion of the output of the WAAC when the war was over.

Kenneth Rowntree CEMA Concert, Isle of Dogs
http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/23463

Michael Ford War weapons week in Country Town
http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/9684

Choose one of them, and find out what you can about it from the linked web page. Look closely at the image on the website, and analyse it in terms of size, subject matter, use of colour and tone, perspective and the way the paint is applied. Try also to find out something about the artist.
b. Now choose one of the works below, both of which were also shown in the exhibition and illustrated in the catalogue, and compare it with the Rowntree or Ford painting you’ve already analysed. Again, look closely at the image on the website, and analyse it in terms of size, subject matter, use of colour and tone, perspective and the way the paint is applied. Try also to find out something about the artist.

Graham Sutherland *Devastation: East End Street*

http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sutherland-devastation-1941-an-east-end-street-n05736

Paul Nash *Totes Meer (Dead Sea)*


c. What are the similarities and differences you have discovered?

d. Why do you think that the works by Sutherland and Nash might have been given to the Tate Gallery (now Tate), rather than the Imperial War Museum?

**Online Activity:**
The documentary film mentioned in the video, *Out of Chaos*, can be accessed free via the BFI website:


It includes footage of Kenneth Clark, Eric Newton, and several artists who feature in the catalogue discussed, including Graham Sutherland, Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash and Henry Moore, among others. What does it tell us about their working practices in wartime?