



23 January 2015

## **Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist** **14 May 2015 – 30 May 2016**

*Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist* examines the art and practice of Britain's most important political artist. Kennard's images have become synonymous with political activism in recent times and inspired many of today's politically-aware artists from Mark Wallinger to Banksy. This free exhibition at IWM London will be the first major retrospective of his work charting a 50 year career featuring over 200 artworks and related items, including a new art installation 'Boardroom' created especially for the exhibition.

During the late 1960s Kennard abandoned painting and sought new forms of expression to bring art and politics together for a wider audience. This desire to make art that spoke to all led him to the medium of photomontage for its ability to show the "unrevealed truth" behind the image. In doing so, he restored the medium's associations with radical politics, in particular the anti-fascist work of John Heartfield in the 1930s and the Dadaists of the 1920s.

'That sense of ripping into an image, unveiling a surface, going through that surface into an unrevealed truth, is at the core of photomontage. I sit in a room with the tools of my trade and try to pummel these pictures into revealing invisible connections.' **Peter Kennard**

Heightened Cold War tensions and a polarised political discourse in the 1980s saw Kennard's work attain an early maturity, culminating his iconic transposition of Constable's *Haywain* which he showed carrying the Cruise Missiles which were about to be deployed in Greenham Common. This and other hard hitting montages articulated fears inherent in British society as the East-West stand-off pushed the world towards nuclear catastrophe. Missiles, armaments and human skulls are all motifs of Kennard's most ubiquitous works highlighting the injustices within contemporary politics and society.

The exhibition opens with the *Decoration* paintings from 2004. The paintings, which combine digital prints worked over in oil, show ripped and frayed flags and ribbons of British and American medals, with each medallion replaced with a variety of images, from explosions and items of military equipment to the bandaged faces of war victims. Made in direct response to the Iraq War in 2003, the paintings question established notions of military commemoration by the juxtaposition of images showing the human cost of war. In Kennard's seminal *STOP* paintings\*, begun when he was still an art student, visitors will see the artist's political awakening. These paintings reference events of the late 1960s such as the Paris student riots, the 'Prague Spring' and anti-Vietnam War protests and capture the febrile and disorientating atmosphere of the times as the artist experienced them himself as a student activist. The paintings mark not just the beginning of Kennard's interest in creating politically informed art, but remain an influence on his work in both the themes they address and their formal characteristics.

Visitors will then move into a gallery of the artist's own devising, reminiscent of an archival store. Here the iconic photomontages which permeated British society during the 1970s and 1980s can be discovered. Works including *Crushed Missile*, *Haywain with Cruise Missiles* and *Warhead* will also be displayed in their various distributional forms ranging from posters, pamphlets, badges, placards and t-shirts, alongside the original works of art. These items and artworks will underline how Kennard's art is as reliant on its distribution and manifestation as its concept and creation. The display will also confirm Kennard's status as an artistic outsider, determined to make work that exists outside the normal channels of the art world and that directly connects with the public.

The fourth gallery will recreate Kennard's 1997 installation *Reading Room*. The installation will comprise eight wooden lecterns, each bearing two photographic images of faces photocopied onto the financial pages of newspapers. These images were worked over by Kennard in charcoal, smudged and blurred as to appear to merge or dissolve into the stock market figures. In this, *Reading Room* stresses the relentless international presence of the markets, an ever present fixture regardless of ephemeral local headlines.

The exhibition concludes with *Boardroom*, a brand new installation in which Kennard will look at the history of war and conflict from the mid- twentieth century to the present day. He will use many recurrent images from throughout his working life encompassing the entire gallery space. The images will be juxtaposed with numbers forming an audit of war both in terms of human and financial cost. Kennard intends this to be an evolving piece and will change the composition of the display at different points throughout the exhibition run.

*Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist* will explore the practice of an artist at the edge of politics, whose work outside of the established art system has come to represent and support Britain's protest movement.

– Ends –

For further press information please contact:

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\*Peter Kennard's STOP series was acquired by IWM with assistance from The Art Fund

## **Publications**

### ***Unofficial War Artist***

#### **Publication date May 2015**

*Unofficial War Artist* brings together the best of Kennard's work from 45 years of his career and accompanies the retrospective at IWM London. An artist's book rather than a conventional catalogue, the works from the exhibition will be reproduced throughout, all accompanied by a set of numbers from nought to 7 trillion.. These numbers relate to the casualties of war and conflict and to the vast sums of money spent on armaments throughout the world and are juxtaposed with the sums of money needed to alleviate poverty and hunger. Each statistic will be explained by a short text from a recognised source. There will also be an essay by Peter Kennard on his work as an activist artist. The result is a stark and powerful statement about the devastating impact of war, conflict and poverty

***Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist* will available from the IWM Shop [iwmsshop.org.uk](http://iwmsshop.org.uk)**

## **Notes to Editors:**

Peter Kennard was born in London in 1949 and lives and works in Hackney, East London. He studied at the Slade and the Royal College of Art. His work has been at the cutting edge of political art since his work protesting the Vietnam War in 1968. His photomontages, installations and paintings are known globally, gaining exposure in galleries, on the streets, in newspapers, magazines, posters and books.

In recent years his work has been included in many group exhibitions, including, '*Media Burn*', Tate Modern; '*Rude Britannia*', Tate Britain; '*Forms of Resistance*', Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven and solo exhibitions including, '*At Earth*' in Raven Row, London, to coincide with the publication of his book *@earth*, Tate Publishing, in 2011. Since 2003 he has also made collaborative work with the artist Cat Phillipps under the name kennardphillipps.

His work is in many public collections including Tate, Victoria and Albert Museum, Imperial War Museum, Science Museum, British Council and the Arts Council Collection. Kennard is also author of five books, his sixth, '*Peter Kennard: Unofficial War Artist*' will be published in May 2015 by the Imperial War Museum to coincide with his retrospective exhibition.

Kennard's work has been written about by a wide spectrum of artists and influencers including Banksy; 'I take my hat off to you Sir', Harold Pinter; 'Kennard sees the skull beneath the skin all right' and John Berger; 'Peter Kennard's work is haunting. Eschewing words, it insists on not being forgotten. He is a master of the medium of photomontage.'

Kennard is Senior Research Reader in Photography, Art and the Public Domain at the Royal College of Art, London.

### **IWM London**

IWM London – IWM’s flagship branch – tells the stories of those whose lives have been shaped by war through the depth, breadth and impact of our Galleries, displays and events. Visit our brand new First World War Galleries featuring over 1,300 objects from IWM’s collections, explore what life was like at home during the Second World War in [A Family in Wartime](#); delve into the world of espionage in [Secret War](#); visit our award-winning [Holocaust Exhibition](#); discover stories of bravery in [The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes](#); see work by some of Britain’s most significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century artists in our [art galleries](#) or take in our latest major temporary exhibitions. Our family learning sessions and events encourage debate and challenge people’s perceptions of war.

Open daily from 10am – 6pm (except 24 - 26 December)

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### **IWM**

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people’s lives.

IWM’s five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, marks the Centenary of the First World War with new permanent First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with iconic large object displays. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain’s best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill’s secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).