

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRITAIN AT WAR EXHIBITION OPENS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Friday, May 23, the exhibition Britain At War opens at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. It will remain on view throughout the summer and will then be circulated to other cities in this country and in Canada.

As a demonstration of how a nation's artists can be used in national defense, the Museum believes this exhibition may prove useful to our own government. It has been arranged with the cooperation of Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery in London, who has been in charge of selecting and assembling the paintings from England. The National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa assisted by lending to the exhibition a number of paintings of the first world war.

The exhibition has been directed and installed by Monroe Wheeler, recently appointed Director of Exhibitions and Publications of the Museum. In addition to paintings, watercolors and drawings, the exhibition includes sections devoted to camouflage, photographs, cartoons, posters and wartime industrial and architectural forms. The diagrams and models in the camouflage section have been executed by the faculty and students of the Art School of Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. The film section of the exhibition will be shown in the Museum's auditorium at 4 P.M. daily and 2 and 4 P.M. Sundays in a series of documentary films of wartime Britain.

The exhibition includes the work of veterans like Sir Muirhead Bone and Sir William Rothenstein and the work of artists like Paul Nash and Eric Kennington who first made their reputation with their paintings of the last war. The work of Graham Sutherland, John Piper and Henry Moore, noted artists of the abstract and surrealist schools, is also included as well as the work of artists who have attained reputations in recent years, such as Felix Topolski,

Edward Ardizzone and Anthony Gross.

In conjunction with the exhibition the Museum is publishing a catalog Britain At War to which T. S. Eliot has contributed a poem entitled Defense of the Islands. The foreword, written by Monroe Wheeler, who has also edited the catalog, is in part as follows:

"With admirable wisdom, in this war as in the last the British Government has recognized the usefulness of art to enliven the idealism with which its people are united in self-defense, to ennoble the scene of their common suffering and to provide visual imagery of their great cause and their peril....

"Within two months of the declaration of the present war, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, to draw up a list of artists qualified to record the war at home and abroad, and to advise government departments on the selection of artists from this list and on such questions as copyright, disposal and exhibition of work and the publication of reproductions....

"Artists are employed in two categories: salaried appointments for full-time work with one or another branch of the armed forces; or particular commission and purchase....

"It is worthy of note how little false optimism, exaggerated pathos or wartime hatred these pictures show. There are three main divisions of subject matter: portraiture and the common people at all their tasks; destruction by and of the enemy; and the awe-inspiring martial machinery of defense....

"The honor the British have done their artists in summoning them to a particular role in the national defense may provide for us an object-lesson at a time when our own government is beginning the various enrollment of its citizens. No one pretends any more that international political issues and armed conflict are none of the artist's business. Like another man, he may be required to fight, and if his country loses, he may lose all that makes art possible. It would be tragic neglect, on the other hand, for anyone to be indifferent to the arts and the fate of artists in these times....

"Those whose work is shown in this exhibition have fought well without guns."

Under the title The War As Seen By British Artists, Herbert Read, London art critic and author, has contributed an article in which he writes in part as follows:

"The Ministry of Information lost no time at the beginning of this war in enlisting artists. Leading painters and draughtsmen were appointed as official artists to the Navy, the Army and the Air Force. These artists wear uniforms, and live and work with the various units to which they are attached. They may, indeed, go into action with those units and see the worst--and the best--of the war with their own eyes. Other artists are commissioned to do special jobs on the civilian front--in the armament factories or the air-raid shelters; and any artist may submit work to a committee of the Ministry of Information who will purchase it for the nation if it is considered of sufficient interest. Already, after little more than a year of the war, a very impressive collection of war pictures has been built

up. In fact the National Gallery, with this exhibition of pictures and its mid-day concerts of classical music, has become a defiant outpost of culture, right in the midst of the bombed and shattered metropolis.

"It is not for an Englishman to praise these pictures for the spirit they represent, but one final word of explanation. It may be that the general effect will strike the American visitor as tame or subdued, as too quiet and harmonious for the adequate representation of war. It must then be remembered that though the English are energetic in action, they are restrained in expression. Our typical poetry is lyrical, not epical or even tragic. Our typical music is the madrigal and the song, not the opera and the symphony. Our typical painting is the landscape. In all these respects war cannot change us, and we are fighting this war precisely because in these respects we refuse to be changed. Our art is the exact expression of our conception of liberty: the free and unforced reflection of all the variety and eccentricity of the individual human being."

The catalog Britain At War contains 98 pages; 107 plates, including one in full color; and is priced at \$1.25.

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LORD HALIFAX OPENS EXHIBITION OF BRITAIN AT WAR
AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART AND BROADCASTS
IN TWO-WAY HOOKUP TO LONDON

From 6:15 to 6:30 P.M. over Station WABC and network a two-way international broadcast on The Artist in Wartime will take place. Lord Halifax, Great Britain's Ambassador to the United States, and John Hay Whitney, President of the Museum of Modern Art, will speak from New York. Harold Nicholson, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Information, and Sir Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, London, will speak from London. The occasion is the preview of the exhibition Britain At War at the Museum of Modern Art, which Lord Halifax formally opens tonight at 9 o'clock.

Mr. Whitney will speak as follows:

"Speaking on behalf of the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art I should like to say that we are very highly honored that our Museum should have been selected by the British Government for this great exhibition of work of the British artists in wartime. We hope that selection is due in some part to our determination to carry out the insistence of the Founders of this institution that we should be a vital factor in a free world. I need hardly say that the intelligence of the people in this country has been immensely impressed and their hearts profoundly touched by the spectacle of England at war.

"Out of so many stirring examples which could be quoted, it seems to me that in this exhibition we are presenting to the public of the Americas a striking instance of the character of a free and strong nation. I remember well in the early days of this war that we in the Museum were besieged by requests from individuals, both here and in France, to help the artists of that country with our

charity. The Government would do nothing for them, they could do nothing for themselves. Perhaps they felt that artists, like museums, should enter upon a state of suspended animation at the first blast of the guns and return bright and lively at the trumpet call of Peace. But here in this show we see the finest denial of such an attitude that man could devise, and at the same time we offer the public a picture of England fighting in its most vivid medium of communication - a picture most of us could not possibly put together from the photographs we have seen, or the many words we have read. For this, we are deeply grateful to the British Government and Sir Kenneth Clark and to His Majesty's tireless Ambassador who is honoring us at the opening tonight.

"I know that many thousands in this hemisphere will thrill to this magnificent exhibition of England fighting and to see that the English artist is also a fighting man!"

Lord Halifax will speak on the broadcast as follows:

"It will shortly be my pleasant duty, as British Ambassador to the United States, to declare open this exhibition of the work of British war artists.

"During these few minutes on the air I want first of all to express our gratitude to the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art for their kindness in lending their galleries for this purpose. The remarkable new building in which they are housed makes an unusually good setting for these modern pictures of modern warfare.

"Here, in this show, you will find a sober record of what British men and women are doing and enduring, day by day and night by night, even as we speak these words. To some extent it might be said that this sort of record is better done nowadays by photography, for the camera works faster than the artist, and war today is a high-speed affair. But there is more in war than meets the camera's eye. Only rarely, and almost by accident, can the camera seize and record the emotions of the fleeting moment, which

are the natural material of the artist. But the English people are reluctant to display emotions too easily, and the more deep these are, the less willing are my fellow countrymen to permit them to appear.

"You will not, therefore, find heroics here. What you will find are unmistakable records of that calm and determined resolution, with which the ordinary folk of Britain meet the varying hazards of this most grim war. And those who see these pictures will feel, perhaps, a deeper understanding of the quality of the British people.

"The Museum of Modern Art is to be gratefully congratulated on its vision in bringing these pictures before the American public; and we, for our part, are proud that we should have here such significant works of art to show."

When Lord Halifax opens the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, in the presence of members and their guests, he will be introduced with a few words by Mr. Whitney. Lord Halifax will then repeat in substance the talk he gives over the radio.