



War in Pictures

A POIGNANT EXHIBITION AT THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART SHOWS THE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT FROM NEW ANGLES. BY JASON EDWARD KAUFMAN

LEFT: This boy was named “Little Tiger” for killing two Vietcong women, 1968. ABOVE: The body of an American soldier is airlifted from the jungle in Vietnam, 1966.

The closest many of us get to war is via movies, video games, and cable news. And so the reality of battle remains distant and mythical, a crucible of unimaginable physical and emotional hardship. But an exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, “War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath,” aims to acquaint us more intimately with the intensity of military engagements. The exhibition, on view through September 29, asks us to contemplate the horrific consequences of an activity that humans, despite vows and efforts to the contrary, cannot seem to quit.

Visitors will recognize iconic images of combat: Robert Capa’s grainy frames wading ashore on D-Day; Joe Rosenthal’s flag raising on Iwo Jima; Nick Ut’s naked Vietnamese girl fleeing a napalmed village; not to mention a shot of a television showing the infamous acts of torture at Abu Ghraib. But sections also examine daily life and the wait before battle, the devastation that follows, and the roles that medicine, religion, and mourning serve in recovery, as well as the impact of war on civilians and children.

“We wanted to open up the discussion about war photography, so it’s not

just combat and death, but the whole range of experience around the phenomenon of war,” explains cocurator Anne Wilkes Tucker of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where the show premiered last year.

Around 300 photographs pull back the curtain on conflicts since the 1840s, the dawn of photography, to the present. The exhibition showcases scenes from battlegrounds on six continents—from Gettysburg to Afghanistan—and includes works by more than 185 photographers from 28 countries. These contributors are not only celebrated photojournalists, but also amateurs and enlisted men and women, many of them injured or killed in action.

Corcoran curator Paul Roth, who organized the DC installation, adds that the show’s debut in Washington is significant because of its proximity—“a block from the White House and at the center of policy making on peace and war.” Tucker adds that although many members of Congress have not served actively in the military, “We’re hoping some will at least get their aides to see the show before they decide to undertake another war.” 500 17th St. NW, 202-639-1700; corcoran.org. Saturday admission is free this summer through Labor Day. **CF**