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# Affective Terrains

## Art, War, and National Belonging

SUSAN CAHILL

*Abstract: This paper examines how cultural representations affirm national belonging within the context of Canada's involvement in the War on Terror. To do this, it takes as its central case study an exhibition of official war art, 11 Artists for 11/11 (2012), which was mounted on public display in celebration of Remembrance Day. This paper approaches the exhibition and the works included in it by addressing their representative and non-representative (or affective) qualities, in order to think through the ways in which visual narratives of military history participate in shaping sentimental attachments to Canadian identity and being Canadian.*

OVER THE PAST five years, there has been a marked increase in cultural representations commemorating military history as central to Canadian national identity and nation-building through programs organised by the former Conservative federal government. From 2011 to 2014, the Department of Cultural Heritage sponsored an \$11.5 million funding program, the 1812 Commemoration Fund, to support initiatives focussing on Canada's role in the War of 1812. The purpose of funding such initiatives in this way was to "increase Canadians' knowledge and understanding of this major historical event that was key to ensuring our country's existence and shaping our identity as Canadians."<sup>1</sup> Beyond this official fund,

<sup>1</sup> Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, "Bicentennial Commemoration of the War of 1812: Plans, Spending and Results," updated 30 November 2015, available: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/hidb-bdih/initiative-eng.aspx?Hi=123>, [accessed 1 May 2016].

the same government department made available an additional \$5 million toward activities memorialising this conflict and a War of 1812 public monument was announced for Parliament Hill.<sup>2</sup> In 2012, Minister of Canadian Heritage James Moore announced a rebranding of the Canadian Museum of Civilization as the Canadian Museum of History, redirecting the curatorial focus to emphasise the monarchy and military as central to the cultural history of Canada.<sup>3</sup> Over \$25 million have been devoted to this institutional shift, with the original aim to have the revisions and renovations completed in time for the 150th anniversary of Canadian confederation in 2017. In August 2014, the Department of Cultural Heritage established a six-year funding plan, the World War Commemoration Fund, to support

<sup>2</sup> Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, “Bicentennial Commemoration of the War of 1812.” There was some public controversy and questioning surrounding the validity and purpose of this monument. See, for example, Emily Chan, “New War of 1812 monument unveiled on Parliament Hill,” *CTV News*, updated 06 November 2014, available: <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/new-war-of-1812-monument-unveiled-on-parliament-hill-1.2090276>, [accessed 1 May 2016]; John Geddes, “Why does Parliament Hill need a monument to the War of 1812?” *Macleans’s*, updated 15 March 2013, available: <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/next-week-well-see-the-1812-monument-designs-for-parliament-hill/>, [accessed 1 May 2016]; and John Geddes, “Why the War of 1812 monument doesn’t belong on Parliament Hill,” *Macleans’s*, updated 23 July 2014, available: <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/why-the-war-of-1812-memorial-doesnt-belong-on-parliament-hill/>, [accessed 1 May 2016].

<sup>3</sup> Melissa Aronczyk and Miranda J. Brady, “Branding History at the Canadian Museum of Civilization,” *Canada Journal of Communication* 40, 2 (2015), 166. For media sources examining the rebranding of the Canadian Museum of History, see, for example, Daniel LeBlanc, “Museum of Civilization to change name, focus on Canadian History,” *Globe and Mail*, updated 15 October 2012, available: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/museum-of-civilization-to-change-name-focus-only-on-canadian-history/article4611129/>, [accessed 18 February 2013]; Susan Delacourt, “Civilization ends, history begins at Canada’s biggest museum” *The Star*, updated 26 December 2012, available: [https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/10/16/civilization\\_ends\\_history\\_begins\\_at\\_canadas\\_biggest\\_museum.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/10/16/civilization_ends_history_begins_at_canadas_biggest_museum.html), [accessed 18 February 2013]; and Kate Taylor, “The new Canadian Museum of History: Who’s history will it tell?” *The Globe and Mail*, updated 16 December 2012, available: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/the-new-canadian-museum-of-history-whose-history-will-it-tell/article6390494/?page=all>, [accessed 17 February 2013].

events marking the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the 75th anniversary of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

These increases in state funding toward cultural practices and events commemorating Canada's military participation highlight the importance of visual representations in producing and legitimating historical narratives. They also point to the ways in which the government deploys particular versions of cultural representations to educate Canadians about these narratives in a way that helps to shape Canadian identity. Additionally, these funding structures demonstrate the elevated importance of military history within contemporary narratives of nationhood, which cannot be disconnected from the larger socio-political context of Canadian military involvement over the past fifteen years. The circulation of cultural representations in relation to military history, Canadian identity, and contemporary conflict narratives form the central focus of this paper. As such, I examine how the production and display of military representations are political gestures that draw from and contribute to national narratives, and how interpretations of these gestures help to define Canadian nationhood and its inhabitants' self-identification to it.<sup>5</sup> I am particularly interested in this idea of self-identification, whereby visual representations of military history participate in producing and reproducing sentimental attachments to national belonging, which refers to a sense of feeling implicated and invested in the history, politics, and subjectivity of Canada. To examine these ideas and their interconnections, I use a recent exhibition of official war art, *11 Artists for 11/11* (2012), and the rhetoric surrounding it to think through the ways in which cultural representations affirm

<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada, "World War Commemoration Fund," *World War Commemorations, Government of Canada*, updated 11 September 2015, available: <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1422453656425/1422453719362>, [accessed 1 May 2016]. See also, Government of Canada, "About the World War Commemorations," *World War Commemorations, Government of Canada*, updated 15 September 2015, available: <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1389035750253/1389036192671>, [accessed 19 September 2016].

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "inhabitants" rather than "citizens" here because the latter term denotes a particular legal connection to the nation-state that I want to think beyond. In this paper, I am interested in exploring cultural practices in relation to shaping identities of Canadians, which extends to everyone who self-identifies a personal attachment to Canada-as-nation and includes those who may not legally be called citizens.

particular forms of national belonging within the context of Canada's involvement in the War on Terror.

To understand this relationship between art, war, and national belonging, I approach the exhibition in a consideration of three main contexts: context of the artworks; context of the display of these artworks; and context of Canada's recent military involvement. Interpretation and meaning-making occurs at the intersection of these three contexts, and I engage with them as interwoven and mutually constitutive, rather than disparate, elements. Yet in the analysis here, I focus not only on the *what* of the visual representations of military participation, but also on the *why* of the underlying affective logic and intent. By affect, I am referring to a sensory impression, an embodied interaction with the world that contributes to attachments, politics, subjectivities, and histories. Affect as a system of meaning-making asserts that broad sensory experiences and their recognition as feelings and emotions are zones of critical engagement.<sup>6</sup> What this means in the case of my study is that I examine *11 Artists for 11/11* through both the representations of military history and the non-representative, or affective, qualities of these representations as essential components to evoking sentimental attachments in Canadians to a particular narrative of Canadian nationhood and its military history.

Affective structures as a point of analysis are central to my argument here, because affect occupies a particularly marked political terrain in a contemporary moment when war itself is waged against it, a war against "terror." Military participation and representations of it are defined not only by the activities themselves, but also by the ways in which their underlying affect combats "terror." Within the Canadian context, the foundational affect of its international efforts, long associated with peacekeeping, has been one of care, a feeling toward the nation and its military that also produces a sense of self-definition for Canadians as caring people. However, while Canada's role in Afghanistan and the War on Terror has centred on strategies of counter-insurgency rather than traditional Pearsonian actions of peacekeeping, some of the justifications and rhetoric surrounding its

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Jill Bennett, *Empathic Visions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

involvement have been explained through recourse to sentiments that were familiar to Canadians, particularly those associated with care. That is, while the activities of the Canadian military have shifted away from peacekeeping, the rhetoric surrounding the affective justification for such activities have not; the familiar sentiments of Canada-as-caring-nation have still been deployed to reaffirm a recognisable narrative to its inhabitants even while the actions of war have changed. As such, affect as a political strategy has achieved a particular resonance within contemporary narratives of Canadian military participation, and needs to be accounted for in examining the larger socio-political context within which cultural representations operate. I apply theories of the sensory experience to my study of *11 Artists for 11/11* to complicate meaning-making beyond a rational or cognitive process, and to work through how sentiment is involved or implicated in particular renderings of Canada and its military history as part of Canadians' own form of identification and belonging.

The exhibition, *11 Artists for 11/11*, was arranged for November 2012 as part of a month-long celebration of Remembrance Day to pay tribute to Canadian military personnel. It was organised as a public exhibition of Canadian war art and mounted on the external wall of Canada Place, a prominent building in downtown Vancouver that houses a convention centre, hotel, and cruise ship terminal. Curated by Canada Place's digital media specialist, Trevor Jurgens, the exhibition involved a rotating series of eleven images that were digitally projected on a twenty-four foot, high-definition screen (see Figure 1). According to the press release, the purpose of *11 Artists for 11/11* was to pay "homage to the sacrifices of serving and retired members of the Canadian Forces and honour their contributions to missions at home and abroad."<sup>7</sup> The title of the exhibition described its composition and intent, uniting works by eleven different artists as a celebration of Remembrance Day, which is on the 11th day of the 11th month.

Canada Place is located on the waterfront in Vancouver's downtown area on a site that was originally a port connecting land

<sup>7</sup> Canada Place, "Art Exhibition at Canada Place Commemorates Canadian Forces and Remembers Soldiers Lost in War," Exhibition press release, 30 October 2012, available: [http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art\\_and\\_Design\\_news/2012/11/~/\\_media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News\\_Images/2012/Allen\\_Ball-\\_Media\\_Release\\_Canada\\_Place\\_CFAP\\_Art\\_Exhibition\\_Oct\\_30\\_2012.pdf](http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art_and_Design_news/2012/11/~/_media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News_Images/2012/Allen_Ball-_Media_Release_Canada_Place_CFAP_Art_Exhibition_Oct_30_2012.pdf), [accessed 5 February 2015].



Figure 1. External view of Canada Place with digital projection of *11 Artists for 11/11*, November 2012, Vancouver, BC. [Photograph courtesy of Canada Place.]

and sea travel in the early twentieth century. Redesigned in the mid-1980s in order to host the Canada Pavilion at the Expo 86 World's Fair, the current building is a visually prominent structure with a roof designed to resemble five sails. Canada Place is a regional hub for cruise ships, specifically those heading north to Alaska, and hosts approximately three million guests annually.<sup>8</sup> Its location in downtown Vancouver along with its high number of local and international visitors assures that images displayed on a large digital screen on the exterior of the building will be viewed by a wide variety and large number of people. The projection of war art into the public sphere in this way opened up access to a large and diverse population of people, many of whom would not see or feel comfortable engaging with such images within a conventional museum space.

In July 2006, Canada Place adopted the brand "Inspirationally Canada." According to the description of its brand listed on the Canada Place website in 2012, the building is "Vancouver's national symbol, a hub of economic activity and a destination that welcomes Canadians and visitors from around the world to celebrate our

<sup>8</sup> Canada Place, "Partnership Opportunities," *Canada Place*, updated 2016, available: <https://www.canadaplace.ca/events/partnership-opportunities-2/>, [accessed 5 May 2016].

country.”<sup>9</sup> The idea of helping domestic and international visitors “celebrate our country” has played an integral role in the organisation of different public exhibitions that have been mounted on the exterior of the building. *11 Artists for 11/11* was part of a series hosted by Canada Place entitled *Digital Canvas*, which aimed, in the words of exhibition curator Trevor Jurgens, to showcase Canadian culture through images that “catch Canada and all that Canadians love in that moment.”<sup>10</sup> The exhibition *11 Artists for 11/11* was part of this larger endeavour to bring a particular notion of “Canada” and “Canadians” to local and international publics.

The images included in *11 Artists for 11/11* were contextualised within the framework of the larger impetus of Canada Place’s *Digital Canvas* project, as well as the goal of the exhibit itself to honour and celebrate military personnel and their missions. The works, however, were not created specifically for this display. Rather, exhibition organiser Jurgens selected the eleven artworks from projects completed previously by artists included in Canada’s war art program. Jurgens emphasised that his selection criteria were primarily based on finding works by artists representative of different areas of the country, including images that were bold enough to translate well onto the big screen, and ensuring each artist was willing to have her or his work included.<sup>11</sup> In his preparation for the exhibition, he only considered works produced through the official war art program, primarily because the Canadian Forces had already endorsed and vetted the materials.<sup>12</sup> Although he himself had no personal ties to the military,

<sup>9</sup> This description was originally found at: Canada Place, “About Us: Our Brand and History,” *Canada Place*, updated 2012, available: [http://www.canadaplace.ca/About\\_Us/Our\\_Brand\\_and\\_History](http://www.canadaplace.ca/About_Us/Our_Brand_and_History), [accessed 17 February 2013]. This exact description is no longer found on the website, but the general idea of this branding can currently be found at: Canada Place, “Canada Place celebrates 30 years as Vancouver’s iconic waterfront landmark and hub of national celebrations,” *Canada Place*, updated 02 May 2016, available: <https://www.canadaplace.ca/about-us/news-and-media/news/canada-place-celebrates-30-years-as-vancouver-landmark-and-hub-of-national-celebrations/>, [accessed 3 May 2016].

<sup>10</sup> Canada Place, “Digital Canvas: CanadaGram,” *Canada Place*, updated 2012, available: <http://www.canadaplace.ca/Media/Blog/2012/10/5/CanadaGram>, [accessed 17 February 2013]. As of May 2016, this page on the Canada Place website has been removed, although information about the project is still available on a Facebook page, available: <https://www.facebook.com/events/254488058004775/>, [accessed 5 May 2016].

<sup>11</sup> Telephone interview between author and Trevor Jurgens, 23 July 2013.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



Canada Place has hosted a series of Canadian Forces events, and as Canada Place's digital communications strategist, Jurgens wanted to continue the good relationship with the military. The relationships between Jurgens, Canada Place, state and military officials, and different artists in the organisation of *11 Artists for 11/11* highlight the complex and multi-dimensional ways in which narratives of Canadian military history are constituted and legitimated.

All of the images included in *11 Artists for 11/11* centred on the people, spaces, and activities of the Canadian Forces, although each work offered a slightly different angle of vision. None of the images represented conventional visualisations of war, such as heroic manoeuvres or dramatic battles; rather the artworks illustrated moments that compose the often unmarked (and potentially unglamorous) responsibilities of the military. For example, Mark Richfield's painting *Last Flight #1* depicts the activities of military personnel through multiple panels of different scenes (see Figure 2).<sup>13</sup> Visualising his experiences while on a Canadian air force base in Cold Lake, Alberta, Richfield's painting reveals a series of panels illustrating personnel working on military airplane equipment. The activities in each of the panels range greatly in terms of framing: two of the upper, smaller panels reveal tightly-framed close-ups of faces surrounded by the technologies of the planes, while the central, largest panel reveals the broad landscape of a brightly lit tarmac, a military plane, building, and luminous blue sky as viewed from the interior darkness of an airplane hangar, with a small, shadowy figure standing to the right-hand side. If not for the camouflaged uniforms of the people working on the equipment, the connection of this piece to Canadian military history would be unclear. His work, like many of the others included in *11 Artists for 11/11*, represents the array of labour, skills, and machinery involved in military life, internal and external to identifiable conflict zones.

William MacDonnell's painting, *The Wall* (1995), was the only image included in the exhibition that was produced prior to 2001. It portrays a dark grey wall running across the central, horizontal plane of the image, breaking in half a dark and hazy landscape (see

<sup>13</sup> Richfield's work in the exhibition was titled *Last Flight #1*, however on the website of the official war art program, the same piece is titled *Last Flight #2*. Because my intention here is to examine the works in relation to their inclusion in a particular exhibition, I will use the title as it was listed within *11 Artists for 11/11*.



Figure 2. Mark Richfield, *Last Flight #1*, 2006. Oil on canvas. Digital projection in *11 Artists for 11/11*, November 2012, Canada Place, Vancouver, BC. [Artwork copyright of Mark Richfield. Photograph of screen projection courtesy of Canada Place.]

Figure 3). Several thin trees tower over the wall and cut into the grey sky. In the foreground, a light brown road extends away from the viewer and diverges into two lanes that parallel the route of the wall. It is only after a moment of looking that a light grey Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) with two soldiers perched on top becomes visible on the right-hand side of the image. With the realisation of this presence, the painting quickly shifts from a representation of a nondescript landscape at twilight to a military patrol under the cover of darkness. Painted while MacDonnell was embedded with Canadian Armed Forces in the mid-nineties, *The Wall* depicts the Canadian peacekeeping effort in Croatia.<sup>14</sup> However, the activities as they are shown in this piece are a calm, subtle expression of military life in a warzone, one that uses established art historical techniques of framing, composition, and landscape to create a recognisable and relatable space for viewers. In MacDonnell's piece, military activities epitomise the notion of Canadians as keepers of peace and order. Such a presentation affirms the traditions of Canadian troops as

<sup>14</sup> An interview with MacDonnell about his time in Croatia and the work he produced about his experience there is available at: Jennifer Morse, "William MacDonnell," *Legion: Canada's Military History Magazine*, 1 May 2008, available: <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2008/05/william-macdonnell/>, [accessed 15 October 2016].



Figure 3. William MacDonnell, *The Wall*, 1995. Acrylic on canvas. Digital projection in *11 Artists for 11/11*, November 2012, Canada Place, Vancouver, BC. [Artwork copyright of William MacDonnell. Photograph of screen projection courtesy of Canada Place.]

peacekeepers, charged with establishing and maintaining peace within the chaos and violence of war and conflict. As the only work in the display produced before 2001, this expression of military activities provided a recognisable anchor to the historical policies and pathos of Canadian military conflict activities as a generous and caring gesture to maintain global order.

These two works are representative of the larger trends within the exhibition. Each of the artworks included in *11 Artists for 11/11* offered a different snapshot into a different example of the people, technologies, and spaces involved in military life. For example, Jacques Hamel, *The Driver* (2004) represents an army truck driver participating in training exercises in Sherbrooke, Quebec; Douglas Bradford, *Sea King* (2005) illustrates a military helicopter landing on the HMCS Calgary, a patrol warship or frigate; Zeqirja Rexhepi, *Remembrance Day* (2005) focuses on an abstract depiction of Remembrance Day celebrations in Canada's capital city, Ottawa; and Allen Ball, *CANCON* (2007) depicts a nighttime view of the Canadian Forces control center in Cairo.<sup>15</sup> While the works varied in artistic

<sup>15</sup> I do not have space to examine all eleven artworks within the paper here. The official online presence of this website has been removed from Canada Place's website. However, images of all the works can be found at CFAP's official website at <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/al-la-eng.asp>.

style and specific subject matter, curated as a group the images spoke to each other and offered a sense of Canadian military history marked not by aggressive battles or violence, but by composure, order, and modest integrity. To be sure, the works together typified the modest notions of “peace, order, and good governance” as core principles upon which Canadian nationhood is based. This general impression of the exhibition is a direct result of the images included within it; different artworks depicting different activities and juxtaposed in different ways would generate a very different interpretation and narrative of Canada’s recent military history.<sup>16</sup>

The selection of these types of images to represent the contributions of the Canadian Forces at this historical moment is interesting, and somewhat surprising given the recent context of Canadian military participation. In 2012, the Canadian military had been in Afghanistan for eleven years and fighting in Kandahar for six.<sup>17</sup> While combat operations ceased in 2011, a year before this exhibition was mounted, this aspect of post-9/11 participation was central to the history of Canadian military efforts during this time period. The exhibition, then, centralised the quiet, non-conflict aspects of military life during

<sup>16</sup> One example of an exhibition that generates a different narrative of recent military history is the touring display of Gertrude Kearns’s work, *Art of Command: Portraits and Posters of Canada’s Afghan Mission* (2016). For analyses and reviews of this recent exhibition, see Peter Goddard, “Gertrude Kearns’ war work gets major Toronto showing,” *Toronto Star*, updated 4 March 2015, available: <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2015/03/04/gertrude-kearns-war-work-gets-major-toronto-showing.html>, [accessed 15 September 2016]; Bill Graveland, “Canada’s Afghan leaders the subject of new Calgary exhibit,” *CBC News*, updated on 2 October 2016, available: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/afghan-mission-leaders-exhibit-1.3788104>, [accessed 10 October 2016]; Craig Mantle, “Contributing to the Legacy: Gertrude Kearns, The Art of Command, and the Developing Memory of the Afghan War,” *On Track* 20, 2 (Autumn, 2015): 33–38, available: [http://www.cdainstitute.ca/images/on\\_track/On\\_Track\\_20.2.pdf](http://www.cdainstitute.ca/images/on_track/On_Track_20.2.pdf); and Craig Mantle, “Commanding Art: Gertrude Kearns and Canada’s Afghan Mission,” *CDA Institute Blog*, 9 June 2015, available: <https://www.cdainstitute.ca/en/blog/entry/commanding-art-gertrude-kearns-and-canada-s-afghan-mission>, [accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>17</sup> For more information on Canada’s military history since 2001, see, for example, Robert Fowler, *Combat Mission Kandahar* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2016); Geoffrey Hayes and Mark Sedra, eds., *Afghanistan: Transition Under Threat* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008); Eugene Lang and Janice Stein, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008); Peter Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan: The War so Far* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007); and Lee Windsor, David Charters, and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada’s Afghan Mission* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

a historical moment when the nation was engaged in high-intensity combat missions that were expensive in lives and economics. While the purpose of the exhibition was to offer an “homage to the sacrifices of serving and retired members of the Canadian Forces and honour their contributions to missions at home and abroad,”<sup>18</sup> and therefore was not necessarily focussed on the current life of Canada-at-war, ten of the eleven images included in *11 Artists for 11/11* were produced in the post-2001 period. Yet only one depicted a scene within Afghanistan. As such, in the representations of this period in military history, there was a marked disconnect between the messaging of the images within the exhibition (military activities as peaceful and quiet, even mundane and everyday) and the realities of contemporary Canadian military efforts (fighting a costly war in Afghanistan).

These types of representations presented a particular narrative of military history that focused entirely on the non-combat operations of warfare, which influenced the interpretation and meaning-making of the exhibition. Representation, however, was not the only interpretative context for knowledge production. Non-representational elements were also key, in framing both the exhibition and the artworks themselves. As mentioned previously, the works selected and presented together in *11 Artists for 11/11* were not created specifically for this show, although their production context was central to the ways in which the images themselves and the exhibition as a whole were intended to be understood. All the paintings digitised in the display were originally completed by artists while under commission with the official Canadian war art program. Ten of the eleven works were produced under the Canadian Forces Artists Program (CFAP), which began in 2001 as the latest incarnation of Canada’s official war artist program, while one work, produced by William MacDonnell, was created under CFAP’s predecessor, Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program (CAFCAAP); this earlier program was cancelled in 1995 due to funding shortages. Both CAFCAAP and CFAP are part of

<sup>18</sup> Canada Place, “Art Exhibition at Canada Place Commemorates Canadian Forces and Remembers Soldiers Lost in War,” Exhibition press release, 30 October 2012, available: [http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art\\_and\\_Design\\_news/2012/11/~~/media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News\\_Images/2012/Allen\\_Ball\\_-\\_Media\\_Release\\_Canada\\_Place\\_CFAP\\_Art\\_Exhibition\\_Oct\\_30\\_2012.pdf](http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art_and_Design_news/2012/11/~~/media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News_Images/2012/Allen_Ball_-_Media_Release_Canada_Place_CFAP_Art_Exhibition_Oct_30_2012.pdf), [accessed 5 February 2015]; and in *RCN News*, 3 November 2012, available: <http://rcnnewsmagazine.blogspot.ca/2012/11/11-artists-for-1111.html>, [accessed 11 September 2016].

a larger tradition of official war art programs in Canada that began during the First World War under the patronage of Sir Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook.<sup>19</sup> Canada's official artist program has taken a variety of forms since its inception and its most current iteration, which is organised by the Directorate of History and Heritage within the Department of National Defense, proposes "to capture the daily operations, personnel, and spirit of the Canadian Forces."<sup>20</sup>

The past and present incarnations of Canada's official war art program focus on generating creative representations that depict a broad array of military personnel and activities. However, this representational impetus does not stand alone. The central mandate of CFAP program, as articulated in the quotation above, emphasises both the representational elements of commissioned works—that is, daily operations and personnel—and the non-representational components, namely the spirit. To be sure, language used to describe art has a long history of deploying non-representational or affective terms to highlight its potential transcendental qualities. Yet, such a statement elucidates the expectation that CFAP images (and exhibitions that display them) will record and communicate not only the activities, people, and spaces represented, but the sense or sentiment that frame or situate these representations within a broader context.

The language surrounding CFAP that highlights the "spirit" of the representations was not isolated or incidental. Similar projections surrounding the exhibition itself echoed this type of language. In the press release for the display, Canadian Minister of National Defense Peter MacKay wrote: "These raw and stunning renditions bring home to Canadians the spirit of our soldiers, sailors and airmen and

<sup>19</sup> Karina Roman, "Armed Forces Recruiting Artists for Front-Line Duty: Playwrights, Painters And Poets Being Sought for Revived Program to Record Military History," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 8 June 2001, 5. For more information on the history of Canada's official war art program, see, for example, A.J.P Taylor, *Beaverbrook: A Biography* (Toronto: Simon and Shuster, 1972); Laura Brandon, *Art or Memorial? The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006); and Laura Brandon and Dean Oliver, *Canvas of War* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> This mandate of the official war art program is that which is currently listed on the official website, with the most recent update of 2016. However, I originally accessed this information in 2009, so this phrasing is not new, but has been in use for at least seven years. Directorate of History and Heritage, "CF Artists Program (CFAP)," *National Defense and the Canadian Forces*, updated 15 January 2016, available: <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/ap-pa/index-eng.asp>, [accessed 2 May 2016].

airwomen and the sacrifices they make every day.”<sup>21</sup> To be sure, the fact that the Minister of National Defense contributed a statement to the exhibition’s press release clarifies the significance of cultural representations and how particular forms of representations operate in tandem with state narratives. And with Minister Mackay’s use of the term “spirit,” he reiterated the language of the official war art program and brought a context to the images that moved away from purely representational qualities.

Project coordinator of the Department of National Defense’s History and Heritage Directorate and administrator of CFAP when the exhibition was mounted in 2012, Shannon Klatt, expressed the intent of official war artists in different but related terms. In an interview about the exhibition, Klatt asserted that the importance of the images is rooted in how the “artists tend to convey more of an emotional sense of the experience.”<sup>22</sup> For Klatt, it was not just the activities of war that is captured by the artists, but the “emotional sense” of those activities. Taken together, these statements illuminate how officials tied to the exhibition and the war art program sought to articulate and emphasise non-representational qualities as central to the circulation and interpretation of cultural objects. This framing rhetoric also indicates the ways in which the artworks included in the exhibition were united and contextualised through not only their representations, but also their communication of a particular sensory consciousness that was intended to underscore and characterise the Canadian military more broadly.

The language surrounding these cultural representations accentuated the “spirit” and “emotional sense” of Canadian military history and intentionally gestured toward the importance of affective engagement. Like any interpretative context used to frame cultural objects, this field of non-representation cannot be disconnected from the socio-political circumstances of the historical moment. In the case

<sup>21</sup> Canada Place, “Art Exhibition at Canada Place Commemorates Canadian Forces and Remembers Soldiers Lost in War,” Exhibition press release, 30 October 2012, available: [http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art\\_and\\_Design\\_news/2012/11/~/\\_/media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News\\_Images/2012/Allen\\_Ball\\_-](http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art_and_Design_news/2012/11/~/_/media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News_Images/2012/Allen_Ball_-).

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Harris, “Artists capture misery, heroism on frontlines with Canadian Forces,” *iPolitics*, updated 10 November 2011, available: <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2011/11/10/artists-capture-misery-heroism-of-canadian-forces/>, [accessed on 10 May 2013].



of *11 Artists for 11/11*, the meaning brought to and drawn from its images was inextricably linked to the broader context of Canadian identity in relation to contemporary military involvements. Non-representational structures, particularly those in relation to affect, have achieved a certain political significance within the context of contemporary warfare associated with the War on Terror. As this international conflict is ideologically projected as an infinitely expansive battle—that is, the enemy could be anywhere and everywhere—so too the enemy itself is defined as the embodiment of an affect, terror. Those nations, like Canada, that confront this terror do so not only through the policies and politics of military actions, but also through defining such actions in relation to an affective antidote to terror. Within this context, national military involvement is identified not only through the policies and activities of war, but also through the affective gesture or intent that presumably underlie them. In this way, affect has become central to the political and cultural terrain of warfare, one that highlights the emergence of the “political sphere as an affective space, a space of attachment and identification.”<sup>23</sup>

This affective space provides a critical context to understand formations of Canada’s nationhood and inhabitants’ self-identification to it. It also enables a way to think through personal attachments to identity as extending beyond a purely rational or cognitive process, toward a sentimental connection to the affective foundation of the nation and its activities. The concept of sentiment, in particular, provides a useful term to harness the broad field of affect in order to analyse how affective or emotional attachments constitute spaces of identification among people that promise a certain form of belonging, a sense of feeling implicated and invested in the history, politics, and subjectivity of Canada. This sentimental attachment to a certain belief and investment in the idea of Canada is at the core of the inhabited and embodied space of national belonging, or cultural citizenship, and creates a lens through which cultural representations are interpreted and understood. It is, in fact, the space of this affective terrain that truly registers nationhood within this contemporary moment.

In the framing of the official war art included in *11 Artists for 11/11*, the affective terrain became one of the central interpretative

<sup>23</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), x.



contexts. In the rhetoric surrounding the exhibition and the images included within it, terms such as “spirit” and “emotional sense” highlighted the importance of the non-representational register in generating a particular type of interpretation. Yet, these terms themselves were actually quite ambiguous. As they were deployed, the terms seemed to suggest a universal and ahistorical essence that could be channelled through all representations of the military; that is, the “spirit” was one that was presented as immediately identifiable, intrinsic, and applicable as the affective intent or foundation to all Canadian military activities and their representations. Such a belief, however, would be incorrect. To be sure, these descriptions were actually quite vague and their meanings would, in fact, change depending on what they were illustrating; they only truly gained significance and traction when read in conjunction with each of the images and their curation as a whole within the exhibit, as well as the affective structures of sentimental belonging and the context of Canadian military actions within the War on Terror.

When read in juxtaposition with the representations in the exhibition, the affective narrative was one defined by illustrations of quiet tasks, skilled competency, and good deeds undertaken by committed military personnel in a variety of non-conflict scenarios and locales. Such activities can be defined as affectively caring, a military contribution to ensuring preparedness and help locally, nationally, and internationally. Such visual and affective vocabularies were indeed recognisable within the Canadian context, because they recalled conventional associations of Canadian international efforts in peacekeeping. Indeed, the images seemed to come together by presenting current military efforts through the same peacekeeping-like activities that defined the expectations of Canada’s historical legacy as peacekeepers. In other words, the actions of the military as presented in the collection of eleven images here presented the “spirit” of the Canadian military as caring through portrayals of helpful and dedicated acts around the periphery of conflict, a familiar representational and non-representational context that relied on constructing recent military participation as a continuation of and legacy to historical military involvement. The affective structure underlying such actions, then, became the unifying way in which contemporary military history was read in terms of the simplified and familiar historical conceptions of military history. Within the rhetoric of the exhibition, the “spirit” of military, then, was presented

as an ahistorical, inherent Canadian-ness that defined and united all Canadian military actions, past and present, although it was actually the choice of images and the way they were framed that produced and affirmed this particular spirit-ideal.

Many difficulties and issues arise from this presentation and interpretation, not least of which are the realities of Canadian military participation since 2001. While the exhibition participated in the affective framing of Canadian military efforts within the War on Terror, the low-key, understated representations did not include central elements of Canada's actual military contributions. At the start of the War on Terror in 2001, then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien committed to sending Canadian soldiers to Afghanistan as part of the UN-sanctioned and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). From 2001 to 2011, Canada contributed in a combat role to this inter-governmental and inter-organisational mission. Canada's involvement has also consisted of other aspects traditionally associated with peacekeeping efforts: assisting the local population, encouraging civil-military cooperation, and attempting to ensure population safety. That is, while Canadian military participation post-9/11 involved strategies of combat and counter-insurgency, it also conducted activities that were similar in gesture to those familiar within peacekeeping discourse. To understand Canada's military involvement over the eleven years prior to the mounting of the exhibition, whether one supports all aspects of these missions or not, was to recognise the multiple facets and phases of military activities.<sup>24</sup>

If this was the reality of military missions, why would an exhibition dedicated to commemorating the service of this time period only focus on one element? For many Canadians, the realities of the Canadian military as engaged in high-intensity counter-insurgency missions may be too much of a departure from the nation's conventional associations with peace and diplomacy, or too politically problematic to be accepted. In its public presentation and celebration of military service, the exhibition avoided these potential problems and critiques by rendering absent the areas of military service that

<sup>24</sup> For the Canadian government and military officials, these two aspects—combat and being caring—do not have to be mutually exclusive; the larger efforts in Afghanistan involve killing insurgents who represent threats to global security, while caring for the peaceful civilians of Afghanistan.

may be too different from or aggressive to conventional conceptions of Canadian identity. As a commemoration, the exhibition focused on those depictions that would present the least controversial elements of military life and produce the most empathy or self-recognition for Canadians. To do this, *11 Artists for 11/11* only included those works that were familiar in both representation and affect to historical ideals of Canadian-ness as peacekeepers. In other words, while the activities of the Canadian military have shifted, the rhetoric surrounding the sentiment of such activities has not; the familiar sentiments of Canada-as-caring-nation were deployed within the exhibition to confirm a recognisable narrative to its inhabitants even while the actions of Canadian military participation have changed. As such, taken together, the representational and non-representational elements of the images reassured viewers that the foundational sentiment and “spirit” of historical and contemporary Canadian military activities has been one of care, thus defining and justifying recent military actions, and asserting a continuity of inherent Canadian-ness that extended to Canadians’ own self-identity.

The rhetorical framing of the artworks and exhibition played an integral role in illuminating the ways in which organisers intended these cultural representations to be read. To be sure, while the written statements surrounding this display never explicitly used the terms “affect” or “care,” their language asserted the importance of the non-representational register, and when placed in relation to the images, exhibition, and Canada’s international conflict participation, enabled this interpretation. Taken together, these factors contributed to a particular narrative of history that highlighted military activities and caring affects, although one that did not include any representation of the high-intensity combat activities that have been central to Canada’s military participation in Afghanistan. The inclusion of representations of particular types of images, showing certain activities, was a key component in mobilising this interpretation. While I have provided an overview of the types of images included in the exhibition, which illuminates the general sense of the representational and non-representational registers, I do want to focus here on one artwork in particular. Silvia Pecota’s painting *Fallen Comrades* (2006) was the only work in the exhibition that represents a post-9/11 military presence in Afghanistan, and is a good case study to elucidate how the visual language of these works within the contexts of the exhibition and contemporary global conflict participated in producing and



Figure 4. Silvia Pecota, *Fallen Comrades*, 2006. Oil on digital photograph. Digital projection in *11 Artists for 11/11*, November 2012, Canada Place, Vancouver, BC. [Artwork copyright of Silvia Pecota. Photograph of screen projection courtesy of Canada Place.]

reproducing particular forms of sentimental attachments to national identity, which helps to characterise a sense of self in relation to national belonging.

Pecota's painting depicts a homemade memorial to a dead Canadian soldier organised by their comrades in the middle of a vast Afghan landscape (Figure 4). In many ways, Pecota's work was atypical of the representations found in the other works included in the exhibition, because most of the images portrayed the everyday, ordinary labour of Canadian military personnel outside of war zones. Pecota's piece, on the other hand, was the only artwork that actively represented Canadian military personnel within the context of Afghanistan and the international efforts within the War on Terror. When curated with the other artworks in the exhibition, this work helped to anchor and reinforce the affective or sentimental foundation that united the various representations.

In Pecota's image, the death and private remembrance of a "fallen comrade" on the battlefield is captured and presented as a public

image.<sup>25</sup> In the left foreground, a mound of camouflaged uniform fabric, backpack, and helmet compose a memorial to a fallen soldier. A small Canadian flag rises from the side, the blazing red and white colours starkly contrasting with the browns, greens, and greys that mark the rest of the image. With their backs to the viewers, their faces unseen, two soldiers walk away from the site, presumably after having constructed it, and return to a small unit of troops gathered around a Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) in the distance. Obviously, any visualisation of death, memorial, or funeral presents a scene that has immediate associations of loss and sadness, and such images are not unique to post-9/11 war art. Yet, the overwhelming gesture of the piece is not the death of a soldier, but the underlying sentiment of love, of care offered by the Canadian troops in the construction of a monument of remembrance.

Whether it was Pecota's original intent with her painting or not, this image became much more than its specific subject matter—that is, of a “fallen comrade” on the Afghanistan battlefield. Within the context of the exhibition and the rhetoric around it, this work functioned to delineate the sentiment of care as the central character or essence of the nation, which can then be embodied by those who act in its name. The anonymity of people and events alludes to the idea that they are the Canadian any-body and every-body, an allegory of the “spirit” of the nation with which Canadians can self-identify. As the clearest example of this type of non-representational register, this work actually personified the sentiment of care as directly representative of the affective character of military participation more broadly. It provided an affective entry-point or anchor through which the other pieces and the exhibition as a whole could be read. In many ways, it affirmed the sense Canadians feel about themselves as caring individuals who support both military responses as a gesture toward peace and the nation that undertakes these caring activities in their

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that, in 2006, the same year that Pecota dated this work, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government instituted a media ban on the reporting of the return of dead soldiers and filming or photographing of flag-draped coffins, which mirrored a similar ban set in place in 1991 by then-US President George H.W. Bush's administration. Harper's media ban was quickly reversed in the face of protests from journalists, opposition Members of Parliament, and the public; in the US, President Barack Obama overturned the previous media ban in 2009. Pecota's representation of a battlefield memorial, then, offers insight into a private, intimate, non-media image of the death of Canadian military personnel in Afghanistan at a historical moment when such images were heavily contested.

name, both historically and presently. Whether this artist or the others included in *11 Artists for 11/11* intended this interpretation or not, when placed within the context of the exhibition as well as the socio-political context of contemporary military participation, the artworks engaged in this non-representational level of interpretative analysis.

None of the works in the exhibition represented scenes that could be interpreted as depicting actions clearly connected to strategies of counter-insurgency or combat. Only Pecota's image illuminated aspects of military life in Afghanistan, a notably small inclusion for a war that has so dominated recent Canadian military history. The majority of the works in *11 Artists for 11/11* clearly asserted the helping, development, and building policies that have longed been associated with peacekeeping actions, and were therefore easily recognisable and comfortable to Canadian viewers. With a history of policies defined nationally by multiculturalism and internationally as peacekeeping, Canada has long affirmed itself as a caring nation. The familiarity of this affective structure enabled its easy transition into contemporary military activities in Afghanistan, even though Canada's role in Afghanistan was clearly not like those associated with conventional peacekeeping: there was no peace to keep, no two sides to keep separate, and the UN had not been invited by the various sides to help, for examples. But in a moment when affect gained particular political expediency, this affect of care, which relies on this history of Canadian international activities, became a prominent way in which to explain and justify "the spirit" of all national military actions, not just for those activities that were represented within the exhibit, but also for those which were rendered invisible. In this way, the-military-as-caring became an affective foundation to rationalise the underlying motivations of all its activities—combat and development—without having to engage with the political complexities of acknowledging fighting and killing as part of the mission.

While *11 Artists for 11/11* was mounted in 2012, after Canada had been engaged in combat in Afghanistan and other artworks depicting the realities of combat life had been produced, the exhibition only included images that would come together to reproduce the peacekeeping-like side of recent military history. So when the Minister of National Defense and officials tied to the Canadian war art program activated the language of "the spirit" and "emotional sense" of Canada and its military shown in the artworks, these terms

recalled the long held belief of the spirit of the nation as caring, as demonstrated by quiet, peripheral activities, rather than the actions of combat and counter-insurgency that have been central to post-9/11 Canadian military participation in Afghanistan. In this way, care as the defining sentiment of Canadian military participation was still being used, potentially as a way to help make such a transition more palatable to Canadians who self-identify with this national character as a part of their sense of belonging, and would reject the political and practical issues of combat missions as representative of themselves.

Cultural representations of military history have come to play an increasingly central role in defining Canadian identity and nationhood, particularly in light of initiatives undertaken by the previous Conservative government from 2011 onward. And these cultural objects and artworks cannot be divorced from the context from which they are produced and circulated; they need to be located within the histories they represent and can, in fact, provide new and unique ways of viewing these histories. When placed within the larger socio-political context of Canada's military involvement, the exhibition was organised and framed as a celebration of the nation's good deeds, undertaken by good people in order to appeal to and involve those self-identified Canadians who hold the image of the nation-as-caring-peacekeeper as central to their own sense of self and belonging. In this way, the organisers, military officials, and the arrangement of the artworks themselves activated particular sentimental attachments by relying on an established and recognisable rhetoric that re-produced the ontological identity of Canada-as-caring at the exact historical moment that such a description did not easily apply to many of Canada's military contributions.

To be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong if the intent of the exhibition was to highlight one aspect of service as an integral contribution to military involvement. However, by presenting this exhibition as paying "homage to the sacrifices of serving and retired members of the Canadian Forces and honour their contributions

to missions at home and abroad,”<sup>26</sup> the organisers suggested the presentation contained a more comprehensive engagement with the recent history and activities of Canadian Forces’ missions. In this way, the exhibition presented the artworks in the service of one, albeit somewhat parochial, narrative of military history, rather than used images that could offer multiple visual and political perspectives, which is an openness that has been asserted as central to the mandate of the official war art program.<sup>27</sup> I believe this rendering invisible certain actions, particularly those that may be seen as politically problematic, was a way in which to maintain and generate support for the military as a whole, by appealing to Canadians’ established sense of self and nation through familiar and recognisable tropes on a representational and non-representational level. Through the deployment of the affective or sentimental register as an ahistorical, universally applicable characteristic underlying all Canadian military efforts, whatever shape they may take, the narrative of recent military history became narrowed and simplified, and denied Canadians larger conversations and participation in the realities and complexities of contemporary military involvement.

Whether this activation of sentiment along these lines was intentional or not, it is crucial that international viewers and Canadians alike become aware of and question such renderings at both the representational and non-representational registers. Canadians can celebrate the service of the military while still challenging and critiquing military institutions and their cultural representations. Otherwise, they run the risk of disconnecting visual representations of war from the complexities and nuances of the policies and politics of national military participation. They also expose themselves to

<sup>26</sup> Canada Place, “Art Exhibition at Canada Place Commemorates Canadian Forces and Remembers Soldiers Lost in War,” Exhibition press release, 30 October 2012, available: [http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art\\_and\\_Design\\_news/2012/11/~/\\_media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News\\_Images/2012/Allen\\_Ball\\_Media\\_Release\\_Canada\\_Place\\_CFAP\\_Art\\_Exhibition\\_Oct\\_30\\_2012.pdf](http://www.artdesign.ualberta.ca/en/Art_and_Design_news/2012/11/~/_media/Art%20and%20Design/Images/News_Images/2012/Allen_Ball_Media_Release_Canada_Place_CFAP_Art_Exhibition_Oct_30_2012.pdf), [accessed 5 February 2015].

<sup>27</sup> As Klatt asserted in a 2011 interview, the official war art program does not “tell [the artists] what to do or how to portray the troops, whether they show things positively or critically or anything like that.” As quoted in Harris, Klatt stated: “Artists capture misery.” Kathleen Harris, “Artists capture misery, heroism on frontlines with Canadian Forces,” *iPolitics*, updated 10 November 2011, available: <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2011/11/10/artists-capture-misery-heroism-of-canadian-forces/>, [accessed 10 May 2013].



uncritically accepting contemporary actions based on historical beliefs, particularly in relation to sentiment. A real danger develops when the actions of nation do not define sentiment, but that sentiment comes to explain actions; the measure of the affective foundation for national military activities should be rooted in the activities themselves. To be sure, national identity, like interpretations of artworks, are not static, but are produced and reproduced continually. If Canadians still value notions of the nation and the self as caring, they must demand that institutions—cultural and military—undertake those actions that confirm and reproduce these beliefs.



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