

presented as an example of historicism rather than merely dismissed as a fake. The final room shows Hoentschel, in vibrant form, as a master *marchand-éditeur* later in his career: the creator and sponsor of 'Le Pavillon de l'Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs à l'Exposition Universelle de 1900' (Fig.59), and as the man who took over the workshop of his friend Jean-Joseph Carriès, who had died in 1894, and continued producing stoneware vases under his own name. There is also a brief but useful video showing a few of Hoentschel's interiors. A single object in the final room encapsulates Hoentschel's legacy, as well as the enduring appeal of eighteenth-century French design. This is the Louis XVI-inspired wall light (ex-cat.) designed by Armand Rateau (1882–1938), who worked with Hoentschel between 1898 and 1904, before becoming a successful Art Deco designer.

The exhibition has already led to new insights into the collection in general and into individual objects. As Daniëlle Kisluk-Groseheide notes in her essay, 'The Hoentschel Collection Comes to New York', the collection's popularity with the Metropolitan's visitors has fulfilled the original hope expressed in Paris that 'it might develop the American public's appreciation for the arts of France'.

<sup>1</sup> Inv. no.1907.225.285: this preliminary sketch for a tapestry cartoon is on view in Gallery 615 in the Metropolitan's newly installed paintings display and was thus not available for the exhibition.

<sup>2</sup> D. Kisluk-Groseheide and U. Leben: 'George Hoentschel and His World', in the catalogue cited at note 4 below, p.20.

<sup>3</sup> Inv. no.1907.225.185: not in the exhibition, but on view at the Metropolitan in Gallery 531.

<sup>4</sup> Catalogue: *Salvaging the Past: George Hoentschel and French Decorative Arts from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Edited by Daniëlle Kisluk-Groseheide, Deborah L. Krohn and Ulrich Leben. 286 pp. incl. numerous col. + b. & w. ills. (Bard Graduate Center and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013), \$85. ISBN 978-0-300-19024-3.



61. Presidential campaign medal with portrait of Abraham Lincoln, by an unknown artist. 1860. Tintype in stamped brass medallion, 2.54 cm. diameter. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

one cannot be separated from the other. The American Civil War was the world's first heavily photographed armed conflict, its opening shots fired just twenty years after the invention of the camera. The exhibition asks us to consider the precise historical moment when war and photography collided and, in the process, to explore our understanding of their uneasy marriage.

The introductory gallery of this eleven-room show acquaints us with the various forms the photographs will take – large-format battlefield landscapes, campaign buttons with miniature tintypes (Fig.61), cartes-de-visite, stereographic views, family keepsakes in tooled-leather cases. Technical limitations made combat shots impossible, but in many

ways, their absence is the most powerful aspect of the exhibition. While the contemporary viewer is accustomed to spontaneous, unposed images from the throes of battle, here, it is surprisingly disconcerting to confront such a comparatively peripheral photographic record. At first, it seems too static to evoke any true sense of the War's horrors. But as one proceeds, the photographs begin to yield a mysterious sense of immediacy precisely by subverting our expectations of war photography.

The exhibition is loosely chronological, with individual rooms weighted towards certain themes such as the Battle of Antietam, medical photographs, and President Lincoln. One of the earlier rooms consists almost entirely of portraits, men of all stripe and colour, Union and Confederate, photographed alone or in bands of brothers (Fig.62). In their deeply serious expressions, Rosenheim notes in the outstanding exhibition catalogue, 'a picture of American society emerges – an entire nation of faces searching for identity and looking at the camera to find its way there. This act of democratic self-representation is where the pathos and poignancy of Civil War photography come through most clearly'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the overall effect of this mass of individual photographs is overwhelmingly sad. But if some saw the medium as a form of self-revelation, others saw it as a tool of empowerment. So soon after its invention, photography was already being exploited to promote socio-political causes. In this regard, the effect of the War on photographers was just as significant as the effect of their photographs on the public; the viewer witnesses the



62. Captain Charles A. and Sergeant John M. Hawkins, Company E, 'Tom Cobb Infantry', Thirty-eighth Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry, by an unknown artist. 1861–62. Quarter-plate ambrotype with applied colour. (David Wynn Vaughan Collection; exh. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

## Photography and the American Civil War

New York; Charleston; New Orleans

by JENNA KRUMMINGA

TODAY, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE WAR WITHOUT ITS PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION. WE MAY SQUABBLE OVER THE DEFINITION OR NUANCES OF 'WAR PHOTOGRAPHY' – IS IT ALWAYS PHOTOJOURNALISM? MANIPULATIVE OR DOCUMENTARY? EVOCATIVE OR NUMBING? – BUT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WAR IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO OUR EXPERIENCE OF ITS PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD. IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT ITS CURATOR, JEFF L. ROSENHEIM, CHOSE TO CALL THIS EXHIBITION, ON VIEW AT THE **METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK** (TO 2ND SEPTEMBER), *Photography and the American Civil War*. IT IS, AFTER ALL, ABOUT BOTH THINGS; THE



63. *Union Private John Carpenter, Company G, Sixty-seventh Pennsylvania Volunteers*, by Reed Brockway Boncouer. 21st June 1865. Albumen silver print (carte de visite) from glass negative, 5.7 by 9.2 cm. (Stanley B. Burns, M.D. Collection; exh. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

practitioners of the new medium developing the now-familiar tricks and tropes of the trade, both aesthetic and practical.

This is most palpable in the battle-aftermath scenes. Consider two photographs taken in July 1863 by Alexander Gardner. In *A sharpshooter's last sleep* (cat. no.101), a lone Union soldier lies on the fields of Gettysburg, rifle and cap strewn forlornly by his decomposing head. In *Home of a rebel sharpshooter, Gettysburg* (no.102), the same corpse lies in a nook formed by two granite boulders – a much more visually pleasing spot – his haunting face staring straight to camera, his rifle propped dramatically against the stone, his allegiance now apparently Confederate. Perhaps Gardner moved the body to get a better picture or perhaps it was simply moved by one of the burial parties. Does it matter? These two photographs have provoked a decades-long debate on photographic ethics and credibility that remains unresolved.

Gardner was certainly not alone in manipulating his subjects to heighten their power. One room of the show is devoted entirely to images taken by George N. Barnard, published collectively in November 1866 as *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign*. These photographs document the devastated landscapes and ruined buildings left in the wake of General Sherman's infamous 'scorched-earth' march through Georgia. Some were taken during the War, others well afterwards. Yet nowhere does Barnard mention which image is from when. This exclusion of dates, along with the highly aestheticised compositions and darkroom insertion of dramatic cloudscapes, suggests that Barnard was less interested in recording the actual events of the campaign than in eliciting an emotional response in the viewer.

These bucolic, often beautiful photographs form a sharp contrast to those in the next room, devoted entirely to clinical pictures: straightforward shots of the wounded. Nothing prepares a contemporary audience for the types of gruesome nineteenth-century injuries and procedures on display here – gangrenous wounds, makeshift surgical drains and crude amputations (Fig.63).

Though these images may be the exhibition's most horrifying, they are not necessarily

its most disturbing. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the many photographs depicting quiet, peaceful scenes, such as Brady's *Wheatfield in which General Reynolds was shot* (no.93): two prints, hung side by side, showing a large field with a well-dressed man standing in quiet contemplation by a broken fence. It takes a moment to realise that the calm scene belies a dark truth, for this, of course, is the battlefield of Gettysburg, where so many thousands fell.

Like many of the photographs in the exhibition, this one is not larger but smaller than life; its decided lack of spectacle makes it easy to pass over. But the viewer who pauses here to consider will understand that it is in images such as this that the true heart of the exhibition lies. With the War a dim memory informed by myth and pale photographs, the exhibition asks us to look, as Brady did, at the place where death occurred and, in the process, to reconsider our notions of war.

<sup>1</sup> Catalogue: *Photography and the American Civil War*. By Jeff L. Rosenheim. 288 pp. incl. 303 col. + b. & w. ills. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2013), \$50. ISBN 978-0-300-19180-6; for quotation, see p.47. The show travels to **Gibbes Museum of Art**, Charleston (27th September to 5th January 2014), and **New Orleans Museum of Art** (31st January to 4th May 2014).

## Destroy the Picture

Los Angeles and Chicago

by ROBERT SILBERMAN

THE EXHIBITION *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949–1962* at the **Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago** (closed 2nd July),<sup>1</sup> was a final triumphant effort by the curator, Paul Schimmel, before his departure from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where the exhibition was first shown. It was also a sequel of sorts, since it builds upon an exhibition Schimmel organised there fifteen years ago, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979*. The first exhibition, like this one, addressed what Schimmel describes as a change of consciousness that

occurred in the wake of the Second World War. It featured some of the same groups, notably Gutai in Japan and the Nouveaux Réalistes in France, and some of the same artists, such as John Latham and Lucio Fontana. But it cast a wider net, with more artists, among them Beuys, Kusama, Oldenberg and Kaprow, and other groups including Fluxus and the Brazilian Neo-Concretists.

The recent exhibition had a narrower focus and a more painting-centred approach. It might well have come first, since the earlier exhibition anticipated today's art world in its emphasis on performance and its embrace of multiple mediums. A painting exhibition can now seem 'retro', even if, as in this case, the conventions of painting are under attack. Yet the spectres that haunted *Destroy the Picture* – nuclear armaments, genocidal violence, the existential emptiness indicated by the use of 'void' in the subtitle – have not disappeared.

*Destroy the Picture* established a firm connection between history and art history by showing how artists responded to the darkness and destruction of the War. The restoration of historical and political context to works such as the so-called bandaged paintings of Salvatore Scarpitta is no small achievement, because it saves them from appearing as formalist exercises. The exhibition made a convincing case for bringing together a wide range of art that represents 'a coherent mode of artistic activity and a compelling international sensibility', without



64. *Untitled fire painting (F 27 I)*, by Yves Klein. 1961. Burnt cardboard mounted on panel, 250 by 130 cm. (Yves Klein Archives; exh. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago).