

The Art of War: Late Night Thoughts After Watching Video Shots from Mariupol's Donetsk Theater

H.C. Palmer

*All the people are still under the rubble, because the rubble is still there.
No one dug them up.*

—Oksnana Syomina, *Associated Press*, May 4, 2022

In my war

pilots flew tankers over rainforests and rice

fields, painting Vietnam's countryside orange.

Tac-Air jelly-gased villages and hamlets—

everyone and everything charcoaled black.

In the Pulitzer Prize photo, survivors make a run

for it along Highway 1. Five children. The girl in the mid-

dle shedding her skin—screaming her silent scream—

we called Napalm Girl.

Decades later

another prize-winning photograph

from the Forever Wars. Syrian refugees

capsized at sea. The 3-year-old boy drowned

and washed-up on a beach. Bright red tee.

Blue pants. Dark sneakers. Black hair
slicked back wet. If you hold the picture
at arms-length, you could believe he never
screamed—that it's merely a dead parrotfish
swept ashore.

Then, last week
video shots from Nightly News.
A Russian airstrike created rubble
from Mariupol's Symphony Hall.
The last scream heard six-hours
after the bombing. Ukraine's national
orchestra and 400 more as silent
as a rest note.

And just tonight
at the San Carlo in Naples—two sopranos sing
ancient war into opera. Ukraine's Monastyrskya
plays Aida and Gubanova from Russia is Amneris.
They embrace at curtain call. The audience screams
Pace, pace, pace.

I recall my visit
to Los Alamos. Life-size replicas of Little Boy
and Fat Man. Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuked flat
when blast waves sucked the air from a quarter-
million screams. The art of wiping
a canvas clean.

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