

Terry Graff's Warbirds: An Ornithological Tour de Force

The recent work of Canadian artist Terry Graff focuses on hybridizations of nature and technology; more specifically, on the fusion of birds with war machinery and combat weaponry in a black comedy of nature fighting back. To date, Graff's Warbird series numbers over 700 works of art in a variety of media - drawings, paintings, collages, assemblages, and sculpture. When completed, it will consist of a battalion of 1,000 works, and will be presented in a large-scale installation.



Out of the Mouths of Babes



Wounded Warbird

The subject of war and its culture has been an integral and consistent, if not dominant and inevitable, characteristic of the human condition throughout the history of civilization. In the visual arts, it was most commonly represented as a heroic enterprise before Goya (1746-1828) depicted its unspeakable horrors. Following Goya's lead, in the twentieth century Otto Dix (1891-1969) expressed

the dark and ghoulish brutality of war with a bold graphic honesty.



Bird and Bomb

The relationship between birds and war is not a far stretch. Resonating at a primal archetypal level, predator birds have a long history of being associated with war and militaristic nations that extends back to ancient times. In particular, for many different cultures across thousands of years, the eagle is considered a universal



Whirlybirds

symbol of authority and might. Further, birds have been used in actual warfare in a variety of ways beyond the deployment of pigeons to send important messages across enemy lines. In fact, they have been used as weapons of mass destruction and whole cities



Warbird 17

have been destroyed by flocks of birds. Under the direction of the medieval King of Norway, Harald Hardrada ("hard ruler"), resinous wood smeared with wax and brimstone was attached to the backs of birds and then set alight. When the birds were released, they would immediately return to their nests in the thatched roofs of



Warbird in Afghanistan

buildings located inside walled cities and ignited an inferno. In more modern times, birds have been equipped with surveillance cameras for the purpose of spying on enemies, and have been used by the military to carry bombs or explosives or for suicide missions.

In the tradition of George Orwell, who used animals to satirize the human predicament and expose issues of injustice, exploitation and inequality in society, Graff uses birds of all shapes, sizes and species and transforms them into lethal mechanized killing machines.



Warbird Fighting Inner Demons

Terry Graff has maintained an active studio practice since 1975. The recipient of major sculpture commissions, acquisitions, grants, and awards, his work has been presented regionally, nationally, and internationally, and includes mixed media drawings, paintings, collages, assemblages, sculpture, kinetic works, and multi-media installations. In the 1970s, Graff began fusing images of ducks with machinery as a visual



Primal Scream

expression of the process of becoming modified or transformed for survival in a dystopian world.

Over the years, he has continued to employ dark humour to draw attention to serious social, political and environmental issues, creating a wide range of "Eco-Deco" works:

"ornithotronic" constructions and sculpture,

robotic duck decoys, mechanical simulations of wetland environments and other ecological

systems, and futuristic, post-apocalyptic aviaries that often include quirky visual source material

from his childhood encoded or embedded with cultural constructions of nature and that reference old-fashioned shooting galleries and pinball machines. The Warbird series is an extension of the artist's life-long vision.

Born in Cambridge (Galt), Ontario, Canada, Graff studied Fine Art at the Doon School of Fine Arts, Doon, Ontario, and Fanshawe College of Applied Arts and Technology, London, Ontario. He received a B.A. in Fine Art from the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, and a B.Ed



Veteran's Day

in Visual Arts from the University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario. He also studied art history, philosophy of art, media arts, and art education at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, received a postgraduate diploma in Fine Art (M.F.A. equivalent) from the Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, the

Netherlands, and holds a M.A. in Art Education from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia (Thesis: Art and Ecological Vision).

Along with his intensive studio practice, Graff has had a distinguished career as a curator, art educator, art writer, and gallery director. He has served as director of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, the Mendel Art Gallery, Rodman Hall Arts Centre, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, and Struts Gallery. He has curated over 200 exhibitions, authored numerous articles, catalogues, and books on both contemporary and historical art, and taught drawing and sculpture at Mount Allison University. As a tireless advocate for the importance of art in people's lives and as an essential ingredient for the health and well-being of communities, Graff has served as a

volunteer on numerous committees and boards in support of cultural activity. He has provided public service as a consultant and arts juror at regional and national levels, and has supported countless artists in a variety of capacities. In recognition of his various cultural contributions



War Cry

across Canada, he has received many awards and honours, including the Fanshawe College Distinguished Alumni Award; The Commemorative Medal for the Centennial of Saskatchewan (Official Honour of the Crown recognizing individuals who have made a significant contribution to the Province of Saskatchewan); the Christina Sabat Award for Art Criticism in Atlantic Canada sponsored by the Sheila Hugh MacKay Foundation; and two eagle feathers from the Mi'kmaq First Nation for his work in promoting the art of First Nations artists.

TERRY GRAFF is a full-time professional working artist who has maintained an active studio practice since 1975. See Terry Graff's work at: <https://www.facebook.com/terry.graff.14>