

This work is a response to «Der Krieg» (“The War”) – a set of 50 prints created by the German artist Otto Dix in 1924.

Dix had served in the German army in the First World War, and these works capture some of the scenes he confronted as a soldier.

Of the 50 images in the set, this work responds to seven, which are listed through the composition:

- I) *Bei Langemarck (Februar 1918)* [Near Langemarck (February 1918)]
- II) *Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor* [Shock Troops Advance under Gas]
- III) *Essenholer bei Pilkem* [Ration Carrying near Pilkem]
- IV) *Zerfallender Kampfgraben* [Disintegrating Trench]
- V) *Gesehen am Steilhang von Cléry-sur-Somme* [Seen on the Escarpment at Cléry-sur-Somme]
- VI) *Abend in der Wijtschaete-Ebene (November 1917)* [Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain (November 1917)]
- VII) *Nächtliche Begegnung mit einem Irrsinnigen* [Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic]

Many of these images are reflections on the landscape – littered with broken trees, other wood and remnants of bodies. With the exception of *Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor* [Shock Troops Advance under Gas] there is very little ‘action’ – no charges or hand-to-hand combat – but a stillness, perhaps a feeling of the liminal – of being outside of time.

While this composition draws stimulus from Dix’s work, it brings together many ideas and echoes. These include the First World War accounts of Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Fredrick Manning, the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg, the Times History of the War (my family had this 22-volume edition, published between 1914 and 1920), and many visits to the Australian War Memorial.

As the work developed, other sources found a way into the score. In the sketch-book where some of the ‘working-out’ was done, I found I had adapted some of Haydn’s “Seven Last Words” for the St Paul’s Choir to sing on good Friday – the F-minor chord that appears every now and then comes from his setting of the text *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* ('My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?') Another reference that resonated as I was towards the end of this work was a passage of T.S.Elliot’s from “The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock” (written in England in 1915): *And indeed there will be a time... / Time for you and time for me, / And time for yet a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions...* "

Finally, this work is also strongly indebted to Helen Gifford. Helen has been a mentor and guide since my early teens, and I had the rewarding task of copying some of her works, including “Choral scenes: the Western Front, World War I” (1999).