



THE SECOND BATTLEFIELD:
NURSES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR
09/16/2014—01/04/2015



Fig. 1

“At first we could cope; then we were overwhelmed by their numbers. They came in the hundreds, from all directions; some able to walk, others crawling, dragging themselves along the ground.”

—

Florence Farmborough, Red Cross nurse with the Imperial Russian army at Gorlice on the Eastern Front



Fig. 2

Nursing played a crucial role during the First World War. Emergency medical practices evolved enormously during the war years (1914–1918) and thousands more medical workers were involved than in previous wars. New and innovative practices included blood transfusions, the use of antiseptics, local anesthetics, and painkillers. Throughout the War, membership in the American Red Cross grew from 17,000 to more than 20 million and 20,000 registered nurses were recruited for military service. In the United Kingdom, 38,000 members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment served in hospitals or worked as ambulance drivers and cooks.

Modern medical nursing finds its origins in the remarkable career of Florence Nightingale, the “ministering angel” and “lady with the lamp” who served day and night during the Crimean War (1853–1856). Her understanding of the importance of hygiene saved countless lives and set the stage for nursing as we know it today. Her model was followed and greatly expanded upon during the First World War by remarkable women such as Edith Cavell, who saved many lives from both sides of the conflict but ended up before a German firing squad; and the subversive motorbike-riding team of Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Knocker, who left their military medical stations to set up their own clinic closer to the front lines where they could save lives rather than simply provide transportation to the morgue. Similarly, novelist Mary Borden founded a field station that she called “the second battlefield” close to the front lines.



Fig. 3



Fig. 5



Fig. 4



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Most of the works shown in this exhibition were made in France, where wartime nursing proved complex. In the words of historian Christine Hallett, “military hospitals were staffed by a combination of religious nuns, a small number of trained nurses belonging to the army’s Service de Santé, military orderlies, Red Cross volunteer nurses, and women from overseas.” These nurses from various backgrounds and different levels of training were utterly unprepared to cope with the hundreds of thousands of injured soldiers who reached military hospitals following the outbreak of World War One. Florence Farmborough, a British-born Red Cross nurse with the Imperial Russian army, wrote of her experience at Gorlice on the Eastern Front, “At first we could cope; then we were overwhelmed by their numbers. They came in their hundreds, from all directions; some able to walk, others crawling, dragging themselves along the ground.”

As the works in this exhibition make clear, nurses were as likely to be depicted as heroic and sympathetic aids as they were to be depicted as brides of wounded soldiers. As Hallett has discussed, the struggle for professional recognition championed by many nurses can be understood as one aspect of the larger struggle for women’s rights. If we find evidence of this in the exhibition it is in the apparent professional distance between the nurses and their male patients that we see in some of the works, and in the remarkable portfolio of drawings by nurse Olga Bing (Fig. 13), who set down on paper the many specific tasks performed by nurses in military hospitals during the War. Occasionally nurses took on the sometimes deadly work of aiding the wounded from the battlefield, as seen in the anonymous lithograph showing the bombing of Reims (Fig. 9).

This exhibition is drawn primarily from a highly significant gift of more than 3,000 predominantly French WWI works donated to the Spencer Museum of Art by Professor Eric Gustav Carlson. This is one of several anticipated thematic selections from the Carlson gift.

Sources

Jean M. Cannon and Elizabeth L. Garver. *The World at War 1914-1918*. Austin, Texas (Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin), 2014.

Peter Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow. An Intimate History of the First World War*. Translated by Peter Graves. New York (Vintage Books), 2011.

Christine E. Hallett. *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War*. Oxford, England (Oxford University Press), 2014.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

All works are gifts of Professor Eric Gustav Carlson, unless otherwise noted.

René Georges Hermann-Paul, 1864–1940
Born Paris, France; died Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France, *L'Infirmière (The Nurse)*, 1914–1918, woodcut, pochoir, (cover image)

Artist Unknown
United States, *Join*, 1914–1918, woodcut, Gift of Thomas French in honor of Eric Gustav Carlson, (Fig. 1)

Eduardo García Benito, 1891–1981
born Valladolid, Spain, *Untitled*, 1915, graphite, watercolor, (Fig. 2)

René Georges Hermann-Paul, 1864–1940
Born Paris, France; died Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France, *Untitled*, 1914–1918, woodcut, pochoir, (Fig. 3)

Georges Paul Leroux, 1877–1957
born Paris, France; died Paris, France, *Untitled*, 1914–1915, etching, drypoint, (Fig. 4)



Fig. 12

Artist Unknown, United States, *Give!*, 1914–1918, woodcut, Gift of Thomas French in honor of Eric Gustav Carlson, (Fig. 5)

Pierre Abadie-Landel, 1896–1972
active France, *L'Infirmier Militaire (The Military Nurse) from L'Alphabet de L'Armée (The Army Alphabet)*, 1914–1918, line-block, pochoir, (Fig. 6)

Henri Jules Jean Geoffroy, 1853–1924
born Marennes, France; died Paris, France, *Untitled*, 1914–1918, color lithograph, (Fig. 7)

Henri Jules Jean Geoffroy (attributed to), 1853–1924, born Marennes, France; died Paris, France, *Ça fait tout de même drôle de n'avoir plus qu'une patte! (All the same, it's funny not to have more than one foot!)* From the series *Pro Patria*, 1915, lithograph, pochoir, (Fig. 8)

Artist Unknown, France, *Le Bombardement de la Cathédrale de Reims, admirable geste des femmes françaises (Bombardment of Reims Cathedral, admirable actions of French women)*, 1914, *La Grande Guerre (The Great War)* series, lithograph, pochoir, (Fig. 9)



Fig. 13

Georges Antoine Rochegrosse, 1859–1938
born Versailles, France; died Al-Biar, Algeria, *Untitled*, 1916, gouache, graphite on paper, (Fig. 10)

Manuel Feliú de Lemus, 1865–1922
born Barcelona, Spain; died Paris, France, *Les Sublimes (Exalt Them)*, 1915, collotype reproduction of a drawing, (Fig. 11)

Eduardo García Benito, 1891–1981
born Valladolid, Spain, *La Coeur de l'Amerique (The Heart of America)*, 1917–1918, line-block, pochoir, (Fig. 12)

Olga Bing, dates unknown
active France, *Gestes d'Infirmières, Croquis 1916–1917 (Nurses Activities, Sketches 1916–1917)*, 1917, 25 collotypes reproducing drawings, (Fig. 13)

Georges Paul Leroux, 1877–1957
born Paris, France; died Paris, France, *Untitled*, 1914–1918, watercolor, pastel on paper, (Fig. 14)



Fig. 14

Charles Dominique Fouqueray, 1869–1956
born Le Mans, France; died Paris, France, *A la mémoire de mon fils Jean tué a Sailly-Saillisel le 21 octo. 1916 (In memory of my son Jean killed at Sailly-Saillisel on October 21, 1916)*, 1916 or later, etching, aquatint

Louis Jou, 1881–1968
born Barcelona, Spain; died Les Baux-de-Provence, France, *Ceux qui on fait le miracle (The miracle workers)*, 1914–1918, etching

Untitled, 1914–1918, etching

Charles Lucien Léandre, 1862–1934
born Champsecret, France; died Paris, France, *La Grande journée de France (France's Great Day)*, 1916, lithograph, chine-collé

Suzanne Marie Sesboué, 1894–1927
born Mortain, France, *Aidez-vous les uns les autres. (Help one another.)*, 1915, pochoir, lithograph,

Artist Unknown, France, *Hôpital auxiliaires Salle Galliens (Auxiliary Hospital, Galliens Room)*, March 31, 1917, pastel



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