



2016

ART AT THE FRONT: Visual encounters by the Russian artist-veterans of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945.

The years of 1941–45 became the most tragic in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. Every day takes us further away from those times and there are fewer surviving witnesses left among us. However, the visual wartime records have been preserved in the drawings of the artists who had to become combatants and went through the war with a rifle and a pencil, fought for their lives in besieged Leningrad, but remained faithful to their artistic endeavours and continued to draw.

The exhibition shows selected works by Russian artist-veterans of the Great Patriotic War – direct participants in the battle of Berlin, the opening of the Road of Life, the liberation of Leningrad; and the key events on the Kalinin front, the Battle of Kursk and the Warsaw operation.

Here one can see visual memories of the war in life sketches created in the rare lulls between battles, scenes in the hospitals, in the dugouts, on the streets and in the homes of inhabitants in the dying cities. There are also portraits of combatants and civilians, for many of whom they became the last records.

The Second World War took the lives of over 70 million people. Of these the Soviet Union suffered the most significant human losses: more than 27 million people, including almost a million Leningraders who died during the 900-day siege of the city.

Artistic records that are often created spontaneously, and with exceptional speed, transmit the sincerity and emotional depth of the experience. These works are of unique documentary and cultural value, as they constitute a private, personal history of the Second World War, outside any official propaganda, being accessible to a wide audience without division into the national language and culture.

The exhibition is being held for the first time in London and presents works by three professional Russian artists, whose skills can be compared to British artists such as Augustus Edwin John, William Orpen, Stanley Spencer and Eric Kennington.

It is dedicated to the memory of all those who died in the Second World War, in the name of peace, mutual understanding and art.

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Elena Oskarovna Marttila (b. 1923) – accomplished artist and member of the Saint Petersburg Union of Artists. She had just finished Art School of the All Russian Academy of Arts when war broke out in Russia. She lived through the hardest winter of 1941–42 in the besieged Leningrad, working as a nurse and helping to evacuate children, and continued her drawing.

After the war Elena worked as a theatre artist and taught in a number of art schools. She created a collection of cardboard etchings based on her sketches made during the war.

Self-portrait, 1942, "Confronting death".

Marttila E.O. Charcoal on paper. Made during the winter of 1941–2 in the besieged Leningrad.

Sergey Fedorovich Babkov (1920–1993) - acclaimed Russian artist and member of the War Artists Studio named after M.B. Grekov.

He fought as an artillerist in the years 1942–45 and took part in the legendary battles of Kursk and Berlin. Sergey finished the war with the title of Senior Lieutenant and received three orders and several medals. He created a series of unique sketches and watercolours of his



wartime impressions.

Self-Portrait, 1943, watercolour, Babkov S.F. Made during the preparations for the Battle of Kursk.



Pavel Ivanovich Afonin (1920–2011) – Honoured Architect of the Russian Federation, Professor of Architecture and artist.

He joined the front at the age of 21 as a sapper and went through to the end of the war, storming Berlin in May 1945. Pavel was awarded four orders and eighteen medals for his service and the courage he demonstrated in some of the most decisive battles, including the liberation of Leningrad,

Warsaw and Tallinn. He created over two hundred sketches and drawings during the war years.

Self-Portrait, 1942, pencil on paper,

*Afonin P.I. Made during training at the
Military Academy named after M.V.
Frunze.*