

UP NOW

## 'War and Discontent'

Museum of Fine Arts

Boston

Through August 5

Tapping into a subject very much in the public consciousness, this exhibition is most compelling when it focuses on the visions of inferno that war has inspired. Curator Cheryl Brutvan's decision to in-

troduce images more broadly expressing discontent adds individually potent pieces but ultimately dilutes the show's intensity.

Horror and inhumanity unite the three anchors of the exhibition, all drawn from the museum's collection—Francisco de Goya's series of etchings "Disasters of War" (1810–23), Édouard Manet's *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1867), and Pablo Picasso's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1963). These artworks are riveting, not only as powerful indictments of aggression, but also as visual masterpieces.

Among the 17 contemporary works, Brutvan's most successful selections present conceptions of war that complement Goya's chiaroscuro scenes of torture, Manet's ethereal gunfire amid shadows, and Picasso's disjunctive depiction of cruelty. In *Napalm (II)*, painted in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam War, Leon Golub isolates two figures, their flesh burning, on a giant sheet of linen. This unadorned cloth backdrop removes all context, reflecting war's dismantling of life's natural order. Suara Welitoff's 2006 video *the song that makes you cry* transforms the movements of soldiers firing artillery in documentary footage into silent choreography, haunting and heart-breakingly poetic.

Elsewhere the themes of outrage and a desire for change dominate. *Black Gold II* (2006), Yinka Shonibare's wall-size splash of black paint enveloping islands of organic patterning, critiques the explosive geopolitical contest for oil. Phil Collins's almost-eight-hour video *they shoot horses* (2004) shows participants in a dance marathon in Ramallah, Palestine, a side of the subjects' lives rarely depicted in Western media. In the bleak open landscape of *The Deluge* (1969),

Philip Guston fuses his artistic and political disenchantment. Unfortunately, the individual punch of these pieces distracts from the central theme—that war is, indeed, hell. —Joanne Silver



Leon Golub, *Napalm (II)*, 1969, acrylic on linen, 114" x 176".  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.