Art in the Trenches: Unofficial Art of the First World War

Tim Clarke

Abstract
Abstract: Scholarship in recent decades focusing on soldier experiences of the First World War have largely ignored soldier-produced artworks as access points into the experience of modern warfare. Though there has been work on official war artists and post-war artworks of soldiers turned artists, artwork produced during service in a non-official capacity has only featured in art history, where the artwork and artists feature as subjects, rather than as sources for understanding their experiences that contextualize their work. This paper makes a historiographical case for exploring this source-base, while also analyzing several selected works from unofficial First World War artists.

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With the outbreak of the First World War Nash enlisted, albeit reluctantly, as a private for home service in the Second Battalion, a position which allowed him time to continue making art without too much interruption. In the summer of 1916, however, Nash began officer training and by February the following year was on the Western Front at the Ypres Salient as a second lieutenant in the Hampshire Regiment. A relatively quiet few months in the region spared him the full intensity of the Front, before he had to be airlifted back to London an invalid after falling into a trench. A few days later,...
difficult because they were dirty and flooded in bad weather. Many of the trenches also had pests living in the trenches including rats, lice, and frogs. Rats in particular were a problem and ate soldier’s food as well as the actual soldiers while they slept. Lice also caused a disease called Trench Fever that made the soldiers’ itch terribly and caused fever, headache, sore muscles, bones, and joints.