

# BUNDESKUNSTHALLE



Missing Sons  
8 November 2013 – 23 February 2014

Media Conference: 7 November 2013, 11 a.m.

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## Exhibition Dates

Duration	8 November 2013 – 23 February 2013
Director	Rein Wolfs
Managing Director	Dr. Bernhard Spies
Curator	Prof. Jay Winter
Exhibition Manager	Dr. Angelica C. Francke Dr. Wolfger Stumpfe
Head of Corporate Communications/ Press Officer	Sven Bergmann
Opening Hours	Tuesday and Wednesday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Public Holidays: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Closed on Mondays
Admission <i>1914 and Missing Sons</i> standard / reduced / family ticket Happy Hour-Ticket	€ 10 / € 6.50 / € 16 € 6 Tuesday and Wednesday: 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday: 5 to 7 p.m. (for individuals only)
Advance Ticket Sales standard / reduced / family ticket	€ 11.90 / € 7.90 / € 19.90 inclusive public transport ticket (VRS) € 11.90 / € 7.90 / € 19.90 inclusive public transport ticket (VRS) on <a href="http://www.bonnticket.de">www.bonnticket.de</a> ticket hotline: T +49 228 502010
Admission for all Exhibitions standard / reduced / family ticket	€ 16 / € 11 / € 26.50
Guided Group Tours information and registration	T +49 228 9171–243 F +49 228 9171–244 <a href="mailto:kunstvermittlung@bundeskunsthalle.de">kunstvermittlung@bundeskunsthalle.de</a>
Public Transport	Underground lines 16, 63, 66 and bus lines 610, 611 and 630 to Heussallee / Museumsmeile.



Parking	There is a car and coach park on Emil-Nolde-Straße behind the Art and Exhibition Hall. Navigation: Emil-Nolde-Straße 11, 53113 Bonn
Press Information (German / English)	<a href="http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de">www.bundeskunsthalle.de</a> For press files follow 'press'.
General Information (German / English)	T +49 228 9171-200 <a href="http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de">www.bundeskunsthalle.de</a>
Cultural Partner	WDR3
Cooperation Partner	Tourismus Flandern-Brüssel



## Information on the Exhibition

Taking its starting point in the First World War, the exhibition *Missing Sons* forges a link to the present. Photographs mark the cultural and historical turning point that brought death and bereavement to millions of people. All that remains of those who never returned home are names, engraved in long commemorative lists at memorial sites all over the world. How did people deal with loss, remembrance and grief? *Missing Sons* complements the exhibition *1914. The Avant-gardes at War* and addresses these very questions, not only in view of wars between nations but also with regard to dictatorships, civil war and the terror attack of 11 September 2001.

The presentation of some 80 photographic reprints will be complemented by five works of Käthe Kollwitz.

The exhibition is under the patronage of the German Federal President Joachim Gauck.



## Wall Quotations

The century of total war began in 1914 with an explosion of industrialized violence the world had never seen before. Of the ten million men who died in uniform, half have no known graves. War became more than a killing machine. It became a vanishing act. The primary reason was the overwhelming force of firepower, in particular artillery, which inflicted 80 percent of the injuries of war and obliterated the bodies of the fallen.

Approximately three-quarters of the men killed were under 30 years of age and unmarried. Imagine the task that faced their parents. Many were simply listed as missing; that is, no one knew where they were. Even those identified were interred in cemeteries scattered across the globe. Most parents had no graves to visit.

Creating sites near home at which millions of parents could mourn was a daunting task. It overwhelmed the churches, and gave force to commemorative projects everywhere. It also set a precedent. Finding and marking the loss of missing sons has been the burden of families in all the civil wars and conflicts which followed. Remembering the missing is the signature act of the twentieth century.

### **War as a disappearing act, 1914–1918**

Seventy million men served in the Great War. One in eight died; these men formed a Lost Generation of men who joined up and then vanished. Verdun, in northern France is a place where we can see what this meant. There is an ossuary on the battlefield where the bones of nameless French and German soldiers lie so mingled together that no single body can be separated from the others.

The earth itself bore wounds that have not vanished. Unexploded ordnance is found every year by farmers tilling these fields. Soldiers fighting there between 1914 and 1918 saw sights no one had seen before – clouds of poison gas, aerial combat, tanks. They saw uncanny sights too – body parts scattered randomly, desecrations with which they had to live.

Finding the remains of the dead was virtually impossible under combat conditions. Static warfare ground the battlefields to dust or mud in Western Europe; mobile warfare and chaos in the east did the same. In Ottoman Turkey, the deportation of Armenians starting in 1915 made it impossible for the victims to bury their dead. There a whole nation vanished from its ancestral home, destroyed in the first genocide of the twentieth century.

### ***The Grand Illusion***

To many experts, Jean Renoir's 'The Grand Illusion' (1937) was the greatest war film of all time. Set primarily in a prisoner of war camp, it said everything that needed to be said about war without showing a single battle scene.

Maréchal and Rosenthal, played by Jean Gabin and Marcel Dalio, are two escaped French prisoners of war, on the run in rural Germany. They are taken in, protected, and cared for by a German farmer's widow, played by Dita Parlo. She



introduces her guests to photographs of the men in her family, not by their names, but by the battles in which they were killed. Her family table, now too big, is inhabited by the ghosts of her own personal lost generation. All she has is her little daughter Lotte.

### **Käthe Kollwitz**

Peter Kollwitz, the 18-year old younger son of the Berlin artist Käthe Kollwitz, was killed on 22 October 1914, 17 days after volunteering for military service and leaving home in Berlin. For the next 30 years, his mother, then aged 47, grieved for her son. His room became a memorial site, where Peter's birthday was celebrated.

It took her 18 years to design a public memorial for Peter, a sculpture for the military cemetery in Belgium where his body lay. Initially her idea was to form a single family circle in stone. Her early sketches show two parents holding their dead son; over time, the son became detached from the parents, and ultimately he disappeared. In 1932 the memorial was inaugurated in Belgium. Two granite figures, Käthe and Karl Kollwitz, on their knees, gaze out at the field of graves, including that of their son. The mother's arms are not extended, but wrapped around her own body, as are her husband's around his. The parents mourn for this 'flock of children', this ill-starred generation, whose elders could not prevent the disaster which had enveloped them.

### **Rudyard Kipling**

Rudyard Kipling, born in British India in 1865, was the greatest British poet of his generation. He wrote of Empire and of the ordinary soldiers who preserved it. His children's stories were known world-wide. In 1907 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. A staunch defender of the British cause in 1914, Kipling urged his son Jack to enlist, and after several failed medical examinations, Rudyard Kipling pulled strings to get him into uniform. He served in the Irish Guards and vanished in September 1915 during the Battle of Loos. He was aged 18. His body was never found. All that remained was his name.

Like Käthe Kollwitz, Rudyard Kipling was torn by grief for the loss of his son for the rest of his life. He joined the nascent Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission, and chose a phrase from the Apocrypha to mark the stone of remembrance in all such cemeteries. It reads: 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore' (*Ecclesiasticus* 44.14).

### **Spiritualism**

Since so many bodies simply vanished during the war, millions lived for years without confirmation that their sons or fathers had really died. The anxiety this uncertainty produced led many to turn to spiritualism for help.

Spiritualism was a set of practices enabling people to explore the existence of human personality after death and the possibility of communication with the dead. This kind of para-psychology catered for millions who, without a trace of their loved ones, found insufficient support from the conventional churches in their grief.



Alongside those who knew their sons had died, those still living in doubt came together in homes where they heard messages passed on by female mediums deemed able to capture and transmit messages from the dead. If radio waves could transmit messages, why could not the human mind? Some were charlatans; others true believers. The messages they delivered were almost always those of consolation and separation: we are well, we are with our fellow soldiers, the voices said, it is time for you to go on living.

### **Naming. 1914–1918**

Creating the war cemeteries of the 1914–18 war was an effort that spanned the globe. The dignity of an individual grave site restored the names of those who died from the terrifying chaos and anonymity of death in industrialized warfare. Many vanished into collective graves or into the soil in which they died. Naming took place on war memorials constructed on battlefields and in country villages and towns, thereby symbolically bringing home the dead to rest in the places and near the families for which they fought.

In recent years, new techniques have been used to retrieve the names and remains of soldiers of the Great War. At Fromelles, south of Lille, the remains of several hundred Australian soldiers were found as late as 2009, and identified through DNA links with their families. They were given individual burials in 2011 and 2012.

### **Disappearances 1939–2013**

The Nazi genocide wiped out the Jewish world of Eastern Europe and left only the names behind: names of families, of villages, of an entirely vanished world. That is why so many Holocaust monuments are dominated by names, lists of names which seem to go on forever.

After 1945, missing sons were mourned by their loved ones through lists of names which carried the moral force of Holocaust commemoration and took it in other directions.

The names of American soldiers who died in the Vietnam war are the only notation on the polished stone of Maya Lin's 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, aside from the reflected faces of those who come to touch them.

The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires are ordinary women, who from 1977 have continued to march with photos of their vanished children, 'disappeared' by the military regime in Argentina.

Half of those killed in the attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York vanished without trace. All that remains is their names.

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