



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Artists and War: Answers?

Michele Emmer

Leonardo, Volume 34, Number 1, February 2001, pp. 23-24 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/19611>

## SPECIAL SECTION INTRODUCTION

## Artists and War: Answers?

In May 1999, I wrote a short text on the war in Kosovo. The article was entitled “Only Bombs Are Intelligent?” and it was first published on-line in Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) and then printed in *Leonardo* [1]. In my article, I indicated concern for the war that was taking place in the center of Europe, 300 kilometers from Italy. Naturally we are always less worried about wars that take place far away from us; it is very human.

At the end of March 2000, I had organized my annual meeting on “Mathematics and Culture” in Venice. One of the invited speakers, film director Peter Greenaway from Great Britain, was delayed for many hours at the airport in Amsterdam because the Venice airport had been closed due to the passage of the military planes taking off on their bombing missions. Finally Greenaway did manage to arrive in the middle of the night, and he gave his fascinating presentation on mathematics and cinema at 11 P.M. [2].

In the article in LEA and *Leonardo*, I asked a few questions:

[T]here is one question worth asking: Do we believe that artists produce art, mathematicians mathematics, scientists science and soldiers war? Each one of us deals with our own specific field and should not waste time in discussion? Even seeing that our weapons of defense are so powerful? In recent years, much has been said about globalization and complexity. Now, in May 1999, we are faced by an enormously complex problem that is extremely difficult to solve while at the same time safeguarding all the people involved. And do we still have nothing to say? Since we are artists and scientists? This is not to suggest the absurd idea of creating the art of war, the aesthetics of war; nor is it out of a sense of guilt or to exorcise our fears. It is simply that in today's world there are artistic and scientific communities that are able to converse with the whole world, who have access to all the means of communication, who are responsible for educating entire generations of young people. Have we nothing to say in order to understand, to try to let tolerance and comprehension prevail? [3]

Roger Malina was immediately very interested in my article, and he proposed to forward it preliminarily to the members of the editorial board of *Leonardo*. The response was disappointing. No one answered, except one person who more or less said that the matter did not interest him much, due to the fact that Leonardo himself, the great Italian artist and scientist, had made projects of bombs. Leonardo in fact was the first person to think of fragmentation bombs.

Then some responses to the questions began to arrive, and *Leonardo* has decided to publish them. In this issue, the first two responses are published. Others will follow. Obviously these responses merely reflect the opinions of the authors.

And currently, in October 2000, the situation in the Yugoslav Republic is once again very tense. The elections for the new president of the Federal Republic, which unites Serbia and Montenegro, have been held. Those opposing outgoing president Slobodan Milosevic have declared the victory of their candidate, Vojislav Kostunica; the European Community, the international community, has confirmed that Milosevic has lost. The Yugoslav elections commission, instead, has declared that there must be a second ballot. Let us hope that violence does not break out again and that the results of the elections are accepted peacefully.

In other words, the problem I had raised before is obviously still of great topical interest.

I shall conclude this short note, by quoting, as I did in the previous article, an excerpt from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, 2:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

MICHELE EMMER  
Leonardo Editorial Advisor  
E-mail: <emmer@mat.uniroma1.it>

## References

1. M. Emmer, "Only Bombs Are Intelligent?" *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, 7, No. 5 (May 1999); reprinted in *Leonardo* 33, No. 2, 83–84 (2000).
2. M. Emmer, ed., *Mathematics and Culture* (Milan, Italy: Springer, 2000). (In Italian)
3. Emmer [1] pp. 83–84.