

Neither Great Nor Glorious

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Warburger

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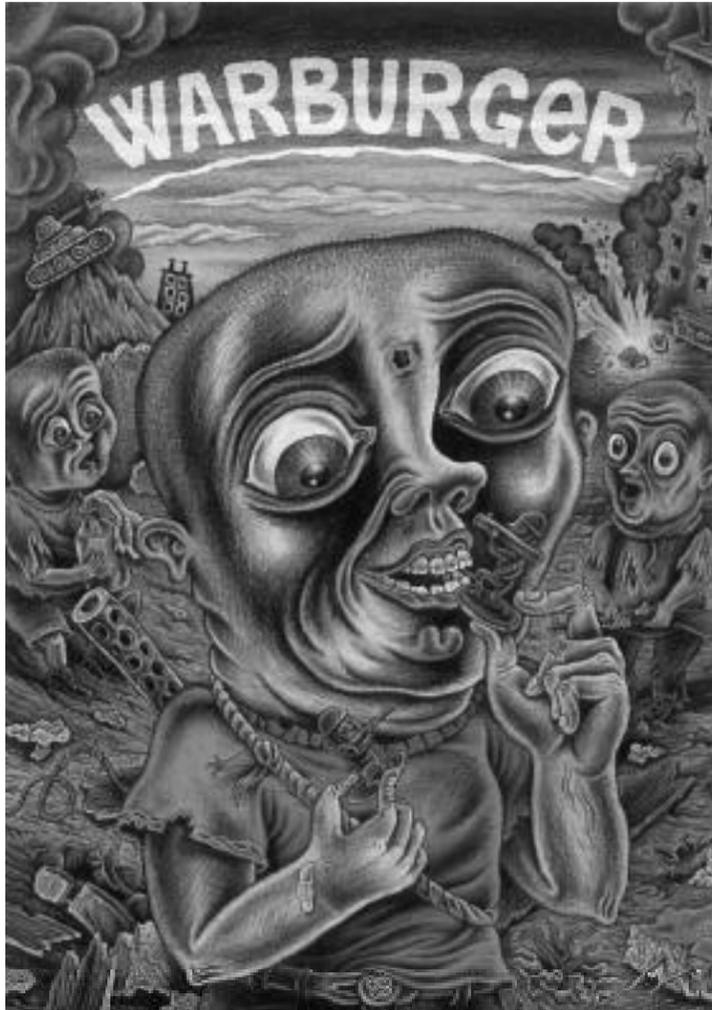
Somehow it seems fitting that the book launch should take place in such a cobbled warren, redolent of rich histories, painful mysteries. No gold plaque will ever say enough but people have to try to speak, to remember. Berlin seems suffused with atmosphere, charged; here in the Haus Schwarzenberg, Otto Weidt employed and protected blind and deaf Jews and non-Jews at his workshop on Rosenthaler Straße during the National Socialist era. By declaring the brushes and brooms he produced "vital for purposes of the military", he was able to protect his employees; his workshop hid Jewish citizens from their persecutors, a last refuge. Otto Weidt also saved many others from collective deportation including a family of four, hidden in a backroom of the workshop.

Night has fallen quickly and an illuminated abstract sculpture casts fine grotesque shadows. A corner doorway leads to a narrow staircase which belies a spacious interior; galleries are tucked away beyond a small bookshop: two rooms lined with pages and pages of original art. Voices on the walls. Artists from all over the world have contributed their time and energy to *Warburger*, a special issue from the Slovenian publisher *Stripburger*, supported by The Peace Institute of Ljubljana and the Ministry of Culture. It's a monster book, a marvellous piece of work. The exhibition forms part of the excellent Berliner Comic Festival; everyone is buzzing, tired yet energised, there's a feeling of relief that the book at 400 pages is finally printed.

Originally, an open call for submissions had appeared: to create a story on "the forgotten or overlooked aspects of war." Producing a contribution seems a distant memory as we return to the bookshop. This ante-chamber is filled with unusual artefacts of our butterfly culture. Books, records, comics, cds: strange stuff, not items easily found elsewhere, avant-garde, oddities, small press, low print runs, limited pressings; we've watched counter-culture shift to over-the-counter-culture then almost disappear as mass-marketed phenomena create an all-pervasive illusion of reality. It's hard not to feel that art or pop-culture are luxuries, especially when for some people poverty is a matter of life and death. What right do we have to write about war? Surely the best art or literature is born of experience? The lived experience fills a work with authenticity. From the relative safety and security of our western cultural standpoint it seems patronising to attempt to write about war, parked comfortably on our shiny largely white arse.

Parents and friends' parents remember World War II. Scribbled in a small black notebook, "Forgotten or overlooked aspects of war?" The blitzed Gorbals; anecdotes from arthritic aunts; refugees gang raped; startling how homosexuals and gypsies are so rarely mentioned when the Holocaust is remembered, Sergei Nabokov died after helping fellow internees; the narcotic Northern fields of France; the pain of alcoholism; soporific floral symbolism; 50 odd wars since '45; depleted Uranium shells tested in Scotland; faces perform pizza gymnastics. Hand-me-down stories rub together in memory and fail to ignite the silent page.

In writing about war an immediate recourse is satire, serious subjects often lurk beneath a jocose veneer: gallows humour, black humour, laughing in the face of adversity, daring to point out the foibles, peccadilloes of the rich and the powerful; laughing at ourselves and our neuroses, but not



discompassionately. There is an illustrious history of satirical literature and also of political cartooning, the inky power of a vicious trope.

A constant war we feel is waged on the little people, everywhere, in immeasurable ways. As the gulf between rich and poor widens, the size and number of barricades and barriers grows: access denied! It would be wrong not to write, not to make a story.

Capitalism's implosion will not be spectacular, rather it is already occurring as a gradual slow decay—rotting, degenerating. Consumer lust, trance and guilt coupled with a pathological denial. The rampant ego, blind to any possible alternative, terrified of change. A healthy culture



can only be nurtured by careful construction of an humane societal infrastructure within which people have meaningful roles, not jobs they hate.

Contemporary capitalism, advanced or corrupt, has installed a vast complex of corporate controlled machinery, breeding fear; fuelling a reactionary world view, helping maintain the illusion of progress. The intensification of capitalist competition and the intensification of imperial discipline. The status quo: a comfort zone or buffer heavily reliant on drugs and media stimuli, people reduced to obsessive compulsives, archetypes, far removed from any semblance of a natural state. Women are objectified, dehumanised, while objects are deified and ideas reified. Information supplants History. Corporations are under written by huge 'subsidies', whilst they play a game of tax avoidance. Our world's most powerful country, the biggest debtor. A secret war is waged daily on our very realities, cultures, diversity, tea-rooms. Hypothesised events of Easter Island are a synecdoche illustrating the dangers of a monoculture.

Anyone feeling remotely impotent or uncertain can take heart

and remember that although this constant war is on the forgotten people, the majority world; people have power and can change things: consume responsibly; buy kindly, mentally unpack products to explode their trade histories; slow down; value nature, knowledge gained through suffering over information, and human qualities over money.

"Forgotten or overlooked aspects of war."

Warburger is a necessarily dark yet beautiful book, passionate, containing a full gamut of emotions, and a variety of story treatments: from Peter Kuper's phallic political rage (he was criticised for depicting the presidential penis too large), to the gorgeous, gentle melancholy of Carol Swain's desert turned glass, animals trapped innocently beneath its stilled surface, and Knut Larsson's unspeakably touching *Zyclon Boy* who during the last hallucinatory moments in the gas chamber imagines he has superpowers and is able to fight to save others and avenge his mother's death.

In an age where pre-emptive war is tolerated and seen as a solution: what have we forgotten, why aren't the alarm bells ringing?

Stripburger have taken the time to put all the contributors online at: <http://www.ljudmila.org/stripcore/warburger/warburger1.htm>

<http://www.metaphrog.com>