

Media Release

Ben Quilty: after Afghanistan

The raw emotional and psychological journey of military service will soon be revealed through the eyes of Archibald Prize-winner Ben Quilty.

His powerful portraits depicting the realities of war and survival will be brought to Brisbane audiences in the Australian War Memorial's travelling exhibition *Ben Quilty: after Afghanistan*, on display at the Griffith University Art Gallery (GUAG) from 11 April.

Quilty was appointed as an official war artist by the Australian War Memorial in 2011 and deployed to Afghanistan to observe the Australians' activities in Kabul, Kandahar and Tarin Kot.

His task was to record and interpret the experiences of Australian servicemen and women who formed part of Operation Slipper.

Quilty says he was profoundly affected by his tour of Afghanistan, and after spending more than three weeks talking to, and hearing the experiences of, servicemen and women in Afghanistan, he felt an overwhelming need to tell their stories.

"Afghanistan is a very emotional place. It exposes the basics of humanity right there in your face: matters of life and death, the biggest themes an artist could ever imagine."

"I hope that when people walk into this exhibition they will get more of a sense of what is like to be in Afghanistan. Not what it looks like, but what it feels like. What it is like to survive an experience such as these Australians have been through," he said.

According to Naomi Evans, Acting Director at GUAG, the exhibition is true testament to Ben Quilty's insightfulness as an artist.

"These paintings reveal an empathetic and considered approach to portraiture, which privileges humanity and the absolute value of each personal life and experience within the controversial context of this war," she explained.

The exhibition presents portraits of soldiers that Quilty met during his tour, including Air Commodore John Oddie, former Deputy Commander of Joint Task Force 633 in the Middle East Area of Operations.

"Ben exposes the unvarnished, visceral experiences of military service and confronts the subject with previously deniable truths – a critical step to reintegrating with family and society," said Oddie.

"By depicting through his art the raw emotion of military service, Ben is rekindling social understanding between the family, the warrior and a society that needs and wants to embrace the reality of military service."

Ben Quilty: after Afghanistan showcases 21 studio paintings, along with 16 works on paper sketched by the artist during his tour of Afghanistan in 2011.



Australian Government
Visual Arts and Craft Strategy
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Quilty's works continue a distinguished tradition of appointing official war artists, a practice established during the First World War.

Will Dyson became the first official war artist in 1917, and he was followed by George Lambert and Arthur Streeton. Since then, official war artists have included Ivor Hele, William Dargie, Stella Bowen, and – more recently – Jon Cattapan, eX de Medici, Shaun Gladwell, and Lyndell Brown and Charles Green.

[Ben Quilty](#) is a renowned Australian artist and the winner of the 2011 Archibald Prize. He has been recognised with numerous other awards, scholarships, and residencies in Australia and overseas. In November 2012 he was appointed a trustee to the Art Gallery of New South Wales Trust.

Ben Quilty: after Afghanistan is on display at **Griffith University Art Gallery, South Bank** from **11 April until 7 June 2014**. The gallery is open from 10am – 4pm, Tuesday to Saturday.

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IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



Troy Park, after Afghanistan
painted in Robertson, New South Wales, 2012
oil on linen, 190 x 140 cm
collection of the artist
OL00628.009



Captain S, after Afghanistan
painted in Robertson, New South Wales, 2012
oil on linen, 140 x 190 cm
acquired under the official art scheme in 2012
ART94524

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