

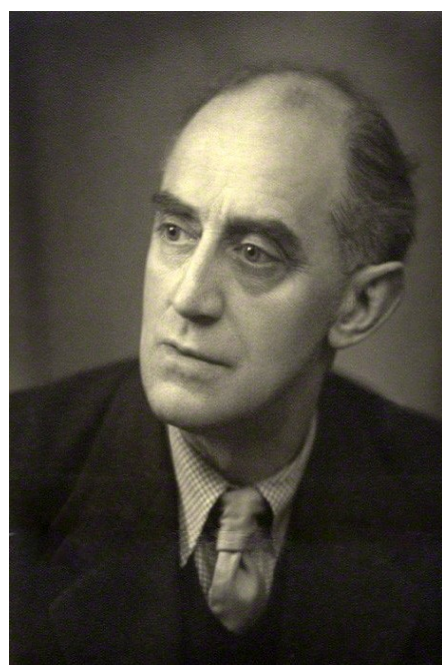
John & Paul Nash

John and Paul Nash were painters, brothers and official war artists commissioned during the First World War. World War I brought about the possibility of death, brutality and destruction, with new machinery of war. In the art world, it created an openness to abstraction and surrealism.

Paul was educated at St Paul's School in London and later Paul attended the Slade School of Fine Art, from 1910 to 1911. At the time, The Slade was considered much more modern than the Royal Academy of Arts. He struggled with figure drawing and concentrated on landscape painting instead, using his time to socialise with other artists such as Ben Nicholson, Stanley Spencer, Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington and Christopher R. W. Nevinson.



Paul Nash in his studio (above and below, left)
Paul's brother John Nash (below, right)



Paul Nash



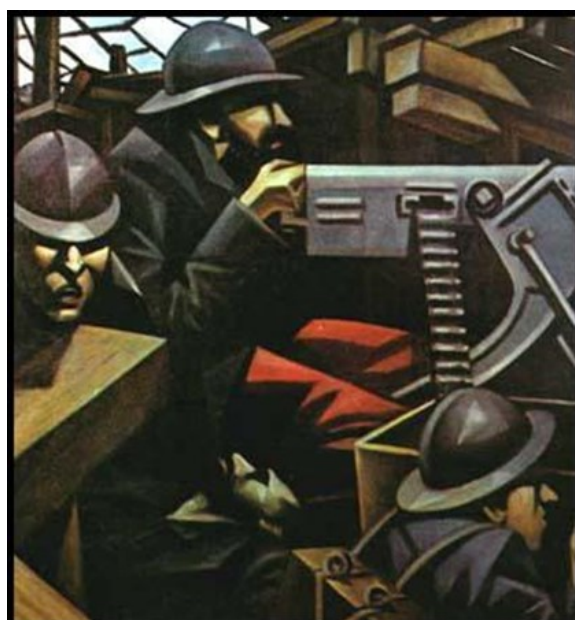
Gloucester Landscape, 1914, John Nash



The Summer Garden, 1914, Paul Nash



B. Nicholson 1894-1982



R. Nevinson 1889-1946



Dora Carrington 1893-1932

The First World War

In 1914, shortly after the start of the war, Paul reluctantly enlisted in the Artists' Rifles (pictured below).

Paul was a commissioned officer, who was sent to the Western Front in late February 1917 and took part in the offensive at Ypres. Paul arrived at the Ypres Salient at an unusually quiet time. At twilight, as he patrolled the trenches, he had time to absorb the strange beauty of the battlefield landscape. In late May of the same year, he broke his ribs and was invalided home.

Having returned home, Paul's exhibition at the Leicester Galleries of fifty-six pieces of work – five oil paintings, five lithographs and numerous sketches on brown paper – was well-received. He returned to the Western Front in November 1917 as an official war artist, with a servant and personal chauffeur, allowing him to dodge artillery shells and access the trenches more safely, thus his experience of the war was much 'softer', he was noting down and sketching events that he witnessed. It was very unusual for a soldier to have such a level of service during the war.

John attended Wellington College and was not formally trained as an artist, and his experience of the war was much rougher than Paul's. John never became a commissioned officer, as he was an experienced soldier and a skilled machine gunner, training people in machine guns and mortars.



Sketch by Paul of a shell exploding from the spring of 1917; he based his paintings on similar sketches.



A poster advertising Paul's exhibition at the Leicester Galleries



A photograph of soldiers in the Artists' Rifles, a group of artistically keen soldiers who still wanted to participate in the war, which Paul enrolled into in 1914.

Over the Top

John Nash, 1918

Over the Top is a 1918 oil-on-canvas painting by John Nash, one of very few officially commissioned works, commemorating the 1st Artists' Rifles counterattack near Marcoing on the morning of 30th December 1917. He experienced the attack first-hand and recalled it as such: "It was in fact pure murder and I was lucky



to escape untouched." On the left, a red earth duckboard-lined trench, which John chose to depict not as a neatly engineered line but as a gash in the wounded earth, zig-zagging and gouging the winter landscape, stretches away from the viewer. A group of soldiers clamber from the trench into a snow-covered landscape, going 'over the top', with two already lying dead in the trench and another fallen with his face down in the snow. Those who have survived walk forwards to their fate without looking back, beneath a grey, stormy sky, with billowing clouds created by shell and gunfire in the distance. The legs of a soldier in the bottom right of the painting suggest something that many soldiers of the First World War experienced: how "cheap" their lives were deemed to be. The painting is



This photograph from 1916 shows the awful state of the trenches—muddy, wet and full of disease.



A photograph from 1917 of soldier going 'over the top' - a very dangerous yet brave thing to do.

a critique of the lack of strategic thinking and organisation in the trenches, with the only answer to the mechanized war being to throw more and more men at the machines. Two studies held by the Imperial War Museum show the carefully balanced composition, with each quarter of the painting depicting a separate violent aspect of the war.



The Counter Attack - A watercolour, pencil and ink study produced by John Nash.

The Menin Road

Paul Nash, 1919

The Menin Road is a large oil painting by Paul Nash commissioned in April 1918 by the British War Memorials Committee that depicts a First World

War battlefield, intended for display at the national Hall of Remembrance, which was never built. The building was to be designed to accommodate a series of paintings based upon the dimensions of the large triptych, *The Battle of San Romano* by Paolo Uccello. Paul started this painting in June 1918, working in a herb drying shed, in which his brother John was working at the same time on his own painting, *Over the Top*. The work presents a devastated battlefield with rain-filled shell-holes after the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, with the trenches flooded, the "black dying trees", as Paul described them. The shattered apocalyptic sky is lit by unearthly beams of light. Two figures at the centre of the painting make their way along a tree-lined Menin Road. The foreground is filled with concrete blocks, barbed wire and corrugated iron. In this work, Nash has combined his graphic ability with highly developed design, by spreading the composition all over the canvas, creating an anti-hierarchy, where the corners contain some of the most important and hideous images in the narrative, and using a colour scheme similar to that of Flemish tapestry and *The Battle of San Romano*.



A photograph of the area depicted in Paul Nash's painting *The Menin Road*

