CIVILIAN LANDSCAPE: AN ECOCRITICAL EXAMINATION OF HORACE PIPPIN’S DEPICTIONS OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

Horace Pippin (1888-1946) was a self-taught American artist who served in World War I. While he used art as a therapeutic outlet to process the horrors of war, his work also served as documentation of the environmental scars that were enacted upon the landscape. This paper will examine his war paintings through an ecocritical lens using Pippin’s style, technique, and subject to argue that the artist overlaid his personal war experiences onto his images of battlefields. The resulting perspective will connect the marks left on nature by military techniques with the artistic marks Pippin enacted on his canvases, one mirroring the other. This is specifically noted through the metaphorical and physical scar of trench warfare on the environment, which I argue Pippin emphasized in his painted scenes. I will then compliment this physical scarring with an examination of the therapeutic role painting played for Pippin in processing the emotional scars of war that continued to plague him well after the ceasefire. In this thesis, I will examine Pippin’s style, method, and subject matter, while considering both preliminary sketches and finished paintings. This study of Pippin’s work will culminate with the painting *The Ending of the War, Starting Home* completed in approximately 1933. It visually represents the moment of German surrender in dark, muted tones with stark brush strokes. The layering of paint and carved frame create a sculptural effect, and it is these marks fashioned by the layered brushwork that mirror the trench scars. Ultimately, this painting stands as one of the strongest examples of Pippin’s work to be considered with an ecocritical perspective.
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CHAPTER 1

PIPPIN'S MEMOIRS: VISUAL SCARRING IN DIARY SKETCHES

Horace Pippin is an artist who may be seen through a number of different lenses with the most prominent being as an African American, self-taught painter. Significantly too, however, Pippin was a soldier, and it was his experience in the military that would set the stage for his artistic career. Serving during World War I (1914-1919), Pippin documented his wartime encounters in written memoirs containing original sketches. Upon his return home, Pippin translated these sketches and his recollections into oil paintings. The act of painting served as a form of therapy for Pippin, helping him process what he saw and recover from his haunting memories. The paintings themselves operate as visual memoirs to the war documenting not only the tragedies of the people, but also the tragedies of the environment.

Ecocritical art history is a recently introduced method of study and a contemporary theoretical framework, so Pippin would not have identified his paintings from this perspective. Yet, as a modern historian, I plan to examine his paintings through this framework to better understand how Pippin overlaid his wartime experiences onto his depicted landscapes. The resulting ecocritical perspective will connect these incidents through the mirroring of marks left on the landscape by military techniques with the artistic marks he enacted on his canvases. This is specifically noted through the metaphorical and physical scar of trench warfare on the environment, which Pippin emphasized in his painted landscapes. This examination will then consider these
environmental scars in parallel to the emotional trauma Pippin endured and processed through paint. This therapeutic analysis compliments the ecocritical study of environmental destruction because Pippin’s work displays the scar of the landscape, while healing the invisible scars Pippin carried. Ultimately, the layered paint and muted colors in Pippin’s paintings directly reflect the war-ravaged landscape he encountered.

Art was not a major aspect of Pippin’s early life, yet, his time as a soldier brought about significant changes that guided him to an artistic future. Pippin was born in 1888 in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and his family moved to Goshen, New York in 1891, where he pursued his education in a segregated schoolhouse. In 1902, Pippin left school to support his family, and in 1912, he moved to New Jersey to work for a moving-and-storage company, where he would remain until the war. While Pippin showed an early interest in art as a child, he was not afforded the opportunity to receive formal artistic training. The need to work and look after his family took precedent, and thus, art did not became a focal point of his life until he began teaching himself after the war. After being honorably discharged from the military, he settled back in West Chester with his wife, Jennie Featherstone Wade Giles. It was at this time that Pippin began his artistic career.

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ii Ibid, 3.

iii Ibid.

iv Ibid.
With the financial support of his disability check and his wife’s work as a laundress, he was finally able to engross himself in artistic practice.\textsuperscript{v}

Ultimately, his year at war is perhaps the most significant event of Pippin’s life, as it served as the foundation for the artistic pursuits that would remain steady until his death in 1946. After the United States joined the fray of World War I in 1917, Pippin enlisted with the Fifteenth Regiment of the New York National Guard, where he served as a corporal in what quickly became the 369\textsuperscript{th} Colored Infantry Regiment.\textsuperscript{vi} This regiment, known as the Harlem Hellfighters, operated on the front in cooperation with the French army.\textsuperscript{vii} Significantly, Pippin’s placement in this particular regiment greatly influenced his artistic subject matter considering that the Hellfighters spent approximately 191 days in the trenches, more than any other American regiment.\textsuperscript{viii} Thus, Pippin’s obsession with the trenches was cemented by the placement of his unit.

In the end, Pippin left the war upon being shot in the right shoulder. The resulting injury mostly paralyzed Pippin’s right arm, resulting in his painting technique using his left hand to prop up his right forearm.\textsuperscript{ix} After his injury, art became a form of therapy for

\textsuperscript{v} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{vi} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{viii} Ibid, xi.
\textsuperscript{ix} Stein, 5.
him, both emotionally and physically. He began by decorating cigar boxes and proceeded with burning images onto wood panels. It was these early processes that began to return strength to Pippin’s right hand. In this corporeal manner, art served as a form of physical therapy for Pippin prior to any consideration of emotional therapy.

In fact, in recent studies it has been found that visual art can help to assuage stress and anxiety in post-war patients, while also aiding in pain relief, enhancing the idea that art served as physical therapy for Pippin’s injured right arm. This is intriguing considering the role his arm played in his artmaking and his self-taught approach using one hand to control the other. In another correlation to Pippin, the research shows that “art with nature content has been found to be particularly beneficial for restoration from stress.” In this manner, one can better understand the incorporation of and focus on the environment and nature in his work.

The year Pippin spent at war is his most extensively documented. He created multiple illustrated sketchbook diaries during his time at war, and one particular journal,

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x Ibid, 4.


xiii Ibid. 377.
xiv Rodman. 7.
now located at the Smithsonian Institute, is composed of both written accounts and visual sketches. These accounts record the daily activities of Pippin and his regiment, detailing life in the trenches. The sketches illustrate the beginning of Pippin’s pictorial understanding of the war, and both are integral to understanding how he viewed the conflict. In the words of noted Pippin biographer Selden Rodman, the artist “was simply doing his duty as a citizen…He took the kind of pride in his outfit a professional ballplayer takes in his team…Soldiering was one of life’s burdens.” xv Pippin’s role as a soldier was simply another step forward in life, but he was able to advance this step by using his experience to propel his artistic career.

As a member of the Harlem Hellfighters, Pippin spent the majority of his time at war in the trenches. This was a unique situation in that the segregated forces were usually not permitted to serve on the front lines, more often being placed in the Service of Supply. xvi The segregated format of the military during this time would have only increased the horrors of Pippin’s war experience, but as the Hellfighters served under French command their treatment was much more civil. xvii On the Western Front, new technology and methods of warfare forced soldiers to burrow into the earth. xviii Both

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xv Ibid.

xvi Nelson, xi.


opposing forces dug trenches with No Man’s Land being designated as the space between the two.\textsuperscript{xix} The historian Chris Pearson comments on the environmental annihilation of World War I, identifying the resulting destruction from new weaponry that creates what he classifies as a “sterile” landscape.\textsuperscript{xx} Pearson argues that World War I was a war “fought in, through, and against nature,” identifying it as “the most intensive and destructive instance of environmental militarization in French history.”\textsuperscript{xxi} In this manner, Pearson recognizes how nature served as both ally and enemy through the use and movement of natural resources to fight the war.\textsuperscript{xxii} Overall, the landscape became a part of the war that was used, weaponized, and damaged, and it could not be escaped. The construction of the trenches stands as one of the most significant instances of environmental militarization, allowing Pippin’s visual depictions of the trench scars and environmental destruction to figure in his work in such a predominant manner.

The trenches appear extensively throughout Pippin’s war diaries, often accompanied by text. However, these visual and written memoirs serve as personal documentation rather than work created with an audience in mind. The diary reads as intimate accounts of his daily occurrences. Perhaps, as an early form of therapy, writing and sketching helped Pippin in the moment to comprehend his situation and continue in

\textsuperscript{xix} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{xx} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{xxi} Ibid, 92.
\textsuperscript{xxii} Ibid.
the trenches. In regard to the trenches themselves, he writes “it were a place that we all wonted to see…every Day you could hear some one say something a bout the old mudy trenches…be for I seen them I heard some bad news a bout them…but when I seen them. I said to my self, it not so bad as they say.” These initial impressions initiate Pippin’s captivation with the trenches. They were meaningful to him before he had laid eyes upon them, creating a motif that would encompass his art throughout his career.

In the diaries, the landscape and the environment progressively become more substantial throughout the images as Pippin spends more time traversing not only the trenches, but also No Man’s Land. The tone of his autobiography, however, does not immediately recognize the environmental damage, yet other snippets of his writings do. In fact, in an incomplete set of notebook fragments, Pippin describes the warzone as a hellish place, while recounting his faith in God to survive the war:

Ther were not one of them that did not look to his maker. To bring him thru his hird fight, all tho it were hird to do in that place to do Gods will. But we ded the best we could I ded not care what or wher I went, I ask God to help me, and he ded so. And that is the way I came thru that tirebell and hell place, for the houl intir batel feel were hell, so it were no place for any houmen been to be.

All quoted material from Pippin’s diary will be kept in its original format with the original spelling intact to keep the accuracy and tone of Pippin’s voice.


Ultimately, Pippin’s comparison of the “whole entire battlefield” to hell evokes a desolate, damaged, and frightening place. This is one of the written descriptions of the land that soon becomes evident in his pictorial accounts, both sketch and painting. In a manner, Pippin’s diary sketches served as not only observations of the war around him, but also reflections of his subconscious as he worked to process what he was witnessing. His writing above, correlating the battlefield to a place of eternal damnation, shows how Pippin acknowledged the destruction and death that was around him, but how it was not easy merely to observe. He notes how it was hard to get through the fight and do God’s will writing that at times he may have experienced a lack of faith. Ultimately, the war was difficult on Pippin’s mind, body, and faith, and drawing helped him surpass his obstacles.

Pippin’s war diary contains six preserved sketches, and each should be considered in its individual context. They demonstrate a variety of subjects pertaining to the war that raged around him, and the first is that of soldiers walking along a road (illustration 1). Here one is visually introduced to Pippin’s early days in the war. The trench does not figure as a predominant subject at this point in his memoir, however, because Pippin has not yet arrived at the trenches. He writes: “I could not lay down for I were to cold. I were

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xxvi Many scholars, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, suggest that Pippin created many sketches that are now lost and the six discussed in this paper are the only six remaining.
so cold that I were growing stiff. I started to Run. in that doeing I [made?] out all right by that time it were near day. A fwe stars were shineing. But we kept on, and on. This is correlated to the sketch, as we see soldiers marching on with a few red dots in the sky emulating visible stars. This image allows viewers to place Pippin in the context of the war, but because Pippin has not yet reached the trenches the hardships and horrors are not evident.

Pippin then transitions from figures to the landscape in the second sketch of a wooded environment, presumed to be Argonne Forest where Pippin’s regiment was stationed (illustration 2). In this scene, the landscape stands as the subject with no living being visible. Amidst the forest, man-made structures are discernible, perhaps serving as war shelters. Of particular note are the two broken trees in the middle ground. The one to the left is torn apart with jagged edges lying on the ground. To the right, the tree still stands, while the top of the trunk is broken and fallen to the ground. In this image, following the timeline of Pippin’s war experience, viewers are introduced to the damaged landscape of the war. Here one sees that Pippin was beginning to document the tragedies of the landscape, even if in a subtle manner.

Following these unassuming scenes, viewers are then introduced to the trenches (illustration 3). Beneath the drawing, Pippin writes “the Gas were strong, and all we could do were to waite.” In the scene, two soldiers are crouching in a trench behind barbed wire, holding rifles, and wearing gas masks. The trench is defined as a solid mass of dark gray. The edge is outlined by a slightly bolder and rugged line across the bottom of the shape, alluding to the three-dimensional depth of the trench. This three dimensionality is further defined by the manner that the soldiers fit beneath the threshold. Here, the trench appears as a dark scar across the page emerging as the image’s most

xxviii Ibid, 6. This is understood through his writing, where he mentions “then we went to the orgone” which the transcribers of the diary translate as Argonne.

xxix Ibid, 10.
Took 3 weeks. The last 2 were for it. It was tight and so well put up that it took some time to get there. At last we made it and were in a shell hole and got all the time and made it bad going for us. So we could not dwell long in the Dough and it all so were black from all the time we were out and did not see any thing out of the way, so we come back in the time, but it was yet raining the water was dripping off of us when we came in the Dough. We did not dare to make a fire and even strike a match. We lived so it were not the first time I went to bed and went up the same. The next night were not any better for we that night the weather part of it raised and I went to bed good; all went well until the morning.
predominant element. The dark abyss created by the solid, darkened linework enhances the fear and danger that the trenches and battlefields soon began to embody.

Following this introduction to the trench is an aerial battle over a wooded landscape (illustration 4). Again, one may presume that this wooded environment is Argonne Forest. In relation to the drawing, Pippin notes “as he got over the strip of seder he openup on the Germans plain and all at once. he were a fair and came down. to rise no more.”xxx This sketch visually demonstrates Pippin’s writing. In this image, the horizon line between the landscape and the sky stands as a stark line against the light page color, paralleling the line quality, composition and scenery seen in the previous image of the trench. Pippin was gradually expanding upon previous observations to further develop his sketches. The explosion in the sky is organic in shape, granting a natural quality to the man-made intrusion. Ultimately, this image correlates Pippin’s observations of the invasion of man on the environment with his visual imagery, upon which he was building in the previous images.

Pippin then advances the theme of the environment by combining man and landscape (illustration 5). In correlation with Pippin’s writing, this image is presumed to portray a march across No Man’s Land showing “at that time we were beyon the wair creeping close to the ground as posebel makeing for the old house not a sound were made but every seckend. we would look. for his deadley sweep of machine gun Bullets. Across

xxx Ibid, 14.
nomanland. we kept on goeing the shells were Birsteing fast, as we made the hill.”

Pippin demonstrates this campaign across No Man’s Land in a simple, yet organic manner. The individuals are miniature shadows as they march across the open landscape that overwhelms the tiny human figures in its massive scale. The destination is vague, perhaps the house Pippin mentions. The explosions repeat the organic forms from previous imagery. Here the orange shapes resemble large flowers blooming on the field, and the tree in the back right is flowing and curved, leaning away from the explosions and human interference. Ultimately, the tree is lifeless, lacking any leaves or color to suggest a living plant. This tree illustrates Pippin’s view of the landscape’s role as a civilian suffering at the hands of man, tilting away from the danger. The horizon is again clearly marked by a stark line, but this stark line is continued directly across the page, suggesting the trenches surrounding No Man’s Land. Standing out against the light color of the page, the trench appears as a scar cut on the otherwise empty landscape.

In the diary’s final image, Pippin’s drawing is void of all color (illustration 6). Beneath it he wrote “even at night, we could not travel without Beeing seen By the skyline.” The void created by the two masses of dark charcoal encompasses the miniature figures marching across the page. The individuals are mounded together and exist in the minor slit of light symbolizing the horizon. In this manner of color contrast, the skyline appears as the opposite of the trench line in previous images. Rather than the

xxxii Ibid, 21.
environmental scar being the dark line on the lightened landscape, here the scar appears as the light amidst the darkness. However, it is significant that this light, this scar, only exists in the presence of man, connecting that nature’s scars are closely tied to the intrusion of mankind.

In his writing, Pippin does not give any suggestion that he was horrified by the war. On the contrary, Pippin served because it was his duty and his writings and
drawings acted as his personal documentations of the desolation he witnessed as identified by Rodman:

These drawings reveal at once what the tight consciousness of the narrative, with its platitudes, its clichés and its traditional patriotism, manages most effectively to conceal. The war had been a shattering experience to Horace Pippin. He would not have admitted it. He may not have ‘known’ it. But the drawings, and to a far greater degree the war paintings that were to follow in twelve years, cannot be denied.\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

Ultimately, Pippin’s drawings served as an expression of his subconscious, an idea that furthers the previously discussed notion of art as therapeutic for Pippin. It became his outlet to process what he witnessed and to orient himself both in the war and its aftermath.

This expression of Pippin’s subconscious was elaborated upon in the artist’s war paintings, clarifying the war diary sketches by advancing the subject matter. The sketches may be seen as preliminary work for his war paintings, but without the aid of Pippin’s words, viewers must rely fully on the visual material supplied. Through this solely visual understanding, the environment becomes a central focus and theme, especially considering the desolation of the landscape at the hands of man and the physical scars left behind.

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\textsuperscript{xxxiv} Ibid, 10.
CHAPTER 2
WAR PAINTINGS: DEVELOPING THE SCAR IN PAINT

While Pippin’s private diary images were created when he was a soldier, he did not paint his first public war painting until over a decade after the ceasefire. Titled The End of the War, Starting Home (1933), this painting encompasses the motifs Pippin began exploring in his wartime diary, while fully memorializing the desolation of the landscape (illustration 7). Containing over ten years of thought, the piece shows how Pippin was grappling with the war’s aftereffects, particularly processing the physical and emotional destruction he observed, concerning both man and landscape. A combination of qualities including muted colors, organic shapes, and a main landscape subject that overpowers the figures, works in parallel with the sculptural effect employed to visualize the hellish battlefield that Pippin described. Specifically, this work serves as one of the strongest ecocritical depictions of the civilian landscape through Pippin’s style, technique, and subject. This is particularly evident in the metaphorical and physical scar of trench warfare visible on the canvas.

For Pippin, The End of the War, Starting Home was an entirely imagined scene. As previously mentioned, Pippin was injured while fighting in the trenches. In October of 1918, he was shot in the right shoulder by a German sniper. In his diary, he writes, “He let me have it, I went Down in the shell hole. he cliped my neck and got me throu my

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xxxv Stein, 3.
shoulder and right arm.”xxxvi He then continues to describe the seemingly endless time that he lay waiting for help. As a result of this injury, Pippin was recovering in a French hospital at the end of the war and would not have been a witness to the cease-fire when it took place on November 11, 1918.xxxvii This absence suggests that this scene would have been entirely constructed based on Pippin’s imagination, previous documentation, and memories to build a moment of victory enshrouded in an ash filled, dying landscape.

It is intriguing that the first war image Pippin produced focused on the end of the war that he could not witness. This is especially noteworthy when one considers the extensive amount of time and detail that he invested in the work, a fact that is evident in the unique stylistic elements that set it apart amidst Pippin’s oeuvre. According to art historian Judith Wilson, “Pippin claimed to have spent three years on The End of the War, applying ‘at least a hundred coats of paint.’”xxxviii The resulting artwork appears more as a bas relief sculpture than a traditional oil painting. This layering of paint gives the canvas a sculptural and dynamic appearance in comparison to his other works. The trees appear embossed, and one can clearly identify the raised edges formed by the paint with the wooden beams of a fence appearing to protrude from the canvas.

xxxvi Pippin, Horace Pippin’s Autobiography, First World War, Circa 1920s, 52-55.


xxxviii Ibid.
The time commitment and laborious addition of paint identifies this work as one of Pippin’s most important paintings. The artist said himself that he used art as a means to process what he experienced at war stating, “[World War I] brought out all the art in me.” xxxix In fact, as previously discussed, art, and especially The End of the War, Starting Home, may have served a greater therapeutic role for Pippin than previously thought. Historian Peter Nelson discusses the traumatizing effects of shell shock on World War I soldiers, identifying the neglectful treatment in which many were told to simply not think about the war or to create bright, colorful paintings. xl However, he notes that Pippin’s art, which confronted the events of World War I head on, may have helped him overcome the horrific past writing, “Horace Pippin came out the other side because in his journals and in his art, he directed his attention exactly and courageously toward the suffering.” xli Pippin directly counteracted instructions by using his art to openly address his memories, fears, and experience at war using muted, somber colors. Specifically, regarding The End of the War, Starting Home, it became more imperative for him to visualize it, perhaps because his injury prevented him from witnessing the end of the war. For Pippin the war had not ended, and as scholar Celeste-Marie Bernier argues, “the boundaries between his life as a soldier and his afterlife as a veteran were blurred.” xlii He could not escape his

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xxxix Stein, 3.

xl Nelson, 245.

xli Ibid.

memories, thus, *The End of the War, Starting Home* may have served as the closure Pippin required to leave the war in his past and start home, creating the two-subject concept of the painting’s given title.

The painted sculptural effects have been interpreted by scholars in various ways, but Bernier argues that “he seeks not to re-do but to reinforce the visual drama of his canvas via strategies of thematic and formal layering.” Through this reinforcement, the connotation of the embossed trees stands out ecocritically, highlighting their role as a symbol of the environmental decay that Pippin first observed with his inclusion of trees in his diary. They are one of the most notable aspects that have been “overpainted,” referring to the death of landscape that Pippin unknowingly observed.

The trees fully encompass the painting’s middle ground, dividing the foreground and background as an obscure block across the canvas. The surrendering German figures stand out against the dark gray of the forest in their light gray uniforms, emphasizing their surrender. The trees are all one lifeless shade of gray with the layers of paint granting them a three-dimensional depth. The branches possess no semblance of life, standing bare and stiff with the action and motion of the foreground and background lost amongst the forest. While the leafless details accurately represent the time of year when the ceasefire took place, they also metaphorically demonstrate the death of the landscape at the hands of war. The wooden beams in the foreground wrapped with barbed wire are

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xliii Ibid, 328.
the same shade of gray as the forest showing how nature was purposefully integrated into battlefields. Here nature was used as a direct, unwilling participant in mankind’s war.

This forest resembles the ones depicted in Pippin’s diary, particularly the wooded environment with no human life and the landscape under the dogfight (illustrations 2 and 4). The painted forest resembles the manner that the tree branches are shaped and stacked upon each other creating the dense and desolate environment destroyed by mankind. Both diary illustrations employ the minimal, muted color palettes that are recreated in *The End of the War, Starting Home*, while stressing landscape death through stylistic choices. In the diary, death is shown through not only the colors, but also the quick, rough linework of the pencil. On the contrary, in the painting death is shown through the extensive layering, thick lines, and dense space.

In representing the end of the war, Pippin depicts his regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters, in the role of victors. Each of the victorious soldiers is painted with dark skin, allowing Pippin to place his regiment at the moment of victory, witnessing the end of the war and claiming an integral role in its success. These soldiers are shown in visual alignment with the landscape with their uniforms shown in the same muted colors as the environment, to some context correlating the treacheries against the landscape with the treacheries imposed against the black soldiers both at war and at home.

Pippin’s portrayal of the victorious Hellfighters stands in strong contrast to the treatment they would have received considering the way the racially segregated US military system actually functioned during this period. As Nelson has argued, the black soldiers of America’s troops “went to war in defense of a country that did not defend
The racial tension in the United States was unwavering at the time with lynching, Jim Crow laws, and segregation occurring daily, yet black men enlisted and fought, although the mistreatment did not end in the military. During the war, black soldiers were most often working in the Service of Supply, meaning that rather than fighting on the front lines, they were building and unloading supplies. Therefore, the position of the Hellfighters on the front lines was a unique situation. The Hellfighters found great success on the battlefield, having never had a man taken prisoner, and never losing ground to opposing forces. However, their success did not grant them immunity from the negative treatment. After recounting a story about the violent treatment of a black soldier at the hands of his fellow white soldier, Nelson writes:

The leadership’s worst fears about the black soldiers had come true: their treatment by the French had indeed ‘spoiled them,’ to the extent that some of them seemed to have been temporarily blinded by a sense of solidarity with their fellow soldiers. They had forgotten what sort of treatment they’d left behind – and were returning to.

Pippin would have been no stranger to these treacheries imposed upon himself and his fellow black soldiers. Therefore, it is intriguing that in The End of the War, Starting Home, the black soldiers are one with the landscape. Upon first glance, they are not even visible, but with closer observation one will identify their darkened skin and earth toned

xliv Nelson, xi.
xliv Ibid.
xlvi Ibid, 204.
uniforms melding with the unnatural landscape of barbed wire wrapped beams, lifeless trees, and ash-covered atmosphere. These treacheries are then enhanced in that this is the only piece in which Pippin directly illustrates a black on white military confrontation.\textsuperscript{xlviii}

The landscape itself stands as one of the main subjects of the painting, dominating the figures. In the immediate foreground, Pippin privileges No Man’s Land and the trenches with figures emerging from the trench scars. In the middle and background, Pippin depicts the wooded landscape and an aerial battle similar to, but more extensive than, the dogfight image in the diary. In the latter, the dogfight overtakes the scene as the predominant subject, whereas in the former the dogfight has been minimized to a small third of the canvas. In the painting, the sky is overtaken by dense, dark, organic shapes symbolizing aerial combat that reminisce flowers in contrast to the lighter quality of the diary image. However, the simplified shapes and pops of color are significant to both. The planes and shapes stand out in their dark colors as intruders to the light sky, and one can imagine the ash falling across our vision.

This landscape overtaken by ash is enhanced by the muted color palette Pippin employed. Grays, browns, and blacks dominate the landscape; however, a few colors do stand out: the bright reds and oranges of the fires and explosions and the moments of green amidst the trenches. As Bernier notes, this “hyper-real use of color accentuates the unnaturalness of military spectacle enacted against the backdrop of the natural

\textsuperscript{xlviii} Bernier, 328.
landscape.”xlix Color is employed not only to depict the death and destruction, but also to comment on the invasion of man and man’s effect on the environment. War is not a natural occurrence, and it stands out against a natural, peaceful landscape destroyed by man.

Referring to the sculptural qualities of *The End of the War, Starting Home*, one must focus on the hand-carved casing of military objects surrounding it, as it is the only painting for which he created a specific frame.₁ These paraphernalia are symbolic of the new technologies and weapons that dominated World War I and took part in damaging the landscape. Landmines, grenades, chemical warfare, and tanks all took their own toll not only on the human casualties of war, but also on the environment. Here, Pippin presents viewers with weapons such as these, as well as military attire in a natural medium: carved out of the wooden frame. Ultimately, by creating military implements out of a natural material, the frame heightens the sense that the environment was a forgotten victim of the war.

Pippin began working with wood by using a hot iron rod to burn images into wood panels before painting became his main artistic pursuit.li In fact, Pippin’s neighbors would recollect his “whittling and crafting” hand-made picture frames. lii Viewers can see

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xlix Ibid, 323.

₁ Ibid, 328.

li Stein, 4.

lii Ibid.
his translation of this craft to his war painting by creating a wooden window to transport viewers to the hellish battlefield. The act of using, manipulating, and overall injuring the wood of the frame mirrors the environmental injury Pippin depicted in the canvas. Ultimately, the act of carving the weapons used against the environment into the natural material of wood greatly enhances the significance of the land’s destruction at the hands of man and war.

Referring back to the war, the carvings on the frame mirror objects described as trench art, i.e., work “made by soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians from the waste of industrialized war, and a host of miscellaneous materials.” Trench art objects could be made from shell cases, lighters, jugs, and other everyday materials the soldiers could access (illustration 8). These objects were created through intimate contact between the maker and the material, whittled by soldiers during their time in the trenches. As scholar Nicholas Saunders ascertains, in opposition to traditional painting that “represented the war at arms length, much Trench Art, especially of metal, was made from the waste of war itself.” The materiality of World War I encroached upon the environment, and trench art allowed soldiers to commemorate this materiality.


lv l Ibid.
As Pippin did not create the frame while in the trenches, it should not be classified as an example of trench art; however, as Pippin was most likely aware of the whittled objects, it can be presumed that he used them as source material, perhaps partaking in the craft himself as a soldier. The suggestion of trench art would enhance the environmental message because of the connection with trench art objects and the materiality of war. It is also imperative to note how Pippin brought a sensibility of trench craft to his recuperation process. *The End of the War, Starting Home* served as a curative piece for Pippin to process the war and its aftereffects, therefore, it is meaningful that he would return to a wartime craft while undergoing this personal therapy. The mirroring of these objects in the frame of *The End of the War, Starting Home* illuminates these miniature objects as echoes not only of soldier life, but also of the lives of military materials.

*The End of the War, Starting Home* served as the starting point of Pippin’s underlying environmental observations. He continued the scar motifs and environmental subjects in his later paintings, enhancing the ideas and evolving the elements away from war. The paintings to be considered include: *Dogfight Over the Trenches* (1935), *Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector* (1931), *The Barracks* (1945), and the non-war painting *The Getaway* (1939). These paintings continue the therapeutic process of art for Pippin by reevaluating stories seen in his diaries, while also continuing his motifs in non-war paintings. They all possess similar symbolism, styles, colors, and themes that connect them amidst Pippin’s commentary on man’s role in environmental destruction and the scars left behind.
Dogfight Over the Trenches combines a variety of imagery previously seen in Pippin’s diary (illustration 9). Specifically, one will note the inclusion of the air fight and the two soldiers in the trench. The dogfight has been significantly reduced in size in comparison to the diary. This detail is also included in The End of the War, Starting Home, showing that even when the air fight is a main focus of the work, the landscape surpasses as the predominant subject. However, the dogfight does maintain the organic shapes and dark color palette highlighted by subtle red hues. In contrast to the diary, the figures and the landscape are the main subject of this painting, engulfing the entire fore and middle ground. Between these two subjects, the figures are metaphorically and physically overwhelmed by the landscape in a similar manner to The End of the War, Starting Home. This painting illustrates how Pippin re-visited his diary as source material for his war paintings, while embodying the muted color palette that became integral to his work.

This recollection of the war diary is important as a connection between the war paintings. The inclusion of similar subjects and motifs emphasizes the themes that were carried across his oeuvre. For example, the inclusion of the dogfight shows that it must have been an integral and memorable aspect in the daily life of soldier Pippin. Constant aerial battles would intrude upon the landscape and scatter ash across the scene, a detail highlighted in The End of the War, Starting Home. Although, by diminishing the scale in both The End of the War, Starting Home and Dogfight Over the Trenches, Pippin is able to enhance the effects of war on the landscape. The battle in the air is minimal in comparison to the battle that is having a direct effect on the physical land. Returning to
his diary would also have played into the therapeutic process painting served for Pippin, allowing him to re-visit and relive the war moments that plagued him.

The figures in *Dogfight Over the Trenches* are visible only from the waist up because they are standing inside the trench, emphasizing its depth. Viewers see the entrance to the trench as it winds its way across the snow-covered field. The snaking line of the trench is mirrored in the background by the fence lines, emulating the scar of man’s effect on the environment. Man is mirrored in the environment through the helmets of the soldiers in what could be interpreted as the shell holes of No Man’s Land, where bombs left craters in the land. This line of shell holes follows the line of the scars, placing man directly in the middle of the wounds.
As Bernier discusses, the figures in *Dogfight Over the Trenches* are passive, observing the aerial battle rather than engaging in battle.\textsuperscript{iv} In this manner, Pippin is separating his regiment from the destruction in No Man’s Land, while acknowledging what he observed from the trenches. Bernier suggests that Pippin’s antiwar ideas denounced “the war as a locus of human destruction and existential nihilism.”\textsuperscript{lv} This destruction is clearly visible in the trench holes, explosions, and implication of death through a memorial cross prominently displayed in the front left corner.

*Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector* depicts a more intimate scene of man in the landscape, presumably illustrating the war landscape of the Champagne region in France. (illustration 10). Viewers see a member of Pippin’s regiment on the left and a German soldier on the right. Again, the figures are standing in a trench clearly marked by the dark gray fence, which is then mirrored further back by the barbed wire fence. Stark gray lines throughout this painting continue the motif of the trench scar. A few dark shadows representing men are also incorporated into the environment, showing how war and landscape became one in a manner similar to *The End of the War, Starting Home*.

Again, this painting appears more passive than *The End of the War, Starting Home*, evoking a more introspective context. From a therapy standpoint, this could represent how Pippin processed the violence of men against one another in *The End of*

\textsuperscript{iv} Bernier, 349.

\textsuperscript{lv} Ibid, 346.
the War, Starting Home, but was still interpreting what he saw around him in both Dogfight Over the Trenches and Outpost Raid: Champagne Sector, which both place the soldiers in observational roles.

On the contrary, The Barracks shifts the scene away from the battlefield, placing viewers into the more intimate setting of the soldiers’ quarters (illustration 11). There are four soldiers depicted, two lying down in their bunks and two sitting up. The color palette reflects the same muted tones visible in Pippin’s previous works. In fact, the minor appearances of red are a frequent motif used by Pippin. This continuation brings the deathly battlefield to a more personal context, connecting the soldier’s personal living quarters with the landscape. Here, the red is used to showcase the flame of the candle, connecting this painting to the use of red in The End of the War, Starting Home, where it was used to depict the organic explosions, combining war and the landscape into one entity. Fire exists in both settings but in different contexts. In The End of the War, Starting Home fire brings destruction, whereas in The Barracks fire brings light in the darkness.

Another significant aspect to consider is the inclusion of the shadows behind the two seated figures. In contrast to the darkened atmosphere, the shadows are depicted in a light gray color, allowing them to stand out against the back wall. In opposition to their respective figures, the shadows are not directly mimicking their position. Rather, the shadows loom over the figures, perpetually peering around their shoulders. The color of these shadows is then reflected in the soft ground where indentations mirror the trench.
holes that overtook No Man’s Land and the battlefields. This connection brings one back to the battlefield to show how the war never left the soldiers. In his diary, Pippin makes multiple references to the schedule in which they would get ten days of rest from the trenches.\textsuperscript{lvii} Perhaps, this painting is showing one of these few moments of rest, however, the connections with the previous paintings show that to Pippin the war never left the soldiers, even during break.

This painting is one of the few instances in which Pippin left a preliminary oil study (illustration 12).\textsuperscript{lviii} The closer, intimate space of the study and lack of unique details places viewers upon the main subjects with little identifying information, in contrast to the deeper sense of space and specific details created in the final composition. However, as Rodman notes, the sketch does not include many of the details previously mentioned that enhance the story and meaning of the painting. The study places viewers much closer to the soldiers, eliminating the foreground of the final painting, thus the connections with the battlefield were not yet clear. Although, the study does include the minor hints of red that connect it with Pippin’s other works. Overall, it is important to see how Pippin was processing his ideas and altering his works when he created his final paintings to better connect the battlefields and the destruction of the landscape. This process also illuminates how Pippin may have been using art to comprehend his

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\textsuperscript{lvii} Pippin, \textit{Horace Pippin’s Autobiography}.
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\textsuperscript{lviii} Rodman, 22.
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memories. The growth in subject matter and enhancement of battlefield connections show that certain memories and symbols began to take precedent.

The lasting effect of Pippin’s attention to nature is visible even in Pippin’s later works that do not appear to comment on the subject of war directly. Continuing away from the battlefield, *The Getaway* is no longer a scene of war (illustration 13). Here viewers are privileged to a scene of nature, yet the connections with Pippin’s images of war and the battlefield still resonate. The two main subjects are the fox and the landscape, which are united. The fox is running away from the only suggestion of man in the painting: buildings. Presumably, the fox has stolen from man invoking the need for a “getaway.” Thus, one is viewing nature escaping and evading man. While nature is not innocent here, it may be understood that man and nature are learning to coexist, a lesson previously explored in the war paintings, where Pippin highlighted the use of and damage
to nature that occurred during battle. More specifically, the fox is running directly alongside a scar on the landscape, however, here it is a river rather than a trench, but the theme continues.

The muted color palette of Pippin’s war scenes is continued with only two pops of color being the orange fox and the red barn. The dark, dense block of trees mirrors the treatment of trees throughout Pippin’s war scenes, highlighting a lifeless environment. In a manner, this painting is a response to the war paintings. Through war, Pippin has shown that the landscape suffers at the hands of man, and here he shows nature trying to escape man, continuing the ecocritical context visible throughout his work.
Another difference between *The Getaway* and the previous war paintings discussed is the reference material. While Pippin was using his own sketches and memories for reference material previously, here it may be presumed that Pippin was thinking of Winslow Homer’s painting *The Fox Hunt* from 1893 (illustration 14). *The Fox Hunt* has been in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts since 1893, therefore, it would have been present in Philadelphia during Pippin’s life. Homer’s painting depicts nature against nature with the crows looming threateningly over the fox as the fox tries to escape. It is intriguing that Pippin would take the work of a renowned American artist like Homer and alter it to comment on the original context. Pippin changed the perspective to suggest that man verse nature was the true battle, rather than the generally understood theme of the cruelty of nature in Homer’s work, by clearly identifying the presence of man in the context of this narrative. The landscape in Homer’s work serves as a mere background in contrast to Pippin’s landscape, standing as the subject alongside the fox. Homer did not include any significant marks on the landscape, yet Pippin carried over the scar motif. Ultimately, *The Getaway* illustrates how Pippin could not escape the destruction of the environment at the hands of man even when he was not depicting the war.

In the end, Pippin’s paintings embody the battle between man and nature showing how the landscape became an unidentified civilian during World War I. Through color, composition, and technique, one is able to notice how the war stayed with Pippin, and the landscape emerged as a prominent subject throughout his oeuvre. Working from direct
references including his personal diary sketches, memory, and imagination, Pippin brought the destructive realities of the war to the canvas, as did other artists of the time.
CHAPTER 3

EXAMINING PIPPIN ALONGSIDE OTHER SOLDIER ARTISTS

Pippin embraced the iconography of a scar on the landscape and conveyed it through his style, technique, and subject matter. During the war, the personal sketches kept in his journals show an early understanding of the desolation of the environment that he witnessed. A stark mark across the page is visible throughout the illustrations, as well as other suggestions of environmental injury including broken, dead trees and muted colors. Pippin then transferred this scarring to his war paintings where the landscape stands as a main subject alongside the figures. This transference of wartime experience to peacetime art allowed Pippin to therapeutically process not only the physical realities of war, but also the subconscious observations that plagued him during and after the war.

However, during World War I, Pippin was not the only soldier or artist documenting the war. While art and war have always been interconnected, World War I was, according to historian Alfred Emile Cornebise, “the first war in which systematic and copious use was made of artists and their talents.” For example, artists from multiple nations aided in arranging camouflage activities, developing propaganda, and documenting the war. Ultimately, the role of the artist became even more significant to the war effort when they became employed by the military. The United States began its


lix Ibid, 6-7.
artistic program after witnessing the success of their allies pursuing similar agendas.\textsuperscript{xi}

American artists were recruited or volunteered to help with camouflage, create target training images, design medals, and other such miscellaneous tasks.\textsuperscript{xiI} In the end, however, while war art was being created by a surplus of artists, only eight were directly employed by the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) to document the war.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

These artists were enlisted in and served as soldiers in the military.\textsuperscript{lxiv} They worked to document the realities of war, while fulfilling their duties as soldiers. However, it should be understood that, unlike Pippin, the work created by this team of artists was created through a particular lens under the patronage of the government. It should also be considered that these soldiers were white, and so their life in the military would have been vastly different than Pippin’s. As discussed in chapter two, the negative treatment of black soldiers did not end merely because they enlisted. However, the wartime experience of these artists as soldiers in the battlefield would have been similar to that of their black compatriots in the sense that it inevitably encompassed death, destruction, and horror.

\textsuperscript{xi} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{lxii} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{lxiii} Ibid, 10-12. These artists were: William James Aylward, Walter Jack Duncan, Harvey Thomas Dunn, George Matthews Harding, Wallace Morgan, Ernest Clifford Peixotto, J. André Smith, and Harry Everett Townsend.
\textsuperscript{lxiv} Ibid, 26.
According to the Smithsonian Institute where the collection of both Pippin’s war journals and the works of the AEF program are now housed, the government artists created more than seven hundred works ranging in subject matter from soldier life, combat, military technology, and “warscapes”. Warscapes, as defined by the Smithsonian, are landscape paintings that encompass the destruction and devastation of war. However, I would further extend this definition to specifically comment on and identify Pippin’s vivid depictions of war overtaking the landscape, where figures meld with the environment.

To begin, the warscapes demonstrate how the government artists were depicting the landscape without human intervention. A good example is Ernest Clifford Peixotto’s sketch titled No Man’s Land, Near Thiaucourt created in approximately 1917 to 1918 (illustration 15). In this warscape, viewers see a desolate, empty landscape. The sparse trees stand broken, twisted, and lifeless, reflecting the barrenness surrounding them. On either side of the road, there are barbed wire fences. The curves and spokes of the fence reflect the shape of the broken trees. As in Pippin’s work, this reflection of natural materials in use by the war instills the idea that the landscape served as an unspoken

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lxvi “Warscapes” is a term used by both Celeste-Marie Bernier and the Smithsonian Institute. Bernier uses it in Suffering and Sunset: World War I in the Art and Life of Horace Pippin to describe Pippin’s war paintings and the Smithsonian Institute uses it to describe the battlefield landscapes of the AEF artists in “Picturing World War I: America’s First Official War Artists, 1918-1919.
participant. Most dominantly, an empty road cuts across the page to recede into the background. This mark mimics the stark line of trenches in Pippin’s work, emulating the motif of a scar on the landscape. While the road is not a trench, it still exemplifies how man intervened in the environment. The scar fades back before blending in with the empty background.

In contrast to the clean and organized format of Peixotto’s image, Harvey Dunn’s No Man’s Land from 1918 not only depicts a warscape, but also captures the emotional reality of the decimated landscape (illustration 16). This sketch shows a vast survey of No Man’s Land and the death that emanated from the area. In contrast to Peixotto’s work, this piece shows desolation through objects rather than emptiness. Barbed wire protrudes throughout the image and the landscape is littered with objects, bodies, and death. Broken tree stumps, again, appear as one of the common examples of environmental decay; however, viewers will also note the dead horse, human skull, soldier’s helmet, and downed plane. On the right side of the image, a dead figure is visible alongside a rifle stabbed into the ground as if a grave marker. This warscape hints at the human activity that would become prominent in other works made by the AEF artists.

Dunn’s style and artistic markings also reflect war’s hectic, confusing reality. It is difficult at first glance to discern the environment from the intrusion of war. Everything appears as one amalgamation of destruction. His charcoal marks are quick and disorganized. These dark, bold lines are then contrasted with the hazy shading of the sky, emulating smoke rising from the battlefield. Much like Pippin, Dunn employed color as a signifier. Most of the sketch is created using black and white charcoal, but subtle uses of
watercolor highlight reddish-brown hues reminiscent of blood and earth. Dunn also signed this piece like Pippin, but he specially marked it “Harvey Dunn, AEF, October 1918,” noting the piece’s patronage as a part of the AEF program.

Next, one should consider a work from the AEF program that includes active figures, such as Dunn’s *The Flare* from 1918 (illustration 17). This sketch uses the same chaotic markings previously discussed in Dunn’s *No Man’s Land*. Here, with no color, the black charcoal marks blend together. The sketchy quality of the linework and shading demarcates a quick, decisive hand. All of the figures are depicted as silhouettes against the light of a flare in the sky. The predominant figures appear in the middle of the scene.
carrying a body between them; however, there are several other figures throughout the scene. One is in the foreground amidst the barbed wire. There is another in the background just below the flare walking across the field. Both of these figures seamlessly merge with the environment in a manner similar to Pippin’s soldier’s in *The End of the War, Starting Home*. The dark, sketchy quality of this piece appears similar to Pippin’s final diary sketch in the manner that the drawing material is used to create the visual environment. This shows that the artists were not only documenting the physical reality that was before them, but also the emotional and chaotic reality that they were experiencing on the battlefields.
A final AEF work to consider is Dunn’s *On the Wire* from 1918 (illustration 18). In contrast to the previous AEF works, which are sketches, this piece is an oil painting. This suggests that Dunn, similar to Pippin, was using the sketches he made in the field to compile final oil paintings. This piece shows two soldiers walking alongside the barbed wire fence carrying a comrade on a stretcher, as seen in the previous charcoal sketch. The figures are again almost entirely silhouetted against the hazy light emanating from the sky, and their legs mesh into the foreground landscape. However, in contrast to previous examples, the landscape here does not appear as desolate, destroyed, and filled with death. Rather, it appears as a green world with subtle hints at life through pops of color representing flowers and the suggestion of sunrise in the sky. Perhaps, the red color of these flowers is meant to suggest poppies, which became the war’s memorial flower in 1915. Taking these symbols together suggests that this painting is about hope. The soldier’s support their fallen comrade who may be severely injured, but still alive. The sunrise, support, and signs of life all come together to suggest the injured may recover, including the landscape.

This allusion to healing is furthered by the barbed wire fence cutting the canvas in half. Against the hazy, pink hue of the sky, the fence appears similar to stitches on flesh. Stitches aid in the body’s healing process, and here the stiches could be aiding in the healing of the environment. This evokes comparison with Pippin’s repeated use of the

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trench because stitches almost always leave a scar. Ultimately, while the stitches will help heal the environment, the scar will always exist.

It is important to consider Pippin’s work in comparison to other soldier artists because their resulting images tend to convey the same themes and motifs even though their artistic pursuits developed out of differing agendas. The AEF artists were specifically employed by the military to document the war, while Pippin used art to not only document his experience, but also emotionally process his memories and subconscious observations, as well as to rewrite history to a certain extent, by giving his comrades in the Harlem Hellfighters a central role in achieving victory. However, despite these differing motives, each artist touched upon the desolation that occurred, specifically
highlighting the visible environmental decay and destruction. Motifs of scars, wounds, and healing can be found throughout the varying war-scapes of these soldier artists.

In contrast to the AEF program, there were other artists who were employed by the government to go to the front lines to document the war, but they were not necessarily “soldier artists.” One such example is John Singer Sargent. Sargent, who identified as an American artist without ever having lived in the United States, was the son of wealthy expatriates. His work persists as a culmination of European cultures, and he became most renowned for his work as a portrait artist. However, toward the end of World War I, Sargent was commissioned by the British Department of Communication, War Memorials Committee, to travel to France and paint the war. While employed by and working alongside the military, Sargent, in contrast to the previous artists discussed, was not an enlisted soldier. Ultimately, this resulted in his experience at war being distinctly one of observation. By not being a soldier, Sargent would not have partaken in combat or ventured into No Man’s Land. He was not expected to act as a soldier living in the trenches, but rather served as a guest visiting to document the experience of others.

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lix Ibid.

The Committee had enlisted the aid of multiple artists before Sargent joined with the aim of the project being to “preserve an official collective memory of the War.”\textsuperscript{lxxi} In contrast to the AEF program, the artists of this program were working toward making a commissioned painting, rather than a collection of artistic documentations. Specifically, Sargent’s project was to focus on the joining of British and American forces, considering his role as an American artist working in Europe.\textsuperscript{lxii} This is unique in comparison to Pippin since his unit was explicitly loaned to and incorporated in the French military. While Pippin did not purposefully highlight this integration in his paintings, he often included suggestive details, such as French uniforms on Hellfighter soldiers.

Unlike Pippin, the war was not in Sargent’s realm, as he usually completed portraiture for wealthy socialites. His comrade, Henry Tonks, even noted that Sargent remained ignorant of all things military.\textsuperscript{lxiii} However, while Sargent was in unknown territory in terms of subject, he was comfortable working towards a final commission. As historians Karen Corsano and Daniel Williman write, “Sargent was a novice in this world of violence…And this time his grief helped him choose his subjects.”\textsuperscript{lxiv} Sargent had to move away from his usual artistic style and subject matter to an unchartered realm that tested his emotional and artistic capacities.

\textsuperscript{lxvi} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{lxii} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{lxiii} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{lxiv} Ibid.
The painting that resulted from this commission, *Gassed* (1919), stands on a monumental scale in comparison to Pippin’s work at approximately seven feet tall and twenty feet long (illustration 19). Viewers bear witness to blindfolded soldiers walking across the battlefield to a medical station as a result of a gas attack. Here Sargent focuses on the figure, and in fact, the figure becomes the landscape. The piles of soldier’s bodies overtake the environment, setting the horizon line and mimicking the ebb and flow of the landscape seen in the works of Pippin and the AEF artists. Ultimately, this amalgamation of body and land highlights the connection between man’s casualty and the violence inflicted on the environment. By making bodies the land, Sargent turns the landscape into the unknown civilian.

Unlike, Pippin, however, Sargent’s tonal values do not suggest the space of war as such a bleak environment. The painting is created with a brighter quality than Pippin’s dark, muted, earthy ambiance. The sky is light, and hopeful scenes of life exist in the background. A camp is visible with carefree soldiers playing football safe from the gas. The warplanes in the top right of the canvas are miniscule and non-threatening. However, this idealistic lightness is contrasted with the realities of war heightened by Sargent’s realism. As with Pippin, Sargent employs a hazy perspective in the sky to suggest the atmosphere of the battlefield, emulating the remnants of the gas attack. The piles of soldiers laying on the ground cannot be ignored as helpless, injured, and possibly doomed. In contrast, the main focus of the blind men begs an empathetic response from viewers. One can understand their fear, blindly walking forward, one soldier dramatically raising his leg much higher than necessary to advance the next unknown step.
There is also a strong reference to the 1568 Northern Renaissance painting by Pieter Bruegel *The Blind Leading the Blind* (illustration 20). This comparison evokes the biblical proverb from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14). David M. Lubin notes how *Gassed* criticizes the war through this comparison with the blind leadership of politicians. Just as Pippin was looking back to Homer, Sargent was looking back to Bruegel to evoke his message through recognizable, visual imagery.

Ultimately, while Pippin’s war paintings focused on the desolation of war in the moment, Sargent’s painting reckons a focus on the desolation that was to come: the post-war unknown. As Lubin writes:

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It encourages us to imagine these long lines of maimed soldiers extending across no-man’s-land to the other side of the trenches, and even beyond, to entire populations of civilians starved, wounded, and blinded by the war…Sargent’s painting addresses what would turn out to be one of the greatest, most enduring problems of the subsequent century: the enormity of war and its consequent displacements of suffering populations.\textsuperscript{lxxvi}

Sargent’s soldiers represent the unknown path forward after the war. This is specifically unique in comparison to Pippin as he lived amongst one of the suffering populations upon his return from war. Sargent was seeking the future during the present while he was at war just as Pippin was documenting the future of the landscape.

\textsuperscript{lxxvi} Ibid.
In returning to Pippin, it is integral to consider his work not only on its own, but also amidst this vast catalogue of World War I art. In the end, one can note that while the role of the environment and suggestions of the environment’s desolation were evident in the work of other war artists, Pippin was unique in his dramatic use of the landscape as a main subject and not a background. Perhaps, this is enhanced by Pippin’s self-motivation for making art on his own terms, instead of being employed or commissioned by the government. Pippin’s art was not focusing on portraying the war to an audience, but rather on documenting the war from his personal observations and for his own understanding and recuperation. In fact, it was mere chance that Pippin’s work was discovered and exhibited since during his lifetime, his artistic endeavors were mostly known only to his immediate family and friends; however, he did often offer artwork in lieu of payment to shopkeepers who would then display the paintings. Stein suggests that it is difficult to ascertain when exactly Pippin was propelled into the public art scene, but comments that many accounts revolve around the collector Christian Brinton’s fascination with some of Pippin’s paintings displayed in such shops. After this “discovery,” Pippin became a part of the public art community participating in exhibits and showcasing his personal war experiences to the world.

As was previously mentioned, an ecocritical perspective is a modern notion that Pippin would not have considered himself. However, this perspective becomes even more

\textsuperscript{lxxvii} Stein, 5.
\textsuperscript{lxxviii} Ibid.
integral when one considers that the trenches are still visible today. Images taken by
photographer Michael St. Maur Sheil of World War I battlefields for his exhibition
“Fields of Battle – Lands of Peace” delineate the still visible trenches (illustration 21). On
the exhibition site, the description comments on a scar motif describing the exhibition as
telling “of the healed scars of the War through our only remaining living witness: the
fields of battle themselves.” While the landscape has begun to heal, the scar of the
trenches still permeates in the ebb and flow of the hills, the winding path of the trench,
and the craters of the shell holes. Pippin bore witness to the original destruction and
injury of the landscape, but today we can still observe the scars that were left behind as
stark reminders of the civilian landscape and its role in war.

Overall, Pippin’s warscapes should be considered not only as documentations of
war, but also as documentations of the silent landscape. The idea of the injured
environment as a subject began in his war diary sketches and continued in his war
paintings. He used his artistic style and technique to enhance the motif of trench scars on
the landscapes, and this is made even more significant by the fact that the trench scars are
still visible today. Specifically, The End of the War, Starting Home stands as Pippin’s
culminating war painting, embodying arts therapeutic role and envisioning the
amalgamation of war and land. This is enhanced by the handmade frame Pippin designed
for the piece which brings man’s war materials to a natural, wooden substance. Amidst

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lxxix Michael St. Maur Sheil, “Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace 2018 Peace and
Reconciliation,” Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace 14-18, Michael St. Maur Sheil, 2019,
the vast array of World War I art, Pippin’s works stand out in the handling of the landscape and environmental destruction. While other artists allude to the landscape’s decay, Pippin brings it to the forefront of his images. Hence, the civilian landscape was an artistically documented victim of World War I, and Horace Pippin was an artist at the forefront of these ecological scars.


