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‘The first ever *anti*-football painting’? A consideration of the soccer match in John Singer Sargent’s *Gassed*

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Abstract

The paper presents a discussion of *Gassed*, a large oil painting by John Singer Sargent displayed at the Imperial War Museum in London. Completed in 1919, *Gassed* is the major achievement from Sargent’s commission as an official war artist at the appointment of the British War Memorials Committee during the latter period of World War I. Prominent in the painting is a group of soldiers, blinded by a mustard gas attack, being lead to a casualty clearing station tent. In the distant background of the painting, another group of soldiers can be seen kitted out in football attire playing a match. The significance of this football imagery is our point of enquiry. As our title suggests, some recent interpretations regard the painting as offering critical reflection, from the time, about the symbolic links between sport and war. However, while the painting may certainly be left open to this type of viewer interpretation, archival and secondary resource material research does not support such a critical intention by the artist. Yet, nor is there evidence that Sargent’s intention was the projection of war-heroism. Rather, Sargent’s endeavour to faithfully represent what he observed allows *Gassed* to be regarded as a visual record of routine activity behind the lines and of football as an aspect of the daily life of British soldiers during the Great War.

Introduction

The casual observer can be forgiven for failing to see the depiction of a football match in John Singer Sargent’s painting *Gassed* (see Figure 1). Indeed, the background football match is not readily offered up to the viewing eye in photographic reproductions of the painting. Such is the case with the reproduction in this article, unless a magnifying glass is put to use. However, the football match is easily observable when the original artwork is seen in its permanent exhibition location at the Imperial War Museum in London. This being so because of the extremely large size of the oil painting on canvas, 231 centimetres x 611.1 centimetres. Standing before the painting, the football match being played in the distance can be seen between the central figures of the predominant image, the temporarily blinded soldiers being led to a casualty clearing station tent.

Figure 1. John Singer Sargent, *Gassed.* Source: Imperial War Museum.

The chief interest of this paper is in how this inclusion of a football match in an artwork centrally concerned with war can be understood. The paper will consider differing viewer interpretations, such as that in the title of the essay, which postulates that *Gassed* offers an early anti-football image within a genre of artwork portraying that sport. No argument will be made against this or more positive interpretations, yet the paper will warn against overstatement on the symbolic and allegorical intentions of John Singer Sargent in *Gassed*. While an artist does not hold a monopoly viewpoint in how an artwork may be subsequently regarded, relevant archival and secondary material research does provide important bearing on how an artist's ambition may be adjudged and serve as a counter to potentially overenthusiastic ascriptions in that regard. Accordingly, we consider the painting *Gassed* within the artistic career of John Singer Sargent and as the outstanding work of his brief period in commission as an official war artist towards the conclusion of World War I. This background discussion provides important contextualization for our ultimate consideration of the significance of the football scene within the overall canvas.

John Singer Sargent – life and work

John Singer Sargent was born in Florence in 1856 to expatriate American parents. He enjoyed a privileged childhood, visiting museums 'from the Vatican to Venice' with his surgeon father and painter mother.[1] Sargent became a keen artist at an early age and his 'drawings were precocious, not in imagination, but as literal records of what was immediately before him', done for the sheer fun of translating what he saw onto paper.[2] In October 1874, he joined the *atelier* of Emile Carolus-Duran, the foremost portrait painter in Paris who encouraged the study of half-tones and values which became crucial to Sargent's art. Sargent

established a reputation for himself as a portrait painter, which, by 1884, led him to London where favourable commissions from wealthy patrons for portraits of their families were on offer. By 1897 he had become a prominent enough painter to be elected to the Royal Academy. Sargent did not work exclusively on portraiture, during the 1890s he turned to landscapes and produced a large volume of *en plein air* studies.[3] By 1907 he had profited sufficiently from portrait commissions, mainly for wealthy Americans during the period from the late 1880s through the 1890s, to retire from portraiture altogether and follow his main interests of murals and landscapes, enmeshing annual trips to the Alps, Venice and other parts of Italy or Spain with work on the murals in his London studios and installation trips to Boston where he held a commission to decorate the public library with murals.[4]

Sargent was on a painting trip to the Dolomites when war broke out in August 1914, but, failing to realise its significance in the early stage, he continued his visit into November. However, the war impacted on him personally when he received news of the death in combat of his niece's husband and he was further shaken by the pronouncement of his good friend, the author Henry James, on the war as 'a huge horror of blackness.'[5] In early 1915 he returned an artistic honour that had been awarded to him by the Prussian state in 1908 and began considering a visit to the front despite an understandable anxiety about what would confront him; 'but would I have the nerve to look, not to speak of painting?'[6] Over the first years of the War, Sargent declined overtures to become an official war artist, but, in 1918, following the death of his beloved niece, Rose Marie Michel, from German shelling of a church in Paris she was attending, he finally accepted a commission. The appeal to Sargent to join the war effort as an artist came directly from the pen of the Prime Minister of the day, David Lloyd George.[7]

However, the initiator of the invitation appears to have been Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, who became Minister of Information in March 1918. Following his appointment Beaverbrook decided to expand the war art program under the auspices of his ministry and this was to be facilitated via the establishment of the British War Memorial Committee (BWMC).[8] This was effectively the final phase of an art program that arose within an official 'information' operation, commenced in August 1914 by the British War Propaganda Bureau under the direction of Charles Masterman. The War Propaganda Bureau's remit was to meet the demand for information from the home front and to help sway the opinion of potential allies abroad; in essence to create, manage and disseminate propaganda.[9] Initially, photography was the main means of visual record, yet as

photographers on the Front were unable to meet the demand for images made by newspapers at home this resulted in soldiers being paid to provide sketches that were redrafted by artists in London to be presented to the public and these were often a 'highly skilled exercise of the imagination'.[10] Most people derived their visual images of the war from a mix of newspaper photographs and drawings that were 'carefully edited to exclude anything too alarmist or defeatist'.[11] In May 1916, seeking more reliable representations of the War, Masterman appointed the Scottish etcher Muirhead Bone as the first official war artist. Gough notes that Bone's 'graphic realism was ideally suited' to providing images from the Front required for 'mass reproduction'.[12]

However, a significant change in policy occurred in 1917 following the impact of an exhibition in London, 'Paintings and Drawings of War by C.R.W. Nevinson'.[13] Nevinson had gone to the Front as an ambulance driver and this period of service provided experiences and sights which he portrayed in Futurist style paintings, described by art historian Charles Harrison as 'a moderate brand of post-Cubist modernism'.[14] Gough suggests that Nevinson's 'near-abstract patterns' provided an unthreatening way to visually represent the calamity of war.[15] Nevinson's style also seems to have sat well with the liberal attitude of Masterman, who wanted to avoid the crude propaganda techniques deployed by the Germans and, in this spirit, was happy to involve the young avant-garde of British art. He was supported in this regard when Beaverbrook appointed the novelist Arnold Bennett to work with the BWMC. Bennett subsequently stated his intention to use the opportunity to advance the 'greatest artistic expression of the day'.[16] An official commission as 'war artist' was given to Nevinson and to a number of his contemporaries including Percy Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash and Stanley Spencer. John Singer Sargent sits oddly alongside this group both as an artist not given to the contemporary modernist style and as a non-age cohort – Sargent was some thirty-three years older than Richard Nevinson. Perhaps his selection as a 'war artist' was meant to give strategic balance to a series of appointments that would otherwise risk looking immature and too artistically adventurous.[17]

Sargent also fitted into a quite particular ambition held by Lord Beaverbrook. To accommodate the anticipated work from BWMC painters, Beaverbrook planned a Hall of Remembrance, an idea he had taken from the Canadians, who had opened a hall of remembrance for the fallen in Ottawa.[18] As centre pieces for the Hall, Beaverbrook wanted 'super-sized' paintings by three of the more senior officially commissioned artists, Sargent, Augustus John and William Orpen. As it turned out, Sargent's *Gassed* was the only painting of this kind to eventuate.[19] It seems an attendant motive of Beaverbrook's was to have these

key artworks depict military cooperation between the British and their allies. In this regard Sargent, an American, seemed like an especially sensible choice as a war artist. Yet, when Sargent went to the Front, accompanied by another commissioned 'war-artist', Henry Tonks – one closer to his age, who had taught Nash, Nevinson and Spencer at the Slade – he was apparently stationed some forty miles from the nearest American battalion.[20] At the time this appeared to be an administrative blunder but the subsequent release of secret army documents in the 1960s reveals that the American 319 Regiment was operating alongside British units in Sargent's area.[21] However, Sargent could find little of interest to paint and he and Tonks successfully sought relocation to Arras in search of more combat. Whilst there, they heard the Guards division were going into action the following morning and decided to drive towards them after lunch the next day in the hope of finding subjects to sketch. On the road 'after tea we heard that on the Doullens Road at the Corps dressing station at Bac-du-Sud there were a good many gassed cases, so we went there ... Sargent was very struck by the scene and immediately made a lot of notes. It was a very fine evening and the sun toward setting.'[22] In the following days, Sargent moved to an American division at Ypres, but military circumstances did not present suitable painting subjects. His frustration was expressed in correspondence to his friend and biographer Evan Charteris:

> The nearer to danger the fewer and the more hidden the men - the more dramatic the situation the more it becomes an empty landscape. The Ministry of Information expects an epic - and how can one do an epic without masses of men? Excepting at night I have only seen three fine subjects with masses of men - one a harrowing sight, a field full of gassed and blindfolded men - another a train of trucks packed with 'chair a cannon' - and another frequent sight a big road encumbered with troops and traffic, I dare say the latter, combining British and Americans, is the best thing to do, if it can be prevented from looking like going to the Derby.[23]

Despite this remark in qualified favour of the third of these 'fine subjects', it seems that the first of the three mentioned came to provide inspiration for the art work that is adjudged by the Imperial War Museum as 'our most significant work', *Gassed*.[24] Sargent's comment on 'the Derby', if made with art in mind, was assumedly giving thought to William Powell Frith's *The Derby Day* (1858). It indicates a concern to avoid making a large canvas dealing with the everyday activities of soldiers look like a panoramic leisure scene. This becomes especially interesting when considered in relation to the football match shown in *Gassed,* a point we return to later in the paper. The concluding episode in Sargent's tour to France would also seem to have proven influential to the subject matter of *Gassed*. In late September, Sargent contracted influenza and was admitted to Number 41 Casualty Clearing

Station (CCS). He was put into a bed in a wet and uncomfortable tent, with men dying around him and the aftermath of battle constantly surrounding him. He was accompanied by 'the groans of wounded, and the chokings and coughing of gassed men, which was a nightmare - it always seemed so strange on opening one's eyes to see the level cots and the dimly-lit long tent looking so calm, when one was dozing in pandemonium.'[25] No doubt, this experience helped him empathize with the gassed troops at Le Bac-du-Sud and, by the end of October, Sargent was back in England and working in his large studio at The Avenue, Fulham Road on the painting that became known as *Gassed*.[26]

Gassed – description and interpretation

It is necessary to provide some further description of the painting *Gassed*, prior to considering interpretations of the painting and of the football match within its overall ambition. As mentioned above, *Gassed* is an especially large artwork; an oil on canvas painting, measuring 231cm by 611.1cm. It is dominated by a line of ten blinded soldiers, nearly life size, being led along a duckboard path by a medical orderly towards a marquee that is indicated by guy ropes entering from the right hand edge. The duckboards are surrounded by blinded soldiers lying down, those in the foreground dissected by the edge of the painting suggesting that Sargent is inviting viewers subconsciously into the painting.[27] A further train of eight soldiers, guided by two orderlies, approach the marquee obliquely on the right. In the background to the left is a bell-tented encampment, no doubt the living quarters of the medical facility staff. A football match is occurring in the centre-left background and to the right the full moon rises into the evening sky, indicating it is around sunset, about 19:00 hours. Above all of this, small specks indicate aerial activity over the trenches.[28] Sargent has removed the landscape details; the location of this harrowing event could be anywhere, thus rather inviting the viewer to consider the plight of soldiers affected by mustard gas as a matter of general concern associated with the War.[29] The accuracy of Sargent's portrayal of the treatment of massed gas victims can be seen in the well-known photograph, *World War I: Gas Warfare*, which shows a line of men, blinded in a German gas attack during the Lys offensive in April 1918.[30] It is further supported by a letter published in *The Observer* in 1920 from a Royal Army Medical Corps captain, who wrote of *Gassed* providing an 'almost exact' depiction of soldiers affected by mustard gas.[31] Sargent's central concern in portraying the particular injuriousness of exposure to mustard gas is apparent from his defence of the title for the painting. While he admitted 'gassed' to be an 'ugly' word, he insisted that it was not 'melodramatic' but, rather, 'very prosaic and matter of fact.'[32]

Understandably, art historians have speculated upon the symbolic significance of *Gassed*. Malvern identifies *Gassed* as being painted in a classical tripartite schema of foreground, middle ground and distance. Citing Prendergast, she identifies these strata as foreground, sufferers and sinners; the middle ground, redeemer; and distance, heaven and salvation.[33] She claims that Sargent has constructed *Gassed* in an affirmation of traditional values:

> The foreground displays the war's victims, all legible to the viewer as whole and unmutilated bodies ... In the middle distance there is a frieze of soldiers ... processing towards a point of narrative resolution just beyond the edge of the frame. In the background, the football match and the encampment, all suffused in the warm glow of sunset, completes the myth of redemption.[34]

Focussing on the central image of the wounded soldiers being led to the tent for treatment, Kilmurray and Ormond claim that Sargent deliberately drew 'on the religious associations of the processional form to give his painting spiritual weight and meaning'. They point out the parallel between the tent guy ropes and the ropes used to raise the crosses in Tintoretto's *The Crucifixion*; hence the reception marquee, off canvas, can be seen as Malvern's narrative resolution, a place of healing and salvation.[35] In another biblical interpretation, Cork points out the struggling orderly, supporting the first two soldiers and turning to either warn the followers of the step or simply to see what was happening as they 'struggle forward like some stoical re-enactment of the sightless tottering towards calamity in Bruegel's great painting *The Parable of the Blind*.'[36]

Gough, in agreement with Malvern, concludes that *Gassed* is 'a testament to the pity of war, but also an elegy to redemption and recovery.'[37] However, as a reflection of reality, he finds fault, claiming that the 'painting only captures an air of discomfort but not the full gamut of pain' inflicted by exposure to mustard gas.[38] Severe exposure would lead to death in between two days and several weeks. Amongst the effects of the gas were large skin blisters, blindness, intractable vomiting and choking, 'the suffering of soldiers was legendary.'[39] For Gough the bandages are too 'clean, the wounds discreet, even polite; the statuesque Tommies are fit, whole and cared for'.[40] This is similar to the view held by the novelist and essayist E.M. Forster. Forster regarded the cleanliness of the painting as indicative of it pandering to the aesthetic expectations of the upper classes. Forster commented directly at Sargent:

> The upper classes only allow the lower classes to appear in art on condition that they wash themselves and have classical features. These conditions you fulfilled. A line of golden haired Apollos moving along a duck-board ... no one complained, no one looked lousy or overtired, and the aeroplanes overhead struck

> the necessary note of the majesty of England. It was all that a great war picture should be and it was modern because it managed to tell a new sort of lie.[41]

While the polemic in Forster's comment is understandable enough, the artistic criticism must be weighed against the reality of Sargent's experience in France and, thus, further reflection upon what he was actually observing. *Gassed*, in its portrayal of the actions of the soldiers, undoubtedly, illustrates some of the symptoms of mustard gas affliction taking hold of its victims. For example, the seventh soldiers in both lines turn to vomit, hence avoiding their colleagues in front, but not their unseen comrades sitting and lying alongside the board walks.[42] In the foreground, one soldier alleviates his nausea by sitting up, another eases his burnt throat by drinking from his water bottle. As Sargent was taking notes and completing sketches in the early evening, many of these soldiers will be in the early stages of gas poisoning as they were exposed in the afternoon. Perhaps his visit was simply too early to witness the blistering that would later affect these victims, although he doubtlessly knew what was to come from what he had witnessed of other victims during his own stay at 41 CCS. As such, the criticism of 'cleanliness' seems somewhat unfair to Sargent, after all he was not dealing with soldiers subjected to shrapnel wounds and he was not portraying the fallen on the frontline, as was Nevinson in *The Harvest Battle* (1919).

The football match in *Gassed* – intention and interpretation

How might we interpret the football match being played in the near distance to the wounded soldiers, visible to the viewer only through gaps in the central line of the men being lead to the CCS tent? Is it best understood, as claimed by Malvern, as part of a 'redemption myth' symbolised by *Gassed*, or 'matter of fact' as suggested by Singer Sargent himself? Throughout World War I, football was a feature of life in the British army; it was seen to improve a soldier's health and fitness, keep him out of bars and brothels, improve his relationships with officers and create and maintain *esprit de corps*. In 1914 football was still unofficial but Captain Jack, 'C' Company commander in the 1st Cameronians, noted 'games, mainly football, in the afternoons keep them fit and cheery ... however tired the rascals may be for parades they have always energy enough for football'.[43] By 1915, commanding officers were realising the potential of football to revitalise troops coming from the front line allowing 'above all a brief mental escape from stress and horror'.[44] Mason and Riedi note that by September 1916 the War Office had decided it was 'so important that every man should be

kept up to the highest pitch of physical fitness, that it is virtually a military duty to take part in and encourage such sports'.[45] In February 1917, Lieutenant-General Maxse issued platoon training instructions in which physical training programmes were to include 'recreational training such as football' and by the final year of the war soccer was played extensively by military personnel.[46]

That the football players in *Gassed* are decked out in full kit suggests that the match was of a competitive kind rather than just a kick-about; possibly a match between sections, platoons or companies, the lack of spectators suggests it is not a battalion game as spectators were an institutionalized element at that level of competition by 1916.[47] The kitting out also suggests a regular game and therefore that the football players are soldiers and medical staff assigned to the CCS. These personnel were no different from other British army units, they had to be kept fit, develop team spirit and also escape the pressures of their jobs. The stress on staff at a CCS was intense and unending as they worked around the clock in six hour shifts. In response to the strain, staff sought 'to find their own peace in the midst of the madness', playing football provided a means of escape from the emotional trauma of war in their off-duty periods;[48] 'There was much more than just nostalgia or boredom to the soldier's enthusiasm for football. Only thus is the avidity with which it was pursued by men weary to exhaustion explicable'.[49]

In *Gassed*, the full kit and the apparently well-coordinated physical movements of the players makes a striking comparison to the gas victims in their improvised medical dressings and motley uniforms, making uneasy progress towards the reception area; 'the players energetic co-ordination contrasts poignantly with the shuffling limbs of the gas victims.'[50] One player can be seen athletically kicking the ball whilst the third soldier in the central line of the wounded, in an awkward inverted mirroring of this movement, raises his leg to an exaggerated height to clear a step in the duckboards, about which he was assumedly warned by the orderly. According to Richard Cork, 'nothing could be further removed from the player's dynamism than this halting movement'.[51]

Whether or not Sargent intended this juxtaposition comes back to a matter of art historical speculation. How to interpret such juxtaposition could involve a treatise in itself. As mentioned above, Malvern sees the football match as part of a 'myth of redemption', and even if accepted as such, argument could be had as to what the football match signifies within such a myth. Other speculation has involved the football match symbolising cold-heartedness on the part of the military leadership towards the suffering of their troops and, also, being

symbolic of an innocence and lack of knowledge about the war on the Home Front in Britain.[52] This latter interpretation resonates with the way in which football was used within advertising posters of the day to alert young men to their real duty in life, i.e. fighting in the war, rather than playing football was the ultimate means of representing their country. Pushing this point in an overtly critical direction, the *Punch* magazine of October 21, 1914 features a cartoon with Mr Punch admonishing a young man who is about to play a football game: "No doubt you can make money in this field, my friend, but there's only one field today where you can get honour".[53] That the two activities were not mutually exclusive – given the playing of football behind-the-lines (or even on the Front in some instances) as discussed above – is as much a likely representational ambition of Sargent's as one to the contrary. It would be unlikely that Sargent, an American, knew enough about, or had enough interest in, soccer to incorporate it into his imagery without actually having seen it being played during his period as a war artist. Again, Sargent may have witnessed a football match of this kind taking place in proximity to the CCS either when making his notes for *Gassed* or during his own brief period of incapacitation. Whether or not he witnessed a competition match or merely decked his painted players out in the colours of a kit to distinguish them against the overall yellowish hue of *Gassed* we do not know. But, it would seem that the football match is meant to add a feeling of everydayness and life going on, much as Sargent's war artist companion Henry Tonks suggested of their time on tour and in regard to his understanding of *Gassed*.[54]

Removed from considerations of the intentions of an artist, it is, of course, worthwhile to consider how a painting is appreciated or understood. This can apply as much to the interpretations by members of the public viewing a painting independently from any knowledge of the painter as it would to the views of those with expertise in art criticism. This is, arguably, especially relevant to artworks that have popular appeal and are increasingly discussed in relation to contrived genres associated with social themes. Thus considered, *Gassed* is inclined to be regarded as a painting within a genre referred to as 'war art'. However, modern and contemporary genre specification is a problematic endeavour, with rather blurred lines and possibly dubious criteria for classification. Accordingly, Laura Brandon argues that 'war art' does not suitably approximate the traditions of genre within art history.[55] So-called 'war art' encompasses the range of traditionally established genres, i.e. landscape, portraiture, scenes from daily life and still life. Rather than being a genre, the term 'war art' would seem to boil down most simply to a loose category of incorporation for any art work in one way or another involving the representation or depiction of war. Within this

framework, *Gassed* would, rather obviously, be discussed as an example of 'war art'. However, and with specific interest to this paper, under the same condition of terminological understanding, may *Gassed* be considered as 'football art'?

In reviewing an exhibition of football themed or pertinent artwork at the Manchester Art Gallery in 1966, timed to coincide with England's hosting of the FIFA World Cup finals, the art critic M.G. McNay, waxed lyrical in *The Guardian*, 'it is clear football painting is a genre, and as such should not be judged simply on painterly qualities.'[56] For reasons stated in the above paragraph in regard to 'war art', we would challenge the idea of a 'football art' genre and, given the lack of obviousness and background placement of its football match imagery, it would even seem a stretch to categorize *Gassed* more loosely as 'football art'. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the painting would not have been relevant to the 1966 exhibition (although its size would have made its inclusion extremely unlikely, even if *Gassed* did come into the organizing curator's thoughts). And, in keeping with McNay's assessment of other works, the various possible interpretations of social statement that might be given to its football imagery would surely have qualified *Gassed* for inclusion irrespective of its 'painterly qualities'. Thus, *Gassed* is justifiably regarded, terminological disputes notwithstanding, within discussions of football related artwork. When the magazine of football criticism *When Saturday Comes* published what could be described as an alternative encyclopaedia of football, it included an entry for 'art', which makes reference to *Gassed* in the following way: 'some critics have claimed [Sargent] is making an analogy between the horrors of modern warfare and organized sport, in which case *Gassed* could be the first ever *anti*-football painting.'[57] This remark prompted a disagreeable response in a letter-to-the-editor, published in a subsequent issue of *When Saturday Comes*:

> I don't agree with this and have never seen anything "anti-football" in this painting. True, the connection between sport and modern warfare has been made, with armies facing each other like two opposing teams (if ever a war concentrated on defence then the First World War was it), but I see no "anti-ness" at all. I think that *Gassed* is more a comment on the enduring spirit of men under duress. The men keep playing football despite the relative closeness of the tragic line of wounded men, because they must keep their spirits up.[58]

The letter goes on to contrast the representation of football in *Gassed* with the more obviously anti-football message in the 1914 *Punch* cartoon, discussed above. We are inclined to agree with the letter writer's interpretation, certainly in its contestation of the claim that Sargent was incontrovertibly making a critical representation of football. Indeed, one of the present author's has argued elsewhere that C.R.W. Nevinson's *Any Wintry Afternoon in*

England (1930) – which was featured in the 1966 football and art exhibition in Manchester – has especial claim to being an anti-football painting in a way that cannot be said of *Gassed*.[59]

Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, it is worth considering the opinion of a commentator well-known to Sargent, the writer Violet Paget (Vernon Lee), whose portrait Sargent painted in 1881. Regarding Sargent's artistry generally, Lee opined, 'I feel certain that his conscious endeavour, his self-formulated program, was to paint whatever he saw with absolute and researchful fidelity, never avoiding ugliness nor seeking after beauty.'[60] In her afterword to Charteris' biography of Sargent, Lee concludes that the artist was not an imaginative painter; he did not build up allegories or narrate events.[61] Sargent recognised that he was a representational painter, remarking to one sitter 'I do not judge, I only chronicle'.[62] Lee commented further:

> His symbolism was immanent in the aspects which he painted. Who else has ever expressed the tragedy of war as he has done in his group of gassed soldiers, its horror conveyed without contortion or grimace; and war's tragedy assigned a subordinate and transitory place in the order of things by that peaceful landscape and the game of football in the middle distance. This composition is as majestically serene as some antique frieze; while for the emotions of the beholder it is terrible, like a chapter of Tolstoi.[63]

Interpretations of *Gassed* as an *anti*-football painting may be made from politically distinct standpoints, whereby the soccer match is taken to signify either a patriotic message highlighting the importance of military duty over sport, or an oppositional message suggesting that the playing of football is to be read as symbolic of the military leadership's disdain for the plight of young men sent to war. While these interpretations are not invalid and, indeed, speak to the ability of *Gassed* to evoke strong feelings, they are not directly attributable to Sargent's ambition. Sargent was not a politically motivated person and his professional endeavour is best accepted as an intention to fulfil his brief in serving as a war artist, one of visual reportage. While being concerned not to present his image of the CCS and surrounds in Derby-like fashion, Sargent painted what he saw, including a football match. Cross-purposed readings of the match's significance will, reasonably enough, continue. But, irrespective of their disputation, for Sargent the playing of football was indicative of the importance of routine life in proximity to the front carrying on, and calm prevailing in the face of chaos.

Notes

[1] Radcliff, *John Singer Sargent,* 24.
[2] Charteris, *John Sargent,* 13.
[3] Kilmurray and Ormond, *Sargent*, 105-127.
[4] Jennings, *John Singer Sargent,* 13-14.
[5] Charteris, *John Sargent,* 206
[6]Letter to Evan Charteris 25 July 1916, cited in Charteris, *John Sargent,* 207
[7] Lloyd George to Sargent, 16 May 1918, IWM First World War Artists Archive, 39/2 part 1. IWM, London.
[8] Malvern, *Modern Art,* 69-75.
[9] Johnson, *Front Line Artists,* 165.
[10] Hichberger, *Images of the Army,* 93.
[11] Cork, *A Bitter Truth,* 125.
[12] Gough, *A Terrible Beauty,* 24.
[13] Ibid., 24.
[14] Harrison, *English Art and Modernism,*38.
[15] Gough, *A Terrible Beauty,* 24.
[16] Ibid., 28.
[17] Cf. Viney, *Images of Wartime.*
[18] Gough, *A Terrible Beauty,* 26. The proposed Hall was never built and the collection of paintings, including *Gassed,* was given to the IWM. In a letter to Bone, Yockney another committee member of the BWMC, wrote that Sargent was the 'keystone of the arch' for the proposed project, 10 October 1918, IWM First World War Artists Archive 284A-7 John Sargent 1918-1924. In response to Yockney, Bone thought the BWMC should 'humour Sargent in every possible way', IWM First World War Artists Archive, 39/2 part 1. IWM, London.
[19] Malvern, *Modern Art,* 81.
[20] Letter to Charteris 11 September 1918, cited in Charteris, *John Sargent*, 214.
[21] WO 95/1370, Appendix 1 and Appendix 12, Infantry Brigade Order No. 247, issued on 12 August 1918. The National Archives, Kew.
[22] Letter to Yockney, March 19, 1920. IWM ART/WA/329 Tonks, Henry.
[23] Letter to Charteris, September 11, 1918, cited in Charteris, *John Sargent,* 214. Sargent was not alone in finding suitable subjects to paint, see Malvern, *Modern Art,* 91-92.
[24] Gallery: Breakthrough, http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/art-galleries.
[25] Letter to Mrs Gardner, cited in Charteris, *John Sargent,* 216. This scene is captured in his painting *The Interior of a Hospital Tent,* IWM Art 1611.
[26] Charteris, *John Sargent*, 217. For a discussion of the public and commercial success of *Gassed* in its day see Harries and Harries, *The War Artist.*
[27] Malvern, *Modern Art,* 99.
[28] A full moon occurred on 22 August 1918; therefore the moon would have appeared full to Sargent on the 21 because 98% of the moon disc is illuminated the night before and after an actual full moon. The time is about sunset (18:56 on that date in Le Bac-du-Sud) as the full moon rises as the sun sets. As the moon rises in the east, Sargent was facing east, a view reinforced by the fact that most aerial battles occurred over the front lines as aircraft photographed or strafed and the opposition tried to prevent them completing their missions.
[29] The land here is gently rolling, research visit 9 August 2012 to the actual site, Le Bac du Sud, France.
[30] *World War I: Gas Warfare* © The Granger Collection, New York
[31] 'Gassed' *The Observer,* January 11, 1920, 11
[32] Charteris, *John Sargent*, Section of a letter, recipient not indicated (Charteris?), 215.
[33] Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros's 'La Bataille d' Eylau.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Cited by Malvern, *Modern Art,* 105.
[34] Malvern, *Modern Art,* 105.
[35] Kilmurray and Ormond, *Sargent,* 265. Charteris, *John Sargent* provides evidence of numerous visits to Venice and even visits to The Scuola Grande di San Rocco, he notes that letters to friends and relatives indicate for

Sargent to 'the end of his days Tintoretto remained for him one of the supreme masters of painting', 18. Close examination of *The Crucifixion* reveals that the most prominent ropes lead to the cross on Jesus' right, his own cross already firmly embedded in the ground, this is commonly thought to be the repentant thief (Luke 23: 40-43), research visit to The Scuola Grande di San Rocco 5 August 2012.

[36] Cork, *A Bitter Truth,* 221.

[37] Gough, *A Terrible Beauty,* 200.

[38] Ibid., 200.

[39] Harris, 'Gassed', 15.

[40] Gough, *A Terrible Beauty,* 200. However, this late in the day as fighting waned and gas victims increased, it is possible that administrators decided to concentrate gas victims to 46 CCS and other wounds to the nearby 45 CCS. A visit to Bac-du-Sud British Cemetery, Bailleulval, 9 August 2012, which is located at the site used by 46 CCS reveals that most of those dying on the 21 August 1918 were from the Guards division who were in the van of the attack and would have arrived before Sargent's visit.

[41] Forster, 'Me, them and you'. In Forster, *Abinger Harvest, 27*

[42] Some commentators have identified the seventh soldier in the main line as being an orderly moving a lying soldier clear of the path, however his 'tin helmet', puttees and combat webbing identify him as a victim.

[43] Terraine, *General Jack's Diary,* 91. Diary entry 2 January 1915.

[44] Grimwade, *War History,* 293.

[45] *Hansard ParliamentaryDebates,* HC Deb., 14 March 1916, vol. 80, cc. 2027-30; *Appropriation Account of the Sums Granted by Parliament for Army Services for the Year 1918-1919 (1920),*83, cited by Mason and Riedi, *Sport in the Great War,* 102.

[46] *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action,* (February 1917). General Sir Ivor Maxse papers, 69/53/15 File 53, IWM. Cited by Mason and Riedi, *Sport and the Military,* 104. For further information on the extent of football at the front, see Roberts, 'The Best Football Team' and Veitch, 'Play Up! Play Up!'

[47] Roberts, 'The Best Football Team'.

[48] Davis, *Into the Silence,* 19.

[49] Fuller, *Troop Morale,* 94.

[50] IWM. *Art from the First World War;* Cork, *A Bitter Truth,* 221.

[51] Ibid., 221.

[52] Tolson, *Gassed,* BBC Art from Different Fronts of World War One. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/wars_conflict/art/art_frontline_gal_01.shtml; Graham-Dixon, Andrew. 'In the Picture'. *The Sunday Telegraph*, November 9, 2003, http://www.andrewgrahamdixon.com/archive/readArticle/177.

[53] Display collection, National Football Museum, Urbis Building, Manchester.

[54] Charteris, *John Sargent,* 215. It is worth mentioning, in probable coincidence, that the main line of wounded in *Gassed* contains eleven men, the same as the number of players in a soccer team. A similar point is made by Ray Physick in his unpublished PhD thesis 'The Representation of Football in Fine Art: From its Origins to the Present Day', University of Central Lancashire, 2013.

[55] Brandon, *Art and War,* 5.

[56] McNay, 'Football in the Picture', *The Guardian,* July 12, 1966, 7.

[57] *When Saturday Comes,* 16.

[58] Stacy Chambless, letter to the editor, *When Saturday Comes*, 227, January 2006.

[59] Hughson, 'Not just *Any Wintry Afternoon in England*'.

[60] Lee, '*In Memoriam*', 251.

[61] Ibid., 251.

[62] Charteris, *John Sargent,* 107.

[63] Lee, '*In Memoriam',* 254

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Figure 1. John Singer Sargent, *Gassed.* Source: Imperial War Museum 001460.