



Ingrid Barber
Portfolio
Waterloo 200



My concept for this work began when I started looking at forthcoming history publications about Waterloo 200. I spoke with my 14 year old son and his school friends to find out what, if anything, the Battle of Waterloo meant to them. They used phrases like 'huge battle', 'important', 'mud', 'horses', 'charging', 'cannon-fire' and 'big hats' but had little more to offer in terms of hard facts.

I started thinking about making an artwork to reinterpret the stereotypical battlefield images the children had conjured up in a new light. My artistic practice is based on narrative, memory and materiality, and I often use unusual objects and memorabilia to construct new work - such as a contemporary Russian icon made from an old stool and a cutlery drawer with lead and brass, and a collaged remembrance installation out of rabbit bones, feathers, cigar boxes, letters and war medals.

I decided to use children's toys to reconstruct the Battle of Waterloo through the eyes of a child, suffused in a wash of wax. Toy horses, Airfix replica soldiers and cannons have been dissected, used in their original state and reworked in pewter. All the elements are set in layers of wax which have been manipulated to create the atmosphere of gun-smoke, chaos, dirt and mud. The battle scene and the Hougoumont Farm are recreated on a large-scale, 150 x 100 cm board, set in an antique gilt frame, which I sourced in Brussels.

This piece is about atmosphere and action, recreating the horror and confusion of the battle for the younger generation to relate to in a contemporary way. The wax is symbolic of freezing memory in time, like Plato's wax tablets, and is my chosen medium for creating a sense that the hundreds of toy soldiers and horses are frozen in time in a sea of wax. This final detailed image of a battlefield and charging horses looks traditional in style, set in its gold frame, but on close inspection is anything but. The characters and horses emerge from of a film of wax, to remind us that they are still very much alive and relevant to our children's futures.

Last week I visited the Waterloo battlefield myself to gather a sample of the earth where the fighting took place. I was lucky enough to meet the archaeological team excavating the Hougoumont area, who showed me the fields where the heaviest fighting took place and the soil which would best represent the history of battle. In the foreground and around the central rider figure and the farm I have embedded the earth into the wax. By using the actual soil where these men fought and died, it brings the work full circle and completes the narrative by bringing the piece into the here and now.



Waterloo 200 “The other side of the hill”

Ingrid Barber 2015, 100 x 150 cm unframed (wax, pewter, battlefield earth, toys, photography, paint, ink)





detail



“All the business of war, and indeed all the business of life, is to endeavor to find out what you don’t know by what you do; that’s what I called “guessing what was at the other side of the hill.”

The speeches of the Duke of Wellington



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