

School of Humanities, Research Seminar Series, March 2022

“Real war ammunition”: Artists for Victory, the National War Poster Competition and the Hostile Imagination on the United States World War II Home Front’

Artists for Victory was created in the United States in 1942 to make available the “arts in patriotic service to their Country”. This talk considers the contents of that patriotic service focusing on the National War Poster Competition of 1942. In doing so, it interrogates the importance of wartime defense volunteerism and the process of enmification which reveals “the nature of the enemy” in the U.S. during World War II. It also discusses what the Competition suggests about the “national state of mind” and considers the role of art in war and the significance of posters as “war ammunition” to “beat the Axis”. It concludes that posters’ value as historical witnesses to wartime psychology, and as pictorial testimony of popular perceptions of the enemy are an overlooked evidentiary base for the cultural study of World War II.