

War posters with a timely message

Frances Anderson meets an author on a mission

“A LOVE LETTER to Bosnia” is how author Daoud Sarhandi describes his book *Bosnian War Posters* published this month by Interlink Publishing. This 300 page book, a visual history of a European war, focuses on posters produced during the Bosnian War of 1992 to 1995.

Daoud explains: “I first went to Bosnia in October 1995, three months after the civilian massacres in Srebrenica. I wanted to do something to express my revulsion at what had happened there and to demonstrate that I was not part of a world that had tacitly condoned such atrocities, so I joined an aid organisation called Workers’ Aid in Manchester, and drove to Tuzla in north-east Bosnia.

“The idea for this book came in Tuzla just over two years later in 1997, when I visited Jasminko Arnautovi, the main designer of posters for the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, and a friend.

“While looking at his anti-nationalist work, I talked with him about the information battle that had been waged for the hearts and minds of the Bosnian people, and realised then that a collection of posters would produce a fascinating insight into how the Bosnian people were addressed, by whom, and to what ends during the conflict.

“During the Bosnian War, posters became tremendously important. With normal communications damaged, most news came by word of mouth. In this environment posters were a cheap and effective way of disseminating information. All kinds of organisations and artists started making posters during the war, for reasons including, military call up, a cry for help, a petition for justice and communicating essential information with the international community.

“Collecting the posters wasn’t easy; it took one year and required countless trips across the war-torn country. Artists often worked alone, and many emigrated during the war, taking their work with them; most of these artists we managed to trace, some we could not.

“Very few printers kept copies of posters they had produced and posters were generally printed in limited numbers due to the shortage of materials, making them even harder to track down.

“Poster designers came from all sectors of the artistic community and also from outside it: professional graphic designers who had been working in artistic, cultural, and commercial fields before the war; fine artists who adapted their talents to the new reality; and amateur designers who were propelled toward design as a way of expressing themselves or serving

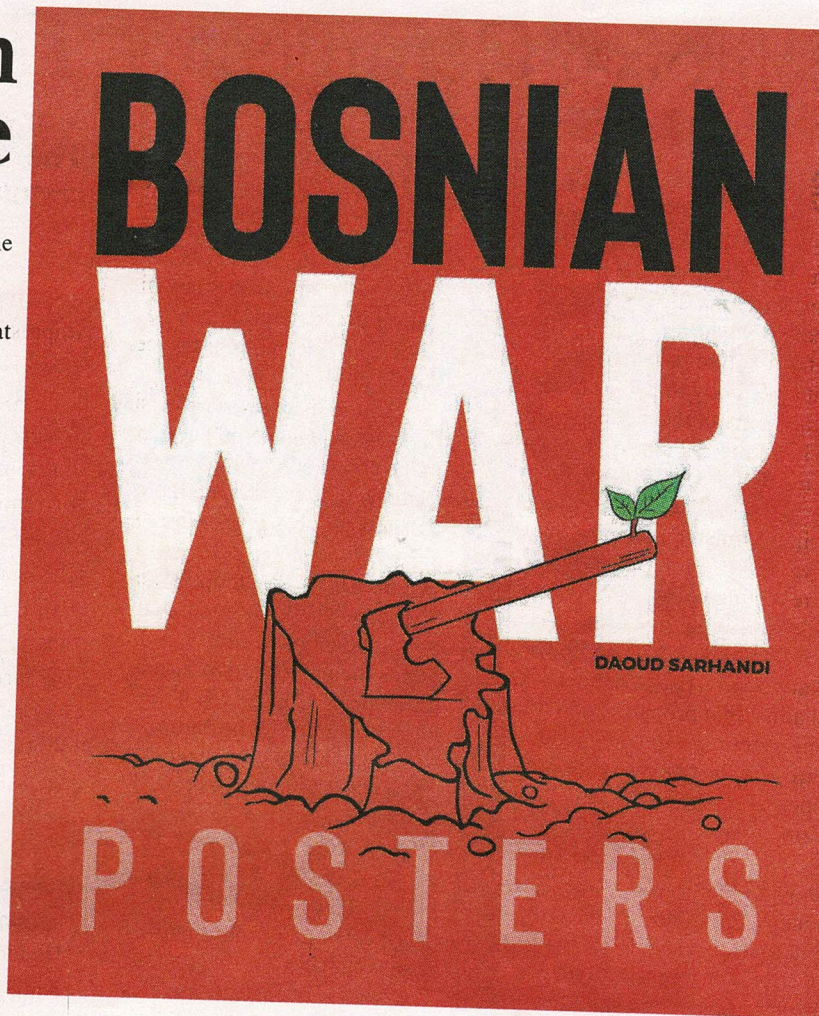
their cause. The Bosnian war may have been the last war that used printed posters to such effect before the age of the internet and social media.

“The book is a unique historical memory of what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is also a warning about what can happen when nationalism is taken to its murderous limits. The book is as relevant today as the material was when it was created.

“This is the only book about the subject, and is a fascinating look at what art can achieve in times of terror. Bosnia was a unique environment, in terms of artistic energy, creative humour or irony. It was the last significant conflict to happen before the internet age took hold. The book is dedicated to Stephanie Wolfe Murray of Canongate Books in Edinburgh, she financially and morally supported the research and encouraged me to write.”

Rupert Wolfe Murray, the book’s producer, discusses his involvement. “I went to live in Bosnia just after its war and published books about the NATO-peacekeeping mission. The profits went into our charity and one project was funding the research to collect the posters produced in the war. It’s a remarkable and unique collection as few countries that are at war today have the sort of artistic background that enabled it and the internet has rendered the political poster obsolete.

“We were fortunate to find a great publisher, Interlink Publishing USA, who covered the printing costs – a major cost considering this is a large



format, 300 page art book, and we’re doing a crowdfunding campaign in order to get copies for the public libraries in Bosnia.

“This is important as books like this would not usually find their way into the public libraries in Bosnia, thus depriving future generations of students of the chance to learn from their last war.”

Daoud concludes: “Bosnia still needs all the help it can get, and I hope this book plays its part. It is my love letter to this complex and beautiful country.”

The book is available in bookshops in the UK, the USA and Europe, but possibly the best way to get copies is through the crowd-funding campaign – where there are discounts and for every 10 copies sold via crowd-funding one copy will be donated to a Bosnian library.

Crowd-funding link: Bosnian War Posters by Daoud Sarhandi | Indiegog

FRANCES ANDERSON



GALLERY HEINZEL
CONTEMPORARY ART