



How did an artist use Cubism to fight the war at sea?

Video transcript - The legacy of dazzle

By the end of the First World War, dazzle camouflage had been applied to more than 2000 ships. And the number of vessels sunk by U-boats had begun to fall. However, there is no definitive proof that this was all thanks to Wilkinson's scheme.

Dazzle camouflage was used alongside other U-Boat countermeasures and merchant ships sailed in convoys protected by naval escorts.

The Admiralty had clearly been impressed by Norman Wilkinson's plan, and had rolled it out as quickly as possible. But they did not have conclusive evidence of effective it was.

What they did agree upon, however, was the value of the scheme as a morale-booster. It made the crew on these spectacular ships feel safer from attack.

The US Navy continued to use dazzle into World War Two, until development of radar technology made it redundant. Wilkinson also went back to work in World War Two. He helped to disguise Britain's airfields - this time using more traditional colours.

The military value of dazzle remains unclear, but it certainly had an impact in the art world. The artist Edward Wadsworth worked for Wilkinson supervising the painting of dazzle ships. He was one of the founders of the Vorticist art movement. The dazzle elements in his work are clear to see.

The most famous cubist artist of them all, Picasso, is said to have "stopped spell-bound" on the streets of Paris when he saw a tank painted in a dazzle pattern. Picasso proclaimed: "C'est nous qui avons fait ca". It is us who created that.

Images from the National Gallery of Canada and Getty

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