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## **Speech**

**by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
following the visit to the exhibition entitled  
"Transformations – A. Y. Jackson and Otto Dix"  
in the Canadian War Museum  
on September 25, 2014  
in Ottawa**

"Transformations." To me, this word is more than simply the name of an exhibition. It represents everything that has happened between the past depicted in the images and the reality of the present. A change, indeed a transformation was needed to bring us to the moment in which I now – as representative of the Federal Republic of Germany – can stand here in the Canadian War Museum and speak of the peace and friendship between our peoples. It means a great deal to me and I thank you sincerely for giving me this opportunity.

Two artists, two countries of origin, one war.

Alexander Young Jackson and Otto Dix – one from Canada, the other from Germany – served as soldiers in the First World War, on different sides. And yet their work is tellingly similar.

Horizons ablaze, swathes of devastation, a beggar with a weathered face and nothing but a stump for an arm: a hundred years on, such images enable us to look into the souls of a traumatized generation. Otto Dix was only in his early twenties when he experienced the cruelty of war and Alexander Young Jackson was but ten years older. Both voluntarily signed up to fight on the front and both returned not only as artists who would depict the marks of war, but as men on whom war had left its mark.

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Despite many similarities in their biographies their art met with very different receptions. While Jackson's works influenced Canada's identity, the Canadian state and Canadian patriotism, the National Socialists stigmatized Dix's work as "degenerate art". It was only decades later that he received the recognition he deserved.

A five minute walk from my official residence in Berlin, Schloss Bellevue, there is a street named after Otto Dix. Many people who live or who buy their morning newspaper there will most likely know that Otto Dix was a painter whose repertoire includes impressive works such as "Gräben vor Reims" (trenches near Reims). Yet I am afraid that very few of my compatriots are aware that Canadian troops also took part in the battles and suffered a high death toll for doing so. Here in Europe, we often view the First World War in a very eurocentric way despite the fact that its name alone tells us that this war was fought worldwide and indeed had worldwide ramifications. However, the countries on the other side of the Atlantic, who were involved with their own motives and suffered their own losses, are sadly overlooked in our general education and perception of the war. The commemorative year 2014 – 100 years following the outbreak of the First World War – provides an occasion and an opportunity to fill such gaps in our general awareness.

Canada's experience is striking: in 1914 your country had eight million inhabitants. 620,000 of them took part in the war. Canada was still a British dominion, meaning it entered the war on the side of the Triple Entente when Great Britain issued its declaration of war. Although Canadian and German soldiers found themselves facing each other on the battlefield only once, their battle – at Vimy ridge in April 1917 – had a lasting impact. It went down in the nation's collective memory as a great manifestation of Canadian bravery.

When it started, few guessed how long this war would last, or how high the ultimate human cost would be. Few could imagine the effect that the industrialization of warfare would have. The drumfire, the killing of trench warfare and above all the gas attacks took cruelty to levels previously unseen by mankind. It would take four long years for the fighting to be stopped.

In 1914, diplomacy between the powers of Europe failed disastrously. At this time, an imperialist mindset held sway in my country which clouded perception of reality, stymied willingness to trust one another and to balance interests peacefully. The course of the fighting went on to provide a horrific demonstration of the fallacy of the belief that unleashing war could resolve a political problem.

It is impossible to obtain exact figures but according to estimations, more than 15 million soldiers lost their lives up to 1918. Canada alone saw 66,000 of its people killed and 170,000 injured. In

addition to this, countless civilians of many different nationalities fell victim to the war.

Only two decades later, National Socialist Germany plunged the world into another, yet more devastating war.

Jackson and Dix were there to experience Germany's second defeat. However, they also went on to see democracy in Germany receive another chance. They saw the peoples of the world commit themselves to resolve conflicts peacefully when they founded the United Nations in 1945. When the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO, they witnessed former enemies Germany and Canada become partners, and shortly afterwards allies. Nothing seemed to bring people together more than the decades-long presence of Canadian soldiers in Germany.

Today, on both sides of the Atlantic, one can feel a great deal of recognition and sympathy for the other country. Our bilateral relations have been successfully transformed into something very positive: despite the burdens of the past we are bound by a close friendship. Since my arrival here yesterday I have seen many things that have shown me that this holds true. My sincere thanks to you for this!

I could conclude on this note but here, in this place in particular, I do not want to hide from you that we are also bound by shared concerns when we look at the world. Reports of bloody conflicts do not merely fill the pages of history books, but the press and daily news, too. Simply think of the reports from Ukraine and the Middle East. What is more, we do not only lack a stable security architecture there, it is lacking in many regions of our globalized world.

Most countries in Europe and North America take it as a given that their citizens are able to live in peace, freedom and prosperity, but as we all know, this is not the case everywhere. The European Union, which was built on the ruins of the wars in Europe, has developed into the greatest peace and prosperity project of human history. Yet the dream that all around the world conflicts can be peacefully overcome through cooperation and partnership, thus creating stability and security, this dream has yet to be realized. And unfortunately we have to recognize that even in Europe, in some places this order is more fragile than we thought because some people are calling into question the fundamental principles which hold this order together.

Canada and Germany are thus now needed more than ever before as partners who share values. Old and new conflicts are demanding determined action from our partners in NATO and in the G7 countries as well as in the wider context of the OSCE, the G20 and the United Nations – from Ukraine, to Iraq, Syria and the Middle East.

Canada and Germany work together in many forums. I am very pleased that we are further developing our political and economic

partnership at the EU-Canada summit tomorrow. And I would also like to use my visit to your country to ask: where and how could we consider further intensifying our cooperation? Where and how can we do more and achieve more than we have done to date?

This much is clear: a world of disorder needs economically and politically stable countries like Canada and Germany. It is in the interest of both of our countries to work to maintain and further develop a world order based on cooperation and rules. We need to reform our international regulatory framework. The challenges we face in doing so are immense. They start with the fight against the violation of human rights – be it by nationalists, extremists or fundamentalists – and range to global topics such as climate change, sustainable energy production and combating poverty and serious diseases such as Ebola and Aids. We must approach all of these issues together, as shared tasks. What is more, we must then work day in day out to deal with them.

What would Alexander Young Jackson and Otto Dix be painting if they lived in the world of today? What motifs and images will this era produce to pass on to our children and grandchildren? I hope that it will not only be hatred and destruction that these new pictures portray but rather hope and trust, happiness, mutual understanding and the gift of reconciliation. Canadian-German relations are a powerful example of the fact that transformation can succeed. Let us work together so that a change of this kind can touch the lives of many other people in our world too.