

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Sue Coe

HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND
SCULPTURE GARDEN

CHILLING DOSES OF REALITY CAST A macabre shadow over Sue Coe's paintings. Her accusing figures rise to level jeremiads at governments for social neglect and at humans for their meat-eating ways.

In this exhibition Coe showed 12 mixed-media works composed largely in blacks, whites, and emblazoned reds. The images spring from headlines. Coe has said that she considers herself more a journalist than an artist, yet like the editorials her illustrations often accompany, these large-scale works go beyond objectivity, veering more toward commentary than straight reportage.

Whether exposing the CIA's interventions in South Africa in the grisly collage *We Come Grinning into Your Paradise*, or chronicling the Persian Gulf crisis of 1991 in *War*, done in graphite and watercolor on paper, Coe recounts events rife with misery.

The artist's sense of mayhem is also evident in her version of Anita Hill testifying in court, and in the oil-on-paper *U.S. Military Successfully Bombs a Mental Hospital in Grenada*, where insane and sinister figures recoil, dance, and howl together in the building's former shell. Coe's straight-from-the-front-page sensibility finds a grim opportunity, based on an actual incident, to portray sexual violence in the collage *Woman Walks into a Bar—Is Raped by Four Men on the Pool Table—While 20 Watch*.

In several paintings from her

"Porkopolis" series, Coe mixes firsthand knowledge of slaughterhouse practice with sharp insights into human behavior. There were a number of graphic butchering scenes, along with the moving oil-and-collage work *Malcolm X and the Slaughterhouse*, in which the black nationalist leader stands off to the side while three men slaughter cattle. An interpretation of an actual incident, this piece, like so many of Coe's works, gives voice to the powerless. CURTIA JAMES



Sue Coe, *War*, 1991,
graphite and watercolor
on paper, 22 1/2" x 18 1/2".
Hirshhorn.