At War

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Events seemed of such moment, screens bright with charts, staccato stars, and ad-hoc icons, we were almost awkward, walking just the same restless streets as always, bound for the retrospective. There, the guards in vacant rooms of art were forced to look us over and over. One, a tall recruit in training, trailed an elder pair through permanent-collection rounds, his oxfords squeaking, busts to still-lifes, portraits, landscapes; last the long halls of history painting: greatest of all, an era held and now a dead (if death exists in genre) genre. Awe, I thought, a curious thing...My drifting, bored glance moved off from canvas, down to fingers jingling keys and coins in creased pockets, nods: These two can get the new guy hired nights at a hospital ward; they moonlight there. He’d rather have time off. They laugh: young, single. Time will come when cash...We left soon after. Full of sights and strolling home, we talked of art’s decline and the fresh campaign.