

Hello, I'm June Simms! Welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

Today we travel to South Sudan to hear about bracelets made from bullets. Old shell casings have been easy to find there after years of civil war. Now local artists have begun making jewelry from the objects.

But first up, Mario Ritter tells us about the runaway success of a new movie about the Battle of Stalingrad.

Stalingrad Wins Battle at the Box Office

Seventy years have passed since the Battle of Stalingrad, a fierce battle between Adolf Hitler's Germany and Joseph Stalin's Russia. Yet a new generation of Russians is now going out to see the latest film called Stalingrad.

Ksenia Kuznetsova has just seen the movie at a theater in a Moscow shopping mall.

"Thankfully I was born after that period and I didn't have to experience it. But the characters in the film give you the feeling that you're living it with them."

The movie Stalingrad began showing in theaters in October. It has become Russia's biggest selling movie since the collapse of the Soviet Union more than 20 years ago.

In March, it will be Russia's entry for an Oscar award for best foreign-language movie.

The real Battle of Stalingrad was a Soviet victory. But, it came at a huge cost. Historians say it was the bloodiest battle in human history, with close to two million deaths.

Film critic Sergei Levrentev says that Stalingrad's success reflects Russia's lasting respect for the sacrifices of World War Two.

"For the youngsters, who are the main spectators in the cinema now, it's totally unusual. They never saw such Soviet films about war. They haven't even some feeling how bad was that war for the Russian people, for the Soviet people."

Stalingrad is Russia's first movie filmed in 3D for IMAX. Moviegoer Katya liked the special effects.

"I really liked the movie. It was filmed and produced very well. The actors did a great job, and of course it grabs you by the heart because it reflects all of our strength and history."

Russia's government financed the film's \$30 million budget as part of a drive to make modern movies that show Russian history in a positive light.

Today, the city of Stalingrad is called Volgograd. The government completely rebuilt the city, after it was destroyed during the war.

A patriotic statue there known as the Motherland Calls was the largest in the world when Soviet officials first displayed it in 1967. However, the 8,000-ton monument is built on clay, and it has started to lean.

City residents are hopeful that, after spending millions on a Hollywood-style movie, Russia's government will invest in repairing the monument to the real war dead of Stalingrad. I'm Mario Ritter in Washington. Thanks to VOA's James Brooke for his reporting on this story.

You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms in Washington.

Making Art Out of War in South Sudan

Africa's longest civil war left South Sudan in ruins when it split from the north in 2011. Now the country's artists are making jewelry out of old shell casings from artillery fire that once terrorized the population. Hannah McNeish recently visited the town of Rumbek to speak with some of the locals.

Just outside of Rumbek, the capital of South Sudan's Lakes state, a song of smashes and clashes and clangs rings out from dusk until dawn. It is the sound of blacksmiths hammering away at old metal shells and turning them into works of art.

John Panchol has been making things from bullet and artillery casings for years. He says before he began making bracelets he used to make traditional weapons used in cattle raids. Raiders now use deadlier, modern guns.

But, Panchol has found that there is a growing demand for art and jewelry made from bullets. He says these so-called "bullet bangles" have become his main source of business. And some of his best customers are Rumbek's cows.

This is cattle country, where cows outnumber humans. Many people are named after their father's favorite bull or best milking cow.

"I'm not just making bracelets," he says. "I'm producing bells for the cows and some spears that are luxury. People love these things."

South Sudanese fashion designer Akuja de Garang is trying to increase support for the new nation's struggling artists.

Like many others, Akuja de Garang fled Sudan's civil war. The 22-year conflict killed an estimated 2 million people. She spent most of her life in Britain where she studied anthropology.

In her house, she displays some of the beautiful objects made by almost 600 ethnic groups spread across South Sudan.

They include pipes of wood covered in smoothed bullets and razor-sharp spears traditionally carried by tribal "wise men."

Akuja de Garang says she wants people to recognize South Sudan for something other than its violent past. She is trying to support artists like the metalworkers by providing small loans, a market for buyers in the capital, and advice on prices that will reflect the blood, sweat and tears of their works.

"What I'm trying to do with the organization I've set up is to offer an opportunity to access the market, basically. So what I'm trying to do is to set up a network of artists around the 10 states."

She says "bullet bangle" artists also are helping to clean up a country littered with bullets, shell casings and other remains from years of war.

The business of making art and jewelry out of scraps of military metal is likely to die out if this new nation can maintain peace with Sudan. That will result in a lack of raw materials. Until then, these artists will continue turning pieces of war into pieces of art.

That is As It Is for today. I'm June Simms. As always, thanks for sharing your day with us. We invite you to share your ideas with us as well. Email us at learningenglish@voanews.com.

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