

Protest! Resistance Posters

Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, Toni-Areal,
20.4.–2.9.2018

Appeals for peace, pleas to respect human rights, calls for environmental protection: ever since the 1920s, the poster has proven to be an effective medium for drawing attention to social and political struggles. In 1968, the spirited and poetic images created by the Atelier Populaire inundated Paris as French workers and students allied behind a common cause. In 1970, a single poster managed to trigger an international outcry: a photograph of the Mỹ Lai Massacre, with a laconic quote added, became the political statement par excellence against the Vietnam War.

Posters communicate universal and timeless themes to a broad public, stimulating critical debate. Arranged in five different sections, the protest posters in this exhibition illustrate a range of proven pictorial formulas and discursive strategies. Graphical commentaries on today's civil protest movements, disseminated largely through virtual means, take up the rhetoric of the posters. Also presented are the individual approaches of eight exemplary artists who have developed their own aesthetics of resistance. Protest songs and films provide a frame through which to view these poster worlds.

Fifty years after 1968—a cipher for worldwide rebellion—the exhibition brings together works that exemplify the tradition of the poster as a medium for protest but that also remind us of the need to carry on the struggle in the here and now: A better world is possible.

Outrage and Enlightenment

Posters that portray horrors and suffering appeal directly to the viewer's emotions. "Time for outrage!" is their urgent appeal. Emotions are often invoked by focusing on the human face. A picture of someone screaming is capable of expressing both pain and burgeoning resistance. Other protest posters pursue an awareness-raising strategy, provoking debate by providing factual information or asking questions, or stimulating reflection by showing us images that are not immediately comprehensible. Victim and object, rebel and subject: in the posters on display, the human image moves back and forth between these poles.

Idol and Bogeyman

Alberto Korda's famous photograph of Che Guevara provided a template for millions of reproductions. This ubiquitous likeness is a perfect illustration of how idols are appropriated by the media: they become frozen in their role as collectively adopted figureheads, their real historical and political significance soon becoming an afterthought. This opens the door for their monopolization by consumerism and popular culture. Graphic protest frequently manifests itself in the dismantling of the political elite and the system they embody. Rendered with cynicism, irony, or humor, authoritarian leaders figures are cut down to human size.

Utopia and Dystopia

Visions of an alternative, better world are rare in protest posters. General calls for brotherhood and sisterhood would seem all too naive. The beauty of unspoiled nature also arouses suspicion, the flirting with consumer advertising posing a constant threat. But utopias can also stand for the principle of hope. Although apocalyptic images may be provocative and shocking, they serve above all as reminders. They work with the vision of a devastating future in order to urge commitment in the present. Utopian and dystopian imagery thus ultimately pursues the same goal: both types of imagined worlds have their own power to stimulate changes in the here and now.

Appeal and Address

The text poster precedes the image poster: ever since the invention of printing, critical voices have adopted the text poster as an effective means of expressing their dissatisfaction. Official typographic notices from the authorities face off against pamphlets from the people within the public discourse. During and after the French Revolution, text posters played an important role in consolidating the young democracy. Rigid manifesto, emotional appeal, play on words, or clever typeface: the posters assembled here demonstrate that the effectiveness of a message can be enhanced even further by targeted typographic design.

Signs and Symbols

The mass medium of the poster communicates using signs and symbols that have long since inscribed themselves into collective visual memory. At the same time, social media helps to rapidly spread new motifs created to encapsulate emancipatory movements. As a result, their appropriation becomes more and more unscrupulous. The only solution is to fall back on familiar codes. Even globally comprehensible symbols that have long been usurped by the media, such as the fist thrust into the air or the dove, still have the capacity to unfold further creative and subversive potential. They need only be infused with new content and rendered in a new form to undermine our viewing habits.

Positions

Today, the poster no longer enjoys the same status it did in the twentieth century as an instrument of political enlightenment. And yet dedicated designers are still proving, as they did back then, that the medium is particularly well-suited for critical interventions in public space. Their posters, realized mostly on their own initiative, are an impressive testimony to the artists' sense of social responsibility. The geographical and historical context, along with cultural, social, and economic conditions and individual attitudes, lead to diverse visual strategies. What they all have in common is a faith in being able to influence developments through creative means.

James Victore

"If your work appeals to everyone, it moves no one."

Avoiding graphical conventions, James Victore's posters have developed their own potential for provocation. Shocking images, uncensored, are ubiquitous in today's media. Victore therefore trusts that any alternative pictorial invention, no matter how aggressive, will be accepted. Hand and computer drawing, graphics and typography blend together in his posters into a new, witty, and irreverent form of expression. The images unfold their cynical impact through the confrontation between lapidary representation and murderous reality.

David Tartakover

"My work is often considered a protest. It's not. It's a reaction."

David Tartakover is a graphic designer, political activist, and artist. For years, the Israeli has been using his work to protest against his country's occupation policy, counting among the harshest critics of the right-wing populists. He uses mostly images from the mass media for his posters, lending them new meaning through concise slogans. Tartakover's subtle messages are designed not to provoke but to make people think. His logo for the movement Peace Now, designed back in 1978, is a testament to his tireless commitment.

Vincent Perrottet

"These images are intended to joyously subvert the gaze."

For Vincent Perrottet, graphic design implies social responsibility and political practice. His posters are at once exhibited object, manifesto, and commodity. Quotes from famous personalities are combined with his own headings to create a polyphonic conversation that invites the public to join in. Background photographs complement the complex message. Perrottet wants to negotiate reality with multiple voices. His posters are also meant as a visual protest against the predominantly commercial occupation of public space.

Tomi Ungerer

"I am a fist-word person."

Tomi Ungerer's posters are effective and affecting: bitter satire, captured in apparently simple images that invariably prove to be ambiguous. Characteristic of Ungerer's style are a reduction to the essentials and strong black outlines. Dating from his New York years, the posters on view here take a stand on racism, the Vietnam War, and the materialism of American society. His sensitivity to injustice is translated into ruthless and provocative rage. Even today, Ungerer's iconic posters have lost none of their power.

Klaus Staeck

“I expose, I ascertain, I rectify!”

Klaus Staeck takes his cue from the design practices of John Heartfield. With his word-and-image inventions, he develops a powerful iconography that uses photomontage in a way attuned to the present day. Staeck makes targeted use of the formal mechanisms of advertising by integrating them into new contexts. He works on developing a visual language of criticism based on the contrast between image and text. The potential of his posters to provoke is increased not least by the way they are posted on official notice boards rather than randomly in public space.

Asamblea de los Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca, ASARO

“Mass media does not reveal the truth; it’s always disguised.”

The artist collective ASARO was founded in 2006, prompted by a teachers’ strike in Oaxaca de Juárez that led to nationwide protests by the largely indigenous population. The strike was brutally put down by the state. Even today, the ASARO posters are still a powerful expression of resistance against despotism and state-perpetrated violence. These woodcut works are inspired in the Mexican folk tradition. And they are also a tribute to José Guadalupe Posada (1854–1913), who used artistic means to protest against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.

Atelier Populaire

“We must all teach ourselves.”

In the course of the events of May 1968 in Paris, young art students discovered the poster as a medium for resistance. After occupying the École des Beaux-Arts, they set up a screen-printing studio and collectively designed posters with poetic potency. The concerns of the student movement were allied with those of the workers. The screen-printing technique lent itself to a new aesthetic marked by irregular letters and simple drawings. Plastered all over the city by night, the posters turned Paris into a realm of signs, inaugurating a buoyant and nonchalant form of politicization.

John Heartfield

“Photomontage was and remains the weapon of revolutionary artists.”

John Heartfield’s posters functioned as a medium of visual enlightenment. The pioneer of photomontage used this technique to reinterpret reality using satire, poetry, and pathos. His works constituted a prophetic analysis of the political situation. They laid bare the complexity of what was going on underneath the visible surface. Heartfield’s photomontages thus took a stand against Nazi mass propaganda and proved to be an effective weapon in the fight against fascism.

Glossary

This glossary provides brief explanations of randomly chosen terms that come up in the exhibition. Visitors are encouraged to delve in greater depth into these topics on their own.

1968

The year 1968 stands for a time of worldwide social and political revolt. Social tensions mounted during the 1960s and were ignited by the Vietnam War and the assassinations of Rudi Dutschke, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., causing civil rights movements and student unrest to come to a head.

Anti-Apartheid Movement

The African National Congress (ANC) took action early on to fight against state-organized racial segregation in South Africa. The Soweto Uprising of 1976 led to the establishment of international solidarity movements against the oppression of the black population. Nelson Mandela was the figurehead of this resistance.

Anti-Nuclear Movement

A worldwide social movement emerged in the 1970s opposing the use of nuclear weapons and later also pushing for a phase-out of nuclear energy. Broad-based protest movements were organized especially in the United States and Germany, leading to an increased focus on renewable energies.

Black Power

In the mid-1960s, African Americans came together to form a radicalized civil rights movement in the United States under the slogan "Black Power." They advocated for greater black self-confidence and a clear distancing from white society, demanding social, economic, and political rights.

Civil Rights Movements

Around 1950, in the United States, a civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. committed to combating discrimination against the black population emerged. This movement would serve as a model for many subsequent movements fighting for the rights of ethnic and social minorities.

Cold War

From 1947 to 1989, the Western powers led by the United States were mired in an ideological conflict with the Eastern bloc under the rule of the Soviet Union. Rather than direct military confrontation, the Cold War witnessed the two blocs vying for technological, economic, military, and political supremacy.

Death Penalty

Some countries still have the death penalty in place for certain crimes. Criminals are executed in the United States, China, India, and parts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, often without a trial. The global trend toward abolishing the death penalty is, however, unstoppable.

Deportation Initiative

The popular federal initiative launched by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) "for the deportation of criminal foreigners" called for the deportation of legal aliens for certain specified crimes. The referendum passed in 2010 with 52.9 percent of the vote.

Dictatorship

In a dictatorship all political power is in the hands of a single person or a group such as the military, a political party, or a family. Pseudo-democratic elements often disguise the real conditions. Authoritarian systems of government are usually an intermediate step on the way to a dictatorship.

Enforcement Initiative

With the Enforcement Initiative of 2016, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) demanded the strict enforcement of the Deportation Initiative passed in 2010. The party accused the parliamentary majority of not complying with the will of the people due to the provisions of international law. In a referendum, 58.9 percent voted against the initiative.

Environmental Protection

With the Industrial Revolution came a growing awareness of the pollution caused by human activity. Beginning in the 1970s, environmental protection became a political issue. The goal was and is to find a balance between economic needs, biological resources, and human health.

Fascism

Benito Mussolini set up a totalitarian dictatorship in Italy in 1922. The name chosen for this form of government in Italy, *fascismo*, became a generic term for nationalist, anti-democratic, and anti-Marxist ideologies and regimes in Europe. Under Adolf Hitler in Germany, mass persuasion and the cult of the Führer, or Supreme Leader, reached a new climax.

Feminism

The term feminism is used to refer to socio-political currents and trends in the humanities that critically question gender relations and advocate for equal rights for women. Following the women's movements of the 1970s, Donald Trump is currently once again stirring up the feminist spirit.

Forest Dieback

The death of forests due to pests, acid rain, and pollution became an important issue on the political agenda of German-speaking countries in the 1980s. Forest dieback also refers, however, to systematically cutting down trees and rainforests in order to plant monoculture crops. This deforestation is often carried out using the criminal means of arson.

Global Warming

Greenhouse gas emissions along with massive deforestation significantly contribute to global warming, or climate change. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 and went into effect in 2005, regulating the reduction of greenhouse gases in industrial nations. In 2017, the United States announced their withdrawal from the subsequent agreements made under this treaty.

Gulf Wars

Iraq and Iran were at war from 1980 to 1988; in 1990, Iraq occupied the small emirate of Kuwait; and in 2003, the United States invaded Iraq, which was led by the military regime of Saddam Hussein. All three Gulf Wars represent a power struggle for the oil there and an attempt to realign economic policy in the Middle East.

Human Rights

The declaration of human rights made during the French Revolution led to international socio-political change. In 1791, Olympe de Gouges added women's rights to the list. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN in 1948 is based on the precedent set in 1789: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Liberation Movements in Latin America

The victory in the Cuban Revolution of 1959 achieved through guerrilla methods sparked liberation movements throughout Latin America. They were directed against military regimes and promised an alternative to "actually existing socialism." Catholic groupings known as Basic Ecclesial Communities supported these efforts.

Middle East Conflict

As a result of World War II, the State of Israel was established on Palestinian land in 1948. The displacement of the indigenous Arab population led to massive resistance. Still raging today, the Middle East Conflict has in the meantime spread to the neighboring countries, to the alarm of the international community.

Migration

Whether spurred by political violence, social destitution, ethnic or religious persecution, or economic hardship, the reasons for leaving one's homeland and migrating elsewhere are as old as man himself. With the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Regulation, the EU has allowed free internal migration since 1985, but only for EU citizens.

Military Build-Up/NATO Double-Track Decision

The NATO member states responded to the stationing of Soviet SS-20 missiles in the mid-1970s with the NATO Double-Track Decision. The decision stipulated that, should a four-year negotiation period fail to produce results, the United States would deploy more medium-range nuclear weapons in Western Europe. A new Cold War arms race began.

North-South Divide

After World War II, the European nations withdrew from the colonies they had been exploiting for centuries. A sociopolitical and economic gap that still persists today solidified between the rich industrial nations of the Global North and the poor developing and emerging countries of the Global South.

Occupy

In 2011, people heeded the call to rise up for more democracy that appeared in the form of the tweet "Occupy Wall Street" by Canadian magazine Adbuster. In the aftermath of the global banking crisis, "We are the 99%" became the rallying cry of international protest movements against the plutocracy, with demonstrations such as that on Zurich's Paradeplatz.

Peace Movement

In the international peace movement, people take action to try to end armed conflicts. Efforts were already undertaken in antiquity to eliminate war as a political instrument. The resurgent peace movement in the nineteenth century experienced an initial high point after World War I.

Spanish Civil War

In Spain, international brigades of left-wing republicans supporting the elected government fought the attempted coup by the right-wing forces under General Francisco Franco from 1936 to 1939. Franco's victory with the help of German and Italian fascists left Spain with a dictatorship that lasted until his death in 1975.

Stuttgart Main Station

With the project "Stuttgart 21," in the year 2000 the city began planning a multibillion-euro conversion of Stuttgart's railway terminus into an underground through station, which met with widespread public resistance. Critics demonstrated for years against the project and forced a referendum in 2011 that, however, they would lose.

Syrian War

Arising in 2011 from protests against Bashar al-Assad's totalitarian regime, the Syrian War expanded into a proxy war for international powers. Geopolitical interests, ethnic and religious conflicts, and the battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) dominate the conflict today, forcing millions to flee.

Toni-Areal

The converted Toni dairy plant became home to Zurich University of the Arts in 2014. However, some people criticized the integration of all university departments into the one building with its industrial flair, citing bureaucratization, loss of autonomy, and the necessary safety precautions as forces tending to dry up the cultural biotope.

Torture

Torture is the targeted subjection of people to physical and psychological violence. Although the prohibition of torture is a human right, it is still common practice in many countries, used to terrorize the population, extract confessions, or exhort information.

Ukraine Conflict

Violently suppressed protests in Kiev in 2014 led to the overthrow of the government of Viktor Yanukovich. Russia responded by annexing the Crimean peninsula, splitting the country into two camps. The Ukrainian military and pro-Russian separatists are still engaged today in armed conflict.

Umbrella Revolution

Inspired by Occupy, in 2014 students in Hong Kong protested against Beijing's decision to restrict the free election of the city's chief executive. An umbrella symbolized the passive resistance practiced by the civil rights movement, which refused to refer to itself as a "revolution."

Vietnam War

In 1954, the division of Vietnam led to civil war in South Vietnam between communist forces supported by the north and the anti-communist government. Intervention by the United States on the side of the South Vietnamese government inflated the conflict into a proxy war between the superpowers. The war ended in 1975 with the victory of North Vietnam.

World Economic Forum (WEF)

Established in Geneva in 1971 as a nonprofit foundation, the WEF annually brings together international representatives from business and politics to engage in informal discussions in Davos. Globalization and capitalism critics see in the WEF above all a meeting of the global elite to defend their vested interests.

World War I

World War I raged from 1914 to 1918 and marked a radical break in human history. It was the first war to involve all the imperialist superpowers that had recently emerged as nations. Technological advances allowed for completely new kinds of weaponry, with devastating effects on the civilian population.

World War II

All of the major powers of the twentieth century were embroiled in World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945. Adolf Hitler and the other Axis powers of Italy and Japan faced off against the Allied powers. This war, from which the Allies emerged victorious, had witnessed the Holocaust and the first use of the atomic bomb.

Yugoslav Wars

In the 1990s, the multiethnic socialist nation of Yugoslavia was broken up into different republics in the course of several wars. The conflicts were triggered by ethnic, religious, and economic tensions that arose following the death of Yugoslavian president Josip Tito in 1980 and political upheavals in Eastern Europe.

Education program In German

Exhibition talks

Wednesday, 25 April, 6:00 p.m.
Gegenkultur im Zeitalter der Omnikultur
A guided tour by Lars Müller, designer and publisher, Basil Rogger, lecturer at ZHdK, and Jonas Voegeli, head of the bachelor's program in Visual Communication at ZHdK, through the exhibition and the accompanying publication

Wednesday, 23 May, 6:00 p.m.
Protestplakate hier und heute: eine aktuelle Praxis?
With Caro Cerbaro and Eric Andersen, graphic designers, and Bettina Richter

Wednesday, 13 June, 6:00 p.m.
"Hoch die – Kampf dem...!"
Plakate als Ausdruck von Protestbewegungen
With Klaus Schönberger, empirical cultural scholar, and Bettina Richter

Wednesday, 4 July, 6:00 p.m.
"Nichts ist erledigt"
Zum Plakatschaffen von Klaus Staeck
With Klaus Staeck, lawyer and poster designer, and Bettina Richter

Guided tours

Wednesday, 6:00 p.m.: 9 May, 20 June, 18 July, 8 August, 22 August 2018
Sunday, 11:00 a.m.: 22 April, 6 May, 27 May, 10 June, 24 June, 8 July, 22 July, 5 August, 19 August, 2 September 2018

Workshop

Saturday, 12 May and 16 June, 2:00–4:30 p.m.
Mein Protest
Transferring an image into your own poster
Workshop for adults and young people aged 16 and over
With Franziska Hess, member of the education staff

Children & Co

Sunday, 3 June, 2:00–4:30 p.m.
Zeichenwörterbuch
Finding and inventing protest signs
Workshop for families with children aged 9 and over
With Domenika Chandra, cultural mediator

Schools

Weltbild in Weltformat
Designing a protest poster together
Plakatscanner
Reading and reinterpreting protest symbols in posters
Workshops for grades 4–10, intermediary and vocational schools
With Domenika Chandra

Registration for all workshops:
+41 43 446 66 20
vermittlung@museum-gestaltung.ch

Accompanying film program at the Klub Kuleshov, Kino Toni, ZHdK

Saturday, 12 May, 5:00 p.m.
Züri brännt
Markus Sieber / Thomas Krempke / Marcel Müller / Patricia Loggia / Ronnie Wahli, Switzerland, 1981

Sunday, 13 May, 5:00 p.m. / 7:00 p.m.
Ice
Robert Kramer, USA, 1970
Loin du Vietnam
Jean-Luc Godard / Joris Ivens / William Klein / Claude Lelouch / Chris Marker / Alain Resnais, France, 1967

Saturday, 26 May, 5:00 p.m. / 7:00 p.m.
Hunger
Steve McQueen, Ireland / UK, 2008
Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement
Laurens Grant, USA, 2016
I Am Not Your Negro
Raoul Peck, Switzerland / France / Belgium / USA, 2016

Sunday, 27 May, 5:00 p.m. / 7:00 p.m.
Fuocoammare
Gianfranco Rosi, France, 2016
Wadjda
Haifaa Al Mansour, Saudi Arabia / Germany / Netherlands / USA, 2012

Reclaim Public Space!

Toni-Areal foyer, 7 June–19 August 2018
Clear the stage: a poster intervention
by bachelor of design students from ZHdK

Publication

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Museum
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