

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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THE ARTIST AS ADVERSARY

The Artist as Adversary is the subject of an exhibition of more than 400 paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, posters and photographs on view at The Museum of Modern Art from July 1 through September 27, 1971. The exhibition includes works by more than 140 artists from 21 countries ranging in date from 1863 to 1971.

Selected by Betsy Jones, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition brings together from the Museum's own collections a large body of work in which the state of the world, political and military institutions and events, social injustices, constitute the subject matter. Acquired during the past four decades, the works are supplemented with several promised gifts and extended loans.

"Whether by means of allegory, metaphor or symbol, irony, satire both humorous and bitter, cold realism or expressive emotionalism, polemics or propaganda," the works in the exhibition are explicit in their attitudes of dissent, protest or attack. "Some of the artists have been motivated by a deep-seated, consistent desire to reform. Others, under the stimulus of critical times, have produced isolated works of protest as acts of conscience. Some are indignant and condemnatory, some are meditative, some are hortatory, some are deadpan, but none are noncommittal," Miss Jones writes.

The majority of the works in the exhibition are concerned with the subject of war. With few exceptions, artists of the past have, Miss Jones says, tended to see war and revolutionary upheaval in terms of victory or defeat, bravery or treachery, glory or tragedy, but rarely in terms of death and inhumanity. But beginning with the battle-ground photographs of the American Civil War published by Alexander Gardner and ending with prints, posters and photographs dealing with the Vietnam War by Carlos Irizarry, William Weege, Rudolf Schoofs, Larry Burrows, Cristos Gianakos, Seymour Chwast and others, the stimulus is, in Gardner's words "the blank horror and reality of war in opposition

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to its pageantry.

"The human wastefulness of war also informs the compassionate despair of Rouault's Miserere prints, the grotesque realism of Otto Dix's War etchings, the black humor of George Grosz and John Heartfield," Miss Jones adds. Picasso is represented by 60 studies relating to his Guernica mural, the most powerful symbol of protest against war and brutality in our time, which, together with the studies, has been on extended loan from the artist since 1939. The exhibition also includes a recent acquisition, Picasso's The Charnel House, his requiem for the victims of World War II concentration camps and gas chambers. Allegorical treatments of the menace of totalitarian dictatorships and the devastations of the Spanish Civil War are seen in Max Beckmann's triptych, Departure, the Peter Blume Eternal City, shown with four studies for it, and Joan Miró's Still Life with Old Shoe.

The vision of the artist is combined with that of the reformer in the photographs of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, aimed at bringing to the attention of the authorities before and after the turn of the century the inhuman conditions in big-city slums and the abuse of child labor. In the thirties, the U.S. Farm Security Administration sent out photographers -- among them Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and Arthur Rothstein -- to photograph the desparate plight of the rural American displaced by Depression, flood and drought so that the public would see what had to be corrected.

Ben Shahn, painter, printmaker, poster artist and photographer is represented in the show by one of his Farm Security Administration photographs, as well as by a print and a painting dealing with the Sacco-Vanzetti case and numerous war posters, This is Nazi Brutality, and political propaganda posters, Break Reaction's Grip.

William Gropper and Jack Levine, both justly renowned for their satirical political and social paintings, are represented by well-known works -- Gropper's The Senate and The Feast of Pure Reason, and Election Night by Levine. In this same vein, though gentler,

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are Fernando Botero's Presidential Family and Marisol's LBJ. Jim Dine's print entitled Drag and Tadnori Yokoo's lithograph poster, This is America, are less respectful. The Friendly Grey Computer - Star Gauge Model 54, a construction by Edward Kienholz, Robert Indiana's emblematic painting, The American Dream, and Peter Saul's untitled drawing all take up some of the familiar frailties of American mores.

Although the exhibition is drawn from the Museum collections, one important loan was secured in order to unite both halves of Jacob Lawrence's sixty-part narrative, The Migration of the Negro. The 30 panels belonging to the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. have not been seen in New York with the Museum's 30 panels since Lawrence's one-man show at the Museum in 1944. Younger artists represented who also deal with the theme of the oppression of the black man in America are Benny Andrews, Malcolm Bailey, Warrington Colescott, the photographers Elliott Erwitt, Ben Fernandez and Declan Haun.

An entire gallery is devoted to the work of Mexican artists. As Miss Jones observes, "probably the most successful integration of art with social purpose on a national scale occurred in Mexico beginning with the Revolutionary period (1910-19) and continuing with vigor into the decades following.... Pledged to an art for the people, working collectively on occasion, the Mexicans revived the mural and the printed broadside as forms of public art, and brought them to a perfection achieved nowhere else in modern times." Frescoes by José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera, paintings by David Alfaro Siqueiros, as well as many prints and broadsides by the influential José Guadalupe Posada, and his successors, Leopoldo Mendez and José Chavez-Morado are included. Both the frescoes were executed under the Museum's sponsorship and Orozco's entitled Dive Bomber and Tank, was done in 1940 in the Museum's galleries where the public could watch its progress. It is both portable and variable. Orozco's conception provided for omitting one or more of the six panels, arranging them in any sequence, and even showing them upside down. Four are included -- right side up -- in the present show.

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Several monuments, not now in existence for various reasons, are represented in the show by maquettes or drawing studies. Mies van der Rohe's monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, designed in 1926 in Berlin, was destroyed by the Nazis. Funds have never been raised to build the Unknown Political Prisoner monument for which Reg Butler's maquette won an international prize in 1953. Spanish authorities have refused permission to erect the monument to the exiled Spanish poet Antonio Machado, for which Pablo Serrano did his over-life-size bronze portrait head. As far as is known, permission has not yet been sought for the erection of Claes Oldenburg's Proposed Monument for the Intersection of Canal Street and Broadway, New York: Block of Concrete Inscribed with the names of War Heroes.

Restricted as it is to the Museum's Collections, The Artist as Adversary is necessarily an arbitrary presentation and in no sense a comprehensive historical survey. But like previous shows with this limitation -- The 1960s (1967), Word and Image (1968), Jean Dubuffet (1968), and The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation (1969) -- it provides the Museum with an opportunity to bring before its public, in the context of more familiar works, many works which cannot be continuously on view.

A paperback booklet with introduction by Miss Jones, statements by a number of artists in the show and a checklist is being published by the Museum to accompany the exhibition.

Additional information available from Joan Wallace, Press Coordinator and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7297, -7501.
