

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

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"New York in April, Paris in May, Prague in August, Mexico in September- the crumbling walls speak. Mass media's controlled silencers have forced the poster to be heard again."

These words accompany an exhibition of about 25 posters made during the student revolt in Paris which were brought to The Museum of Modern Art by a young American who had participated in the uprising. Paris: May 1968. Posters of the Student Revolt will be on view at the Museum beginning November 23 and was selected by Emilio Ambasz, Associate Curator of Design.

The propaganda of the French revolt was fed by immediate pressures. The day-by-day events - the disruption of classes at Nanterre University led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the supporting student demonstrations in Paris, the police invasion of the Sorbonne and its occupation by the students, the barricades, and the government's reaction and referendum - these were the events that produced the newspaper stories and also these spontaneous, passionate comments in the poster medium.

The process of making the posters was rapid and direct: "Grafitti sustained a relentless match of squash against the communiques of the official radio and TV. Slogans were picked off the walls and brought to the limited printing facilities of l'Ecole des Arts Decoratifs and l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, rebaptised Atelier Populaire by the students entrenched there. Students and sympathetic workers - enraptured by the spirit of community - experimented with participatory design, discussing and choosing together the poster subjects and images. Anonymity was not only a consequence of this method of working but also an understandable necessity," says Mr. Ambasz.

The first posters were printed by whatever means were at hand. As the movement became more organized and more people became involved, silk screen workshops were established. "When need overcame production, the ateliers were joined by the workshops of the Faculties of Science and of Psychology as well as by the committees of Revolutionary Action operating in each neighborhood, which resorted to every available printing medium- blueprint and office duplicating machines included." Established artists

(more)

helped, too: "In solidarity, Paris's international artistic community contributed posters which, although more accomplished graphically, lacked the punch of the students' simplicity."

The titles of the posters reveal their spirit of sarcasm, anger, humor: Hitler/De Gaulle, L'Etat C'est Moi, L'Ordre Regne (order prevails), Le Vote Ne Change Rien (the vote changes nothing), and the untranslatable, famous parody of De Gaulle's statement, Le Chienlit C'est Encore Lui. The posters were brought into the Museum by a young American girl who, participating in the revolt, had helped distribute and put them up in the streets. The selection was made from about 150 examples.

"Resorting to the folklore of popular idioms and visual images was the students' way of achieving more directly the desired union of university and factory. Nevertheless, it gradually became clear that Tomorrow had many forms of commitment to reality. While the students had been proposing humanistic anarchism as man's Garden, the majority of the workers had been demanding the Arcadia of the Levittowns. But, then, Today understood will be the myth of history and these posters will be its documents. For its actors, the reality of May dwells in the paper barricades and in the fervid hours of their collective creation."

Paris: May 1968 will be on view in Gallery 20 on the Museum's second floor, where informal and impromptu shows are frequently mounted by the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design. It was installed by John Garrigan, Assistant Curator of Graphic Design.

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Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, and Patricia D. Bauman, Coordinator, Press Services, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.

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November 23, 1968 -  
Wall Label

## PARIS: MAY 1968 Posters of the Student Revolt

*Be realists, demand the impossible.*  
From the walls of the Censier.

Columbia in April, Paris in May, Prague in August, Mexico in September — the crumbling walls speak. Mass media's controlled silencers have forced the poster to be heard again.

Distrustful of the Marxist models and the 19th Century concept of change; repelled by the impermeability of Europe's political and educational institutions yet simultaneously resisting the sponginess of America's cultural and social establishment; Youth — self assured of purity by their refusal to define plans and buoyed by the tension of their own contradictions — envisions, nevertheless, an undeterministic type of social system, tolerant of emotions and designed to operate in a permanent state of reform.

The disruption of classes in Nanterre's New Faculty of Letters led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the supporting student demonstrations in Paris, the police invasion of the Sorbonne, the occupation of the Sorbonne and the Odeon by the students, the first and second barricades, and the government's reaction and referendum are by now well known items for a yet unconcluded chronology of youth's rebellion. But, in contrast to the manifestos of revolution, which have always been rooted in the future, the propaganda of the French revolt nourished itself in immediacy.

Graffiti sustained a relentless match of squash against the communiqués of the official radio and TV. Slogans were picked off the walls and brought to the limited printing facilities of L'Ecole des Arts Decoratifs and L'Ecole de Beaux-Arts, rebaptized Atelier Populaire by the students entrenched there. Students and sympathetic workers enraptured by the spirit of community experimented with participatory design, discussing and choosing together the poster subjects and images. Anonymity was not only a consequence of this method of working but also an understandable necessity.

The first posters were printed by whatever means were at hand. As the movement became more organized and the number of those involved increased, silk screen workshops were established. When need overcame production, the ateliers were joined by the workshops of the Faculties of Science and of Psychology, as well as by the Committees of Revolutionary Action operating in each neighborhood, which resorted to every available printing medium — blue print and office duplicating machines included. In solidarity, Paris' international artistic community contributed posters which, although more accomplished graphically, lacked the punch of the students' simplicity.

Resorting to the folklore of popular idioms and visual images was the students' way of achieving more directly the desired union of university and factory. Nevertheless, it gradually became clear that Tomorrow had many forms of commitment to reality. While the students had been proposing humanistic anarchism as natural man's Garden, the majority of the workers had been demanding the Arcadia of the Levittowns. But, then, Today understood will be the myth of history and these posters, its documents. For its actors, the reality of May dwells in the paper barricades and in the fervid hours of their collective creation.

Emilio Ambasz