

Gérard Gassiot-Talabot: "Is confrontation possible?", *Art and Confrontation: France and the Arts in an Age of Change*, oversat af Nigel Foxell [1968] (London: Studio Vista, 1970), pp. 95-120.

## Is confrontation possible?

15. *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 88.
16. *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 466.
17. *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 80.
18. *Catalogue des travaux de J. Dubuffet*, Pauvert, Section V, p. 83-90.
19. J. DUBUFFET, *Prospectus et...*, Vol. II, p. 74.
20. *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 119.
21. *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 73.
22. DERRIDA, *De la grammatologie*, Éditions de Minuit, *L'écriture et la différence*, Seuil, J.F. LYOTARD, "Le travail du rêve ne pense pas," *Revue d'Esthétique*, January-March 1968, pp.26-61.
23. S. LECLARE, *Psychanalyse*, Seuil, explores the link between enjoyment and the letter. See also the entire works of Maurice Blanchot.
24. J. DUBUFFET, *Asphyxiant culture*, p. 100.
25. *Op. cit.*, p. 116.
26. J. DUBUFFET, *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, Vol. II, p. 322.
27. DERRIDA, *De la grammatologie*, p. 14.

The young painter Quintanilla, a Peruvian Indian who returns in his work to the elements of a fantastic bestiary, told me that he had stopped painting revolutionary pictures, in spite of his desire to do so, as a result of a misadventure that remained with him as a painful memory. Seeing every day scenes of brutality and exploitation, he painted a large-scale picture of a landowner with a furious glint in his eye, whipping from astride his horse a throng of panic-stricken peasants. He then took it to a gallery in Lima. Imagine his surprise when it was bought shortly afterward by one of the richest "exploiters" in the country, a prize ruffian who exclaimed (without the least trace of black humor), "There's a picture that shows how Indians should be treated!"

This type of ambiguity in immediate meaning is one of the crudest and commonest difficulties one can raise concerning revolutionary painting. The least one can say is such painting goes through a hell paved with good intentions and that the worst often prevails over the best. That is all the more reason to examine the limits and possibilities of this political and moral attitude toward the world and the choices it entails for the painter.

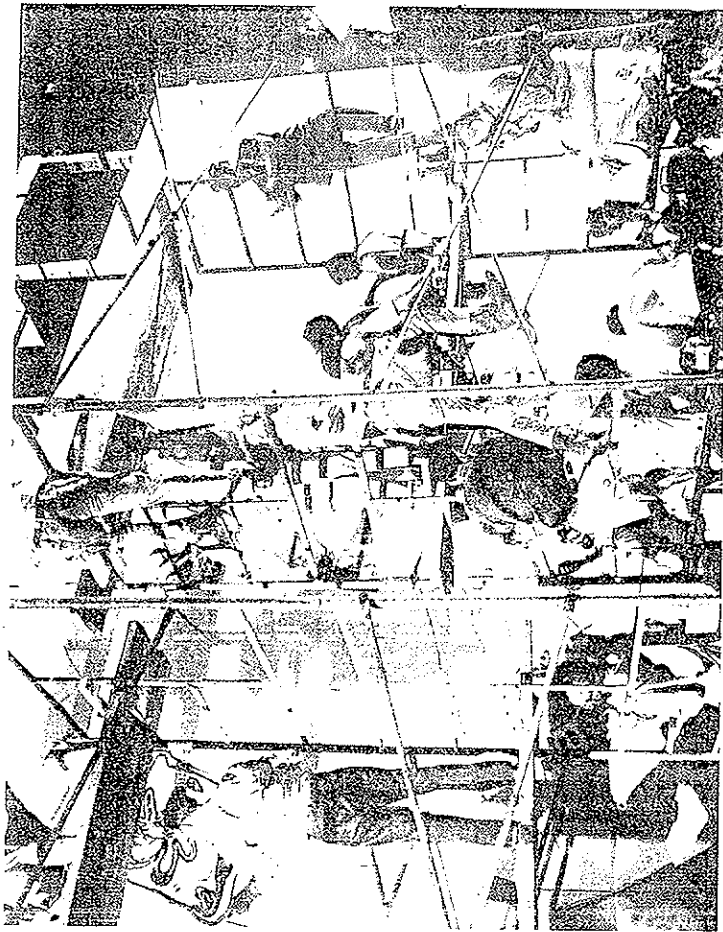
The *raison d'être*, the methods of expression and development, and even the content of revolutionary art come up against obstacles and queries of such importance that it would be futile to try to disguise them.

In the summer of 1967 I organized an exhibition called "The World in Question" at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris within the framework of ARC.<sup>1</sup> In writing the preface to the catalog, I pondered the existence of those revolutionary painters whom Pierre Gaudibert and I chose to include by showing a few of their representative works: "Isn't the very nature of art to rebel against the decay and stiffening of forms and to search for new modes of vision at the

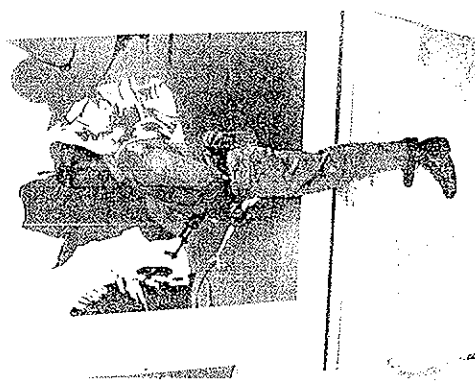
price of brutal rejection and periodic questioning?" In this perspective, are not the march of art and the negations it gives rise to righted by the most effective confrontation, the only acceptable kind for the painter and the sculptor? Those who oppose painting that is concerned with content (and they include the champions of constructivist and kinetic art) call upon the artist to innovate by distortion. And it needs all the conviction and experience of an Alain Jouffroy to write, "We know from the example of Havana that art for the sake of revolution is a revolution in art"; not is this assertion a frivolous play on words, as some would claim. It means that we must adopt other criteria than those that have normally prevailed in western society since the time of Impressionism, if we wish, after the frightful blunder of socialist realism, to give an unbiased welcome to those painters who have decided to find the way back to a political art.

We have thus reached that moment of agonizing reappraisal when in a world that is cracking and splitting on every side, art can no longer exist as an autonomous area from which forms can expand as if by osmosis to fertilize and mold other sectors of human existence. The majority of those who have concerned themselves with contemporary ideas are agreed in assigning a new vocation to the heritage of forms, but their primary concern is to integrate the artist into the system by giving him the role of a great organizer of sensibility, an engineer of vision. As an extreme measure they contemplate new means of distribution that will bypass the dealer, the closed system of promotion and sale; they advocate multiples, the enlargement of the market, a struggle to control speculation, etc. If these courses of action are necessary components, we must still realize that the vehicle of forms remains a powerful emotional, demonstrative, and critical agent and that the artist who wants to make his convictions and his art coincide tries to use the latter as a weapon. There remains the problem of discovering if this weapon is an artistic act and reciprocally, if this act is an effective weapon.

We should do well to recognize that it is often impossible to reply in the affirmative to the two complementary terms of this proposition. We frequently come across pictures that purport to be works of confrontation and yet have not managed to adapt their means to their ends; laboriously they use utterly bankrupt methods, so that they lack necessity and conviction. From this point, it is only a short step to the claim that *all* revolutionary painting suffers from this failing, that political involvement is one thing and artistic creation another, that those artists who try to express content use that and their disarmingly good



Group of artists painting a mural dedicated to the Cuban revolution, Havana, 1967.



A painting by Bernard Rancillac at the May 1967 exhibition in Havana.

intentions as a cover for the poverty of their artistic invention. This kind of attack was seen to develop at the very heart of the events in May 1968, even on the platform of the Institute of Art and Archaeology; here the young painters' Salon, whose directors were all in the fighting, contributed to the state of mind of one art critic who came close to hysteria. These very excesses show to what extent this subject awakens in each of us profound reactions that are based on the fear that an artistic dictatorship of the Stalinist type may return, on the anxious concern at discovering in a painting the opportunism and imposture that is sometimes only a mode among other modes.

We must, however, before going further, emphasize that there is no incompatibility between the search for a language of expression and the search for content. On the contrary, it is in the impulse of political choice, in the search for particularly bitter and inflammatory subjects, that many artists have found the motivation necessary to remain at the height of their inspiration and aims without becoming facile or complaisant. It would seem that by an inescapable process the importance of the subject releases new possibilities in the rendering. Besides, the dramatic impact of an unspeakable deed can be as powerful a stimulant as exaltation at a happy allegiance. Thus it was that in the case of Rancillac a bitter, grating work like "Enfin! Silhouette affnée jusqu'à la taille" has as much impact as the figure of Castro that was painted in the sweltering Cuban summer for the museum in Havana. This shows we must never lose sight of the frontier that divides denunciation (torture in Vietnam) from adherence to an ideal, even if voluntary (e.g. homage to Fidel Castro), socialist realism having for the most part produced only painting of enforced praise. In any case, the problems posed by Rancillac in his series of topical pictures go beyond anecdote; the time of day is objectively indicated (by clocks in the three views of Cuba at morning, midday, and evening), but above all it is the contemplation of the power of the image, of the separation of this image from its iconographic reproduction (the image of the image) that serves as a Trojan Horse to subversive thought. To meaning founded on problems of space, which has been handled by Pop Art with extreme thematic ambiguity, European "narrative" painting has added a grasp of history. This history, however, is not seen in a flat or discursive relationship but with brutal and arresting concern; the unification in time of different moments, the shock of key images, the significant treatment of texture (Spadari's downy surface, Monory's breaks in plane, Sarkis' optical gearing down, Alleyn's schematization, the "video" effect of value equivalences practiced by Rancillac, etc.) unite in forming a cluster of symbols,



Bernard Rancillac, French, 1932-  
*Enfin! Silhouette affnée jusqu'à la taille*, 1967. Galerie B. Mommaton, Paris

a synthesis in which the narrative process and the representation tend to become submerged beneath the total situation of powerful shock.

However, it is pointless to go on with the enumeration of the particular stylistic tendencies of the main painters in "The World in Question," for the problem does not lie in the forms that many artists give us as a kind of supplement. Besides, it is as a "supplement" that certain painters who make a point of the peculiarities in their treatment achieve that thing we call *cachet*—a flavor or a specific irony. So it is with the pictures of Arroyo, Erro, Recalcati, Biras, Cuéco, Tisserant, or Parré.

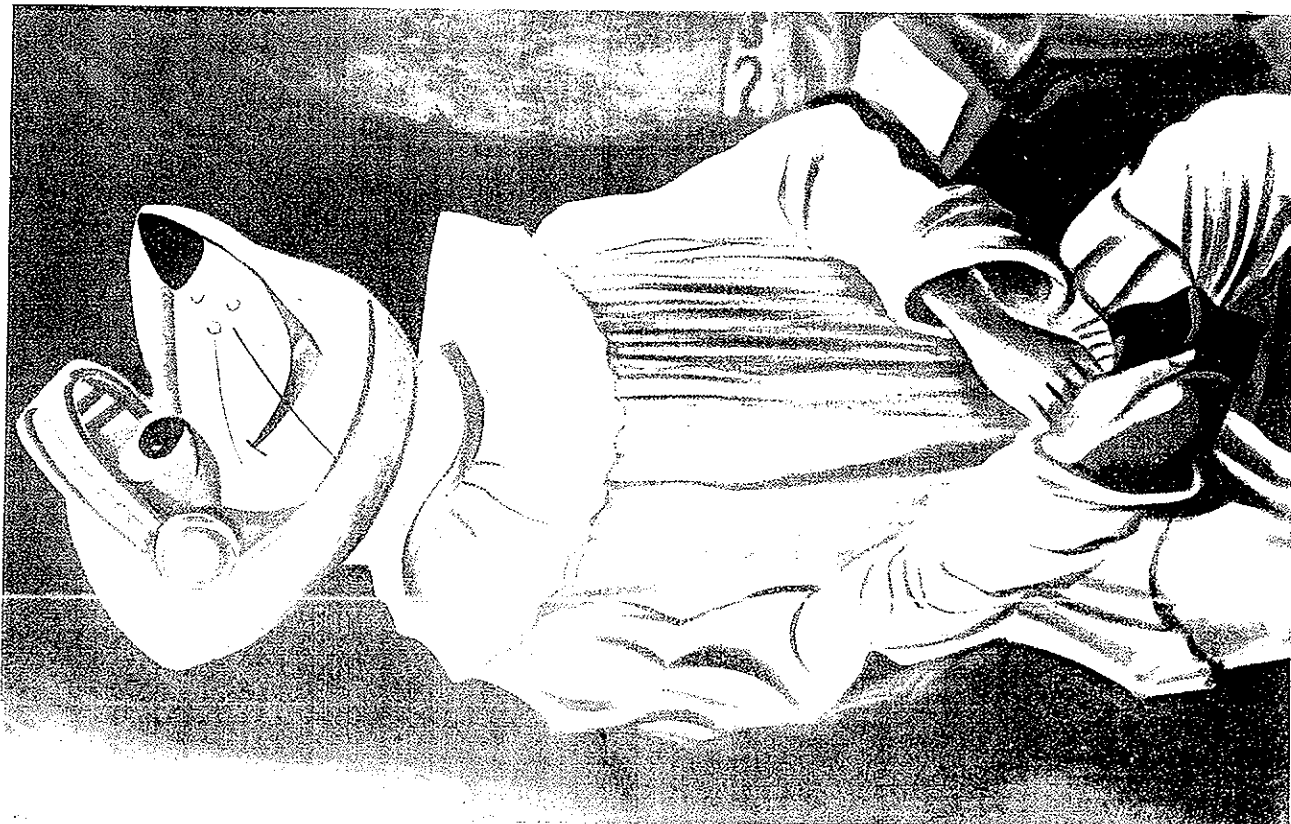
There is nothing surprising in the fact that this list should include some of the leading spirits behind the young painters' Salon, which in the last years has put on view the new generations of artists in France and abroad. It was this salon which in 1965 and 1966, in an objective certified report, assembled all that was to be revered in Paris in the years following, and in 1967 turned in the direction of austere design and restricted its choice to a requirement that went contrary to the prevailing formalism. For its intention to be "at once objective and partisan instead of being eclectic and liberal" (a formula that met with some success in 1966), it substituted the next year an intransigence that provoked some gnashing of teeth. If we refer to the introductory essay in the 1967 catalog we find a truly revolutionary code that is unique to this organization, nor does its originality bear the readily recognizable stamp of Gilles Aillaud. The young painters' Salon defined its action, as follows: "This action aims at liberating art from the shackles imposed by estheticism, which is holding it as a prisoner within the indeterminate domain of cultural concepts; art must, on the contrary, be placed in direct relation to life and history"; and with an allusion to the "objectivity" of the previous salon, the essay continues: "One may say that the systematic opening up of new stylistic possibilities has perhaps caused some changes in taste as to forms, but it has done nothing to reawaken the spirit. In fact, beneath the deceptive freedom of manner, what is vital in a picture today is completely camouflaged, hidden in the adherence of the picture to an 'option,' that is to say one of the categories, one of the departments whereby the more and more oppressive reign of esthetic analysis administers the world of the arts.

"The threat behind this generalized formalism is an immense dream of integration, of participation in the life of modern bourgeois technical society. We are witnessing the exploitation of vital energies by culture, whose sole ambition is to keep in step with the intoxicating novelties of science and industry.

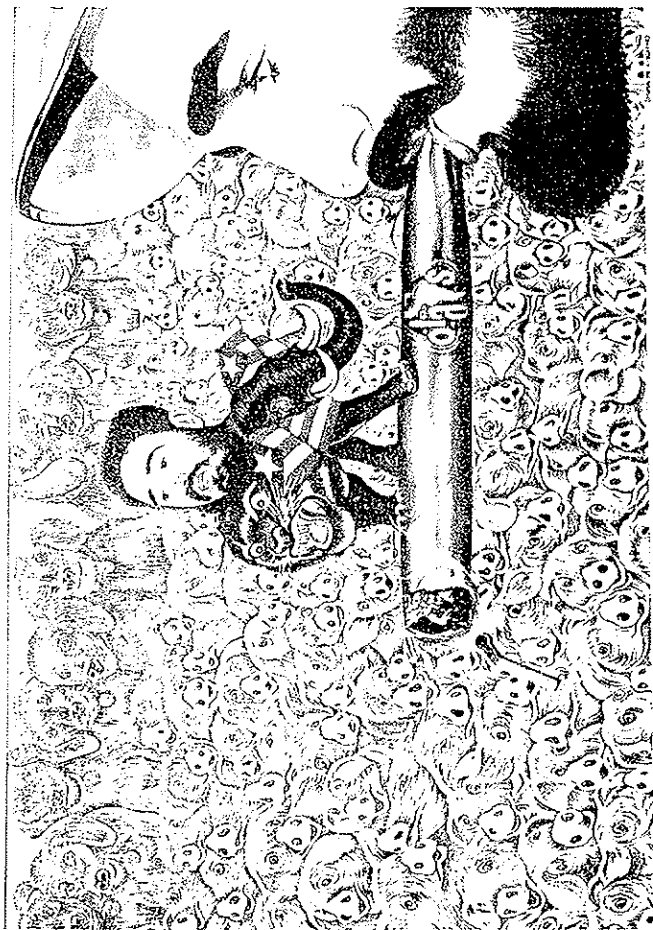
"Hence, we must not be surprised if the same reasons that prompted the



Giangiacomo Spadari, Italian,  
*Per un potere operato, III*, 1968  
Galleria Bergamini, Milan



Erro (Gundmundur Gundmundsson), Icelandic, 1932-  
*Pierrot*, 1964  
 Galleria Schwarz, Milan



Erro (Gundmundur Gundmundsson), Icelandic, 1932-  
*The Bay of Pigs*, 1967  
 Museum of Modern Art, Havana

committee to fight the traditional rhetoric of the language of forms compel them today to fight on several other fronts, for example against the proliferation of found objects and in general against all that plays on the nerves and thus tends to anesthetize the sensibility rather than stimulate the activity of the spirit.

"Contrary to what we are urged to believe, true liberty is very far away. However limited the power of art may be today, it must be put in the service of this truth."

If we ponder these words and decide that the intentions they contain should be applied with the utmost possible rigor, we can't help noting the impressive attempt to give confrontation a collective form. However, as this confrontation covered a wide gamut in the visual arts and as the directors of the salon were loath to give precise directives, we were faced, in the very midst of this manifestation, with an attempt at concerted action within the most clear-cut limits. This was the "red," or "Vietnamese," room which gathered twenty-five painters around the theme, "The war waged by the Vietnamese people against American imperialism," the genesis and realization of which have been described by Michel Troche.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note, as he has himself revealed, what kind of difficulties immediately beset this initiative. Once the theme had been chosen, the technical matters had been straightened out, and the framework of the debate had been determined, "there remained the problem of defining the manner in which the chosen content should be treated. But how can one here divide the 'manner' from the objective decided upon? To paint the war in Vietnam was not simply to illustrate a news item or give an esthetic description of an object; it was to get inside an essential situation which in its human and social aspects imposed a mode of vision and expression." Each exhibitor had to conform to a necessary legibility without being forced to change his language of expression, hence the undertaking was a collective one in which preliminary sketches were discussed and modified in response to the opinion of the group. While bringing info question the principle of the "artistic personality," this method preserved a character of spontaneity, enthusiasm, and liberty which was far removed from the vexatious bureaucratic practices of the defunct socialist realism.

This Vietnamese room could not be seen by the public because the 1968 salon was postponed on account of the events of May, but the aspiration toward a collective art, which is found in other sectors of the art world (le Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel) but which is most frequently and thoroughly practiced by revolutionary painters, remains. Arroyo, Aillaud, and Recalcati had already



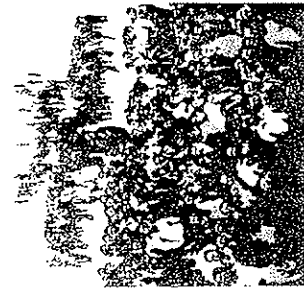
Eduardo Arroyo, *Spanisti*, 1937-  
*Spana te Miro*, 1967  
Galleria Marconi, Milan

joined together to paint "Live and let die, or the murder of Marcel Duchamp." The deliberately anonymous, uniform treatment created just as much of a scandal as the violation of a taboo by the picture's theme. In Spain, the groups Cronica and Realidad have for some years been carrying on a struggle which is not in the least platonic, while all the painters who were in Cuba during July 1967 remember the atmosphere of public gaiety and collective exaltation in which the Havana mural was created. It was dedicated to the Cuban Revolution and was the work of several dozen artists and writers of all nationalities.

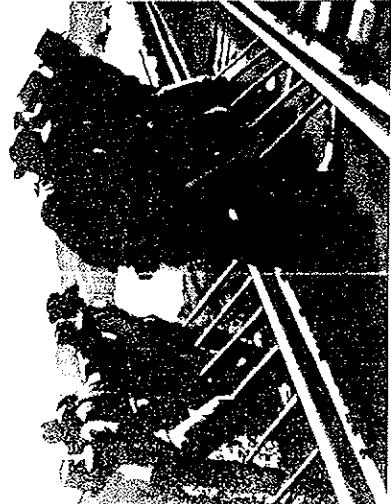
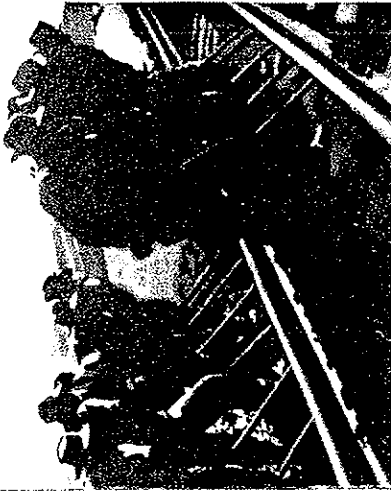
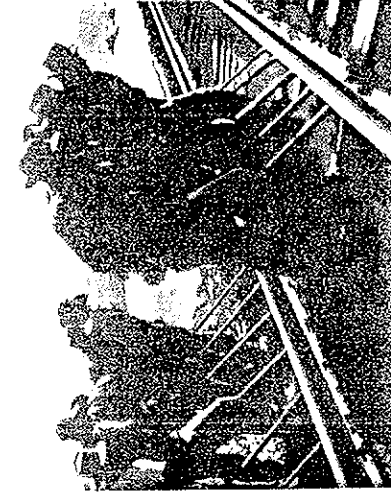
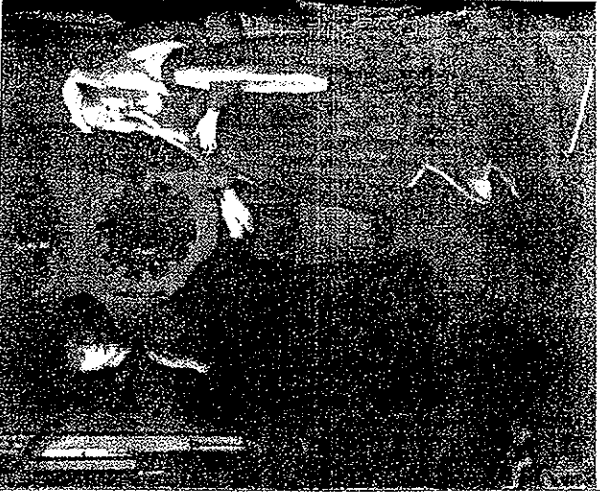
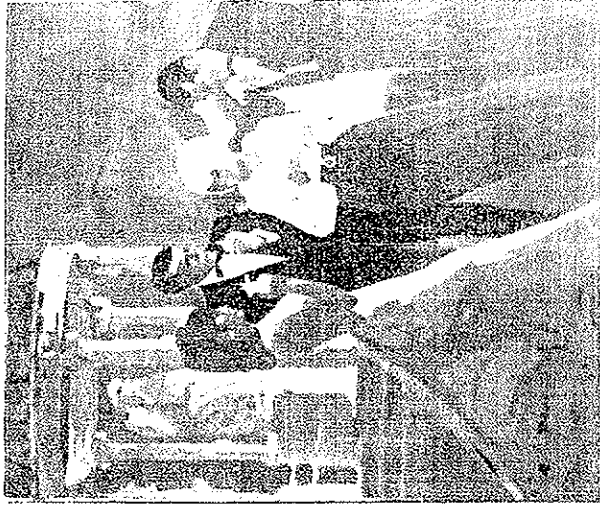
We have just seen how the search for a clear, precise, definite treatment could lead certain artists to abolish style and seek a provocative banality of effect that was destined to *reduce the subject to itself* in the same way as others brought back the object to its reality as an object, or as Buren, Mosset, Toroni, and others offered identical canvases that were only what they were. The radical action on the part of Arroyo, Aillaud, and Recalcati did not constitute a return to the academicism of post-office calendars, for that would have been ridiculous, but a radical rejection of any mediation by sensibility, expression, or originality of form with a view to making a clear, significant statement. At the extremity that is equivalent to the constructivist or lyric *tabula rasa* of abstraction, and in the context of the sophisticated estheticism of western art, it is clear that such a choice can lay claim to all the criteria of non-art.

The search for legibility that we were speaking about is linked with the desire for effectiveness that is imperative in a period of crisis such as the one we are living in. I find it intriguing that a certain critic, whose reactionary sentiments are notorious, should recognize, after having tried to hook his little problems onto the movement of May 1968, that "modern painting and revolutionary action don't marry well except in the street and on walls." One of the aims of revolutionary art is to be on walls in the form of posters, for at the moment of political and social convulsion it is there that the painters who have been bent on determined action find "full employment." We must remember that if the popular studio at the Beaux-Arts took so effective a part in the struggle of May 1968, working for action committees and strikers, it is not only because of the unity achieved among painters of different tendencies, but also because among the most resolute minds there were artists who gave themselves to figurative work and pictorial confrontation.

These observations must not obscure the fact that the revolutionary field has its limits. It is abundantly clear, in fact, that revolutionary art is difficult to define; it suffers from so many ambiguities, and it runs the risk of being stifled



Grupo Cronica  
*La Cantidao se transforma en Calidao*, 1966

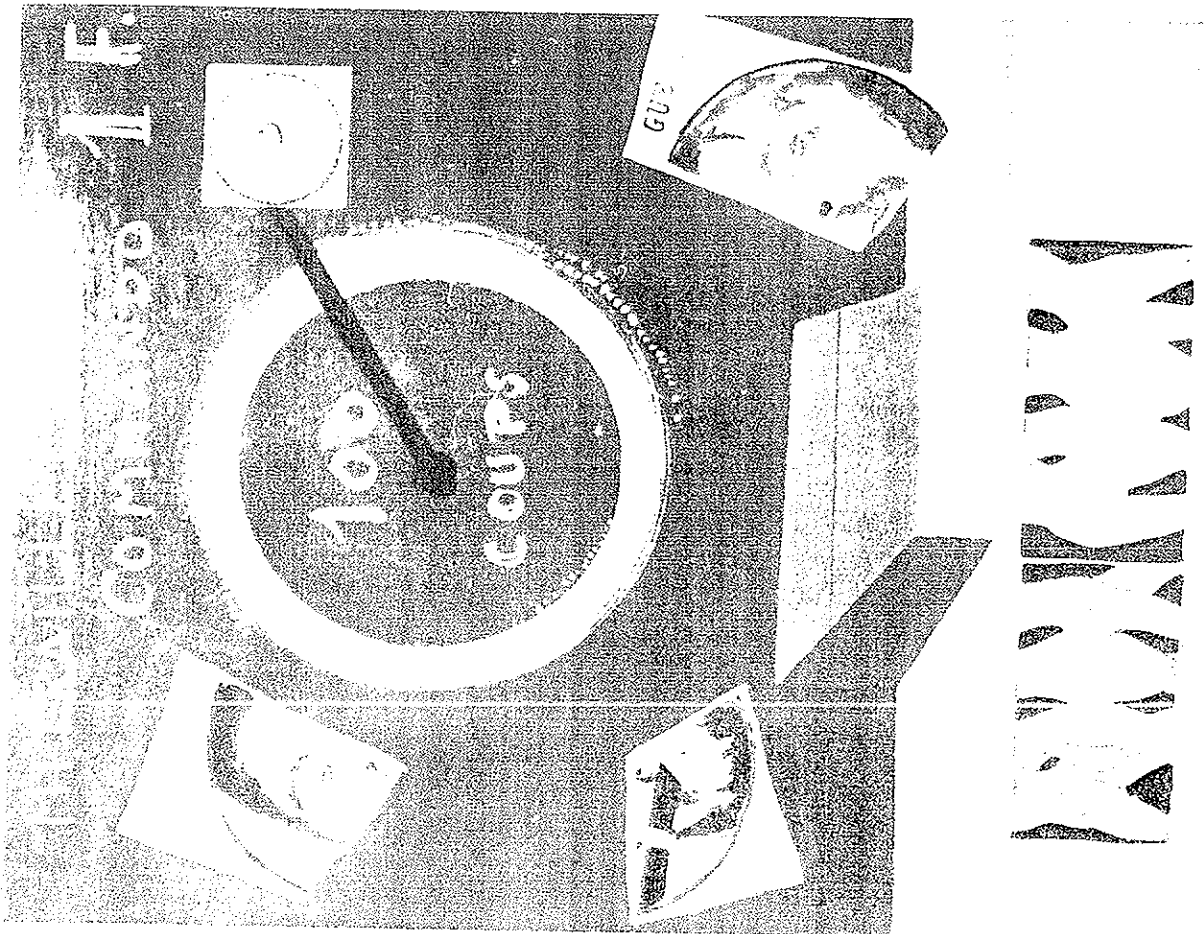


Equipo Realidad  
« C'était une fois... », 1965/1966

by so many awkward good intentions; it asserts convictions, choices, and a conception of the artist's role in the community that many do not share. Not only must there be a non-revolutionary art, but we must recognize that many of the works that are of contemporary significance for us have nothing to do with political action. All authoritarianism on this score would involve the danger of Jeanovism and interfere with the natural leanings of those creative temperaments that have nothing to do with this field on account of esthetic choices that are irreconcilable with it. A revolutionary impulse, no matter how many modern artists have opened the way, from Picasso to Matta and the Mexican fresco painters, is a matter of generation and must be understood as such. On the other hand, if we recognize that political involvement is often independent of the pictorial manner that is practiced, we shall appreciate the Cuban government's policy of an open artistic pluralism. Cuban artists choose political themes only if and when they want to; moreover the manner of treating these themes is not subject to any censorship. For example, the exhibition *Painters and guerrillas*, of 1967, comprised weapons, photographic documents, and pictures in the widest imaginable range of styles. I am not saying that the result was in every way satisfactory, but the field of action that such freedom can develop allows evolutionary mechanisms to function normally, and that is the essential. There is a temperament that considers art a means of combat, a vehicle for ideas, a militant witness, and an involvement. I don't think it was the desire to flatter the western artists who gathered in Havana for the May Exhibition that prompted the head of the Vietnamese delegation to say that a picture was worth as much as a grenade or a rifle. The few words he spoke in the course of that meeting could have served as a preface—and what a preface!—to the exhibition "The World in Question," which had been ridiculed in France by some of the thoughtful left-wingers.

In this action, the combat zones and the available means are plentiful. All the artists are engaged, for even if the problems of content concern only some of them, many are aroused by other aspects of subversion; among these are the bypassing of the market through multiples, collective creative work, manifestations organized in the street for a public that is not prepared for the diffusion of culture (by the GRAV, for instance), criticism of the consumer society, and dramatization by pictorial means that are close to abstraction (Hernandez, Millares), figurative expressionism (Lora, Ortega), Surrealism (Camacho) etc.

The very multiplicity of the points of impact and ways of intervention increase the possibilities of misunderstanding. The ambiguity as to meaning, for example,



Edgard Naccache, Tunisia, 1924-  
*Peinture*, 1968



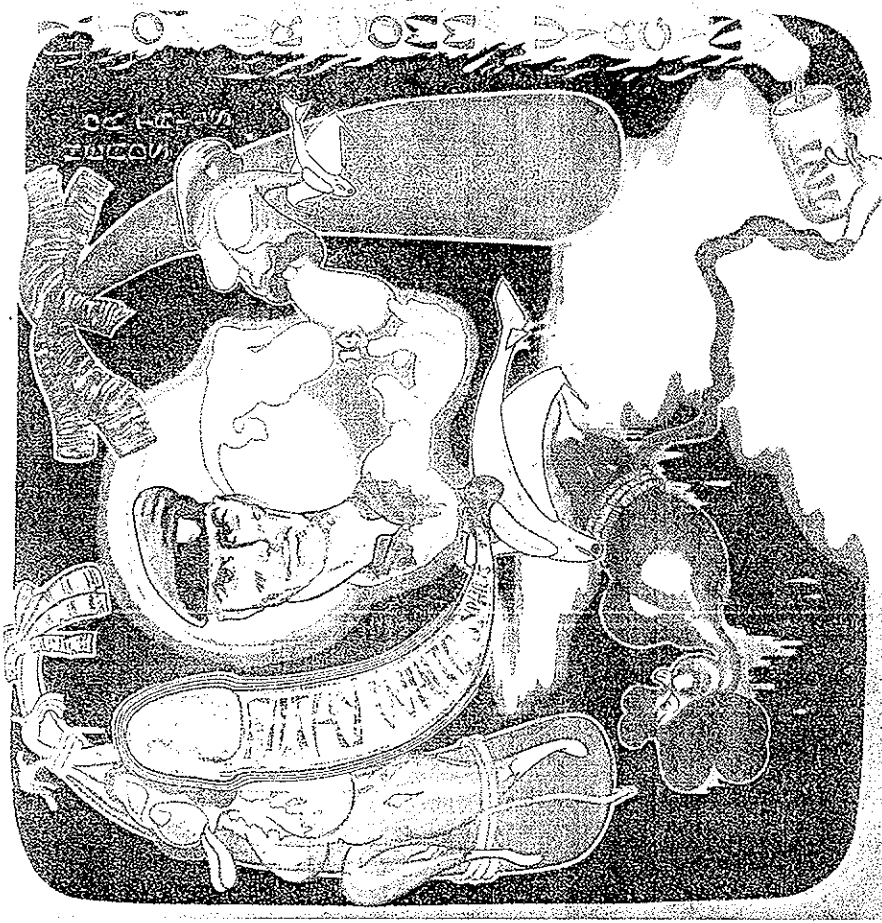
Roberto Matta (Echaurren), Chilien, 1912-  
*La Chasse aux Adolescents: Aveugler, Faire Pleurer*, 1968  
Galerie Alexandre Iolas, Paris

which we mentioned at the beginning with reference to Quintanilla, is inherent in very nature of the act of painting, which is rarely univocal, even when the main meaning is clearly defined. This ambiguity can obtain as to style (Fautrier's *Hostages* and Lapoujade's *Riots*), to the sign constituted by such and such a form (the sense of crowd in Genoves), to simple legibility (Monory's painting entitled *After the rain*, which gave rise to various interpretations in Cuba), to different degrees of meaning that are implanted by the painter like explosive relays, or stages, to the verge of indescribability, to the *a posteriori* meaning that the artist or the public sometimes finds in a work of art.

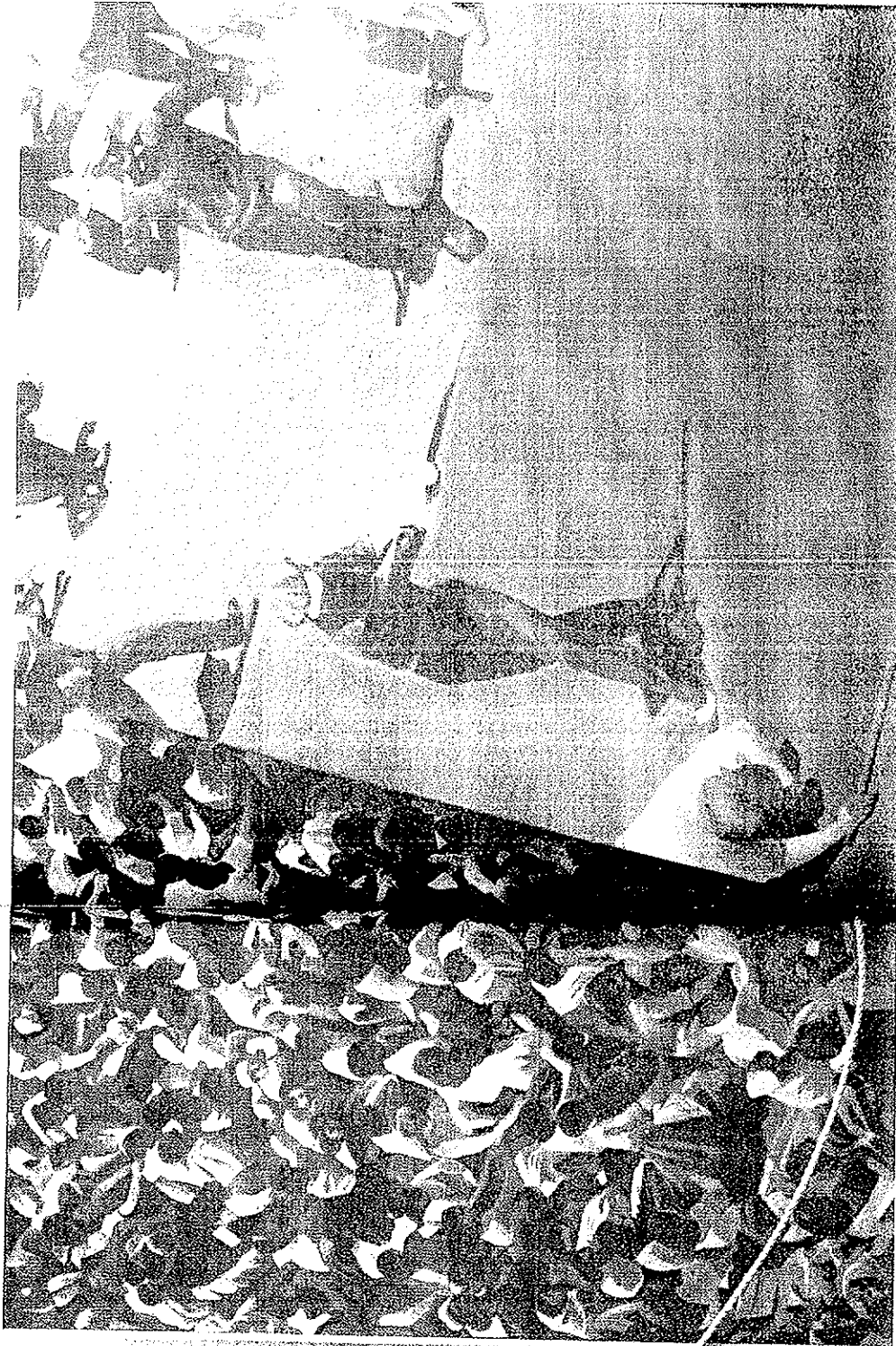
Thus the historico-political implications of the very lovely canvas that Téliémaque had painted for the exhibition *Narrative figuration in contemporary art* (Galerie Creuze, 1965), the subject of which seemed to be the American intervention in Santo Domingo, were minimized by the artist in the course of later discussions; and it was impossible to determine if a mistake had been made from the start as to the picture's content or if its meaning had evolved with the painter's esthetic concepts.

What other difficulties are there besides this ambiguity of meaning? Isn't there a contradiction, for example, between effectiveness and visual pleasure? Mustn't the revolutionary artist beware of the traps of "manner," of a facile hand or imagination, of the non-adaptation of style to subject, of mechanical complications and visual gadgets that distract the attention, of the insidious interference of mental activity in the objective field of the picture? The last point brings us back to ambiguity of meaning, for if a Monory deliberately suggests a multiplicity of solutions (*Comme il vous plaira*) and plays on the interference of his subjectivity with the real image, if someone like Kiasen doesn't dissociate the object from experience of the object, how many other artists, less lucid, are no longer even aware that all they are doing is delineating things in detail while believing that they are sacrificing themselves to noble ambitions and serving a cause?

Ultimately it is the contradiction between form and content that lies at the very heart of every artistic measure that attempts to establish a unity between these antagonisms. On the other hand, the evolution of contemporary esthetic concepts and, one must add, the secondary influence of Pop Art on all western art have brought about an approximate idea of what constitutes "artistic quality." We have recently seen it in the case of art in the street. How is one to react, for example, to this extract from Mao Tse-tung's little red book which to a hasty reader might seem a condemnation of all explicit art (the style of the slogan



Peter Saul, American, 1934-  
*I Torture Tommy Virgins*, 1967  
 Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

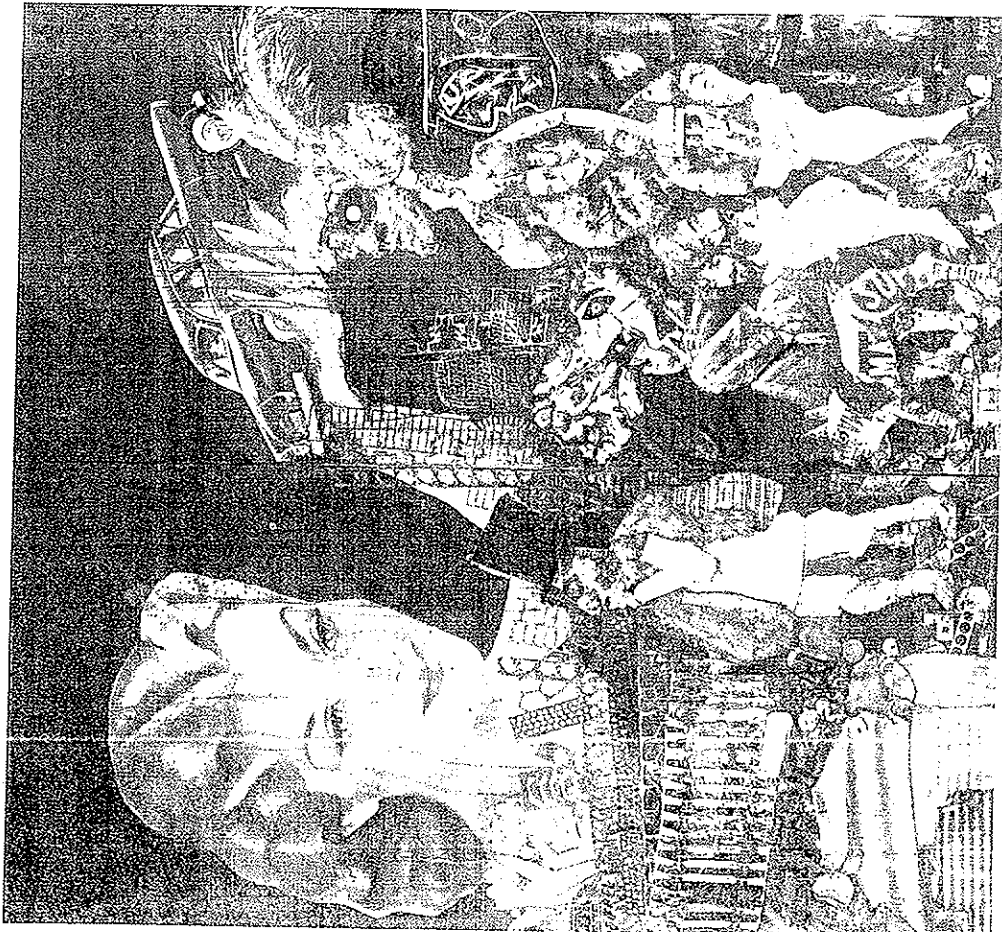


Jacques Monory, French, 1934-  
*Comme il vous plaira*, 1967  
Galerie B. Mommator, Paris

and the poster)? I am, moreover, astonished that none of our opponents has ever used this windfall of a quotation: "Literary and art criticism call for two criteria: one political, the other artistic..."

"And what is the relationship between these two criteria? It is no more possible to put an 'equals' sign between politics and art than between a general concept of the world and the methods of artistic creation and criticism. We deny the existence of an abstract, immutable political criterion; every class in every class society has its own criteria, both political and artistic. Nonetheless, every class in every class society puts the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second... As for us, we demand a unity of politics and art, a unity of form and content, a unity of revolutionary political content and as perfect as possible an artistic form. Works without artistic value, however advanced they may be from the political point of view, remain ineffective. That is why we are against works of art that express erroneous political views and also against the tendency to produce works in the 'slogan and poster style' which are correct in their political views but are weak in artistic expression. We must, in literature and art, conduct the struggle on two fronts."

Mao Tse-tung is apparently reacting against the abuses inherent in every revolutionary explosion when communication runs ahead of the medium and the content ahead of the form. The passage constitutes a partial condemnation of Jdanovism and the authoritarian standardization of visual norms (the rejection of the entire western school from Impressionism onwards) although the concept of "power of artistic expression" which he uses is left extremely vague. Who nowadays, apart from a few retarded academicians in Moscow and elsewhere, can approve this dictatorship in literary and artistic creation which the young Yugoslav writer Miroslav Krleža has been denouncing since 1952 for its desire to submit the arts "to the political will pure and simple, in the fanatical, one-sided form of the spirit of the party..." However, let us be quite clear that the conditions for liberty of intention and execution are almost always preserved in revolutionary art, for the reason that this art goes against the stream and is the object of hostility on the part of the existing power structure and scorn on the part of the fashionable headquarters, namely the network of galleries and museums that make and unmake the art market; things move differently in a given society when power changes hands. From being a revolutionary art it runs the risk of becoming a congratulatory art, and the shadow of a new "socialist realism" soon begins to form. If the example of Cuba is entirely positive on this point, it is because the artists enjoy, as we have noted, total freedom of conception, and the



Antonio Berni, Argentinian, 1905-  
*La grande illusion*, 1962

identification with the socialist struggle is made in a climate of urgency and enthusiasm. The worst that can happen to a revolutionary painter is not so much his submitting, through laziness or necessity, to the pressures of a dealer in a capitalist society as to become, in a socialist society, a blind thurifer of the regime, a spokesman for integration, a man who has ceased to keep a vigilant eye on the world he is helping to construct, and all this through submission to a discipline and an ideology.

My last point is, does painting as confrontation exist? This question is hardly a paradox, for the limits of confrontation must be continually redefined, and we have seen that its field of action is very extensive. It would be presumptuous for a painter to lay permanent claim to a revolutionary status and to reduce his art to nothing but a tedious machine for negation. Among the artists we exhibited at "The World in Question," some, as far as their art was concerned, had only adopted a political stance two or three times in their lives (Crémonini), others had created a number of works that were eloquent as political statements (Matta), or confined themselves to a slow work of undermining (Berni).

These divergences in the nature of the confrontation, which may occur as a response to the occasional promptings of conscience or to an urge of longer duration, only add to our uncertainties. In any case, no one can arrogate to himself the right to design this or that, to distribute certificates of political involvement, and it is a field in which the attempt at investigation clashes as much with the resistance within ourselves as with the resistance that is offered us by the world we live in.

1. Animation Research Confrontation — Section directed by Pierre Gaudibert.
2. Cf. *Opus international*, No. 7, p. 78.

Raymonde Moulin

## Living without selling

*Merchandise will be burned*  
Censier

Twenty years before the May Revolution, the following statement was written by a liberal economist: "The entire capitalist society functions regularly thanks to some social sectors that are not animated by the spirit of profit and the search for the greatest gain. When the high official, the magistrate, the artist, and the intellectual become dominated by this spirit, society crumbles and the entire economic order is threatened."<sup>1</sup> The existence of the work of art as merchandise, the dominant role assumed by the market in the organization of artistic life, the subjection of artists to restrictions that are inherent in the logic of the economy, all this was inevitably contested in a far more radical way by the revolutionaries of May 1968. Could those who despise capitalist society, the consumer society, forego such an appropriate occasion to emphasize the encroachment of financial monopolies on creative activity and to denounce the hypocrisy of an ideology that sanctifies art, glorifies artists, and portrays the relationship between the art lover and the work of art as a pure, disinterested love, while concealing the fact that works of art are the subject of commercial deals? The dignity that our society recognizes in art constitutes one side of a system, of which the reverse is commercialization in art. This we already knew. Nonetheless, with many, the spirit of resignation outweighed that of revolt, and the pessimists affirmed that there is no instance of an organization that excludes all form of restriction and assures the creative artist liberty and security. The revolutionaries of the *École des Beaux-Arts* and various art committees systematically made an issue of what was commonly admitted, namely the economic status of the work of art, the market system, and the ambiguous position of the artist as both creator of esthetic objects and producer of goods to be sold. To understand the meaning and import of this issue, it is essential to bear in mind the main aspects of the

Lucy Lippard: "Trojanske heste: Den aktivistiske magt og kunsten", Mikkel Bolt & Karin Hindsbo (red.): *City Rumble. Kunst, intervention og kritisk offentlighed* (København: Forlaget politisk revy, 2005), pp. 144-173.

# Trojanske heste: Den aktivistiske kunst og magten

Lucy R. Lippard

Måske var den trojanske hest det første aktivistiske kunstværk. Aktivistisk kunst er på én gang baseret på subversion og på *empowerment* og kan derfor operere både inden for og uden for den belejrede fæstning, som kaldes fiktkultur eller 'kunstens verden'. Der er ikke tale om en ny kunstform, men snarere om en koncentration af forskellige energier, som tilsammen giver kunstnerne nye ideer til, hvordan de kan knytte an til energistrømmene i deres egen erfaringsverden. I dag, i 1984, har kulturmagten en fornyet evne til at påvirke, hvordan mennesker ser verden omkring sig. Aktivistisk kunst – som også kaldes 'bevægelsen for kulturelt demokrati' – frembyder altså "en fælles bevidsthed, som stadig er under udvikling og derfor endnu kan have uventet gennemslagskraft [...] en slags praktisk konsensus, som i øjeblikket befinder sig i bevidstgørelsens og organiserings fase."<sup>1</sup>

På baggrund af den aktivistiske kunsts dynamiske og pragmatiske karakter må dette essay snarere forme sig som et forsøg på at sætte den aktivistiske kunst i relation til kunstens verden og den politiske organisering end som en decideret historisk gennemgang. Teksten er inddelt i fire afsnit: argumenter for aktivistisk kunst, tanker om kunstens magt, nogle af kilderne til den seneste aktivistiske kunst, og nogle eksempler på de forskellige strategier og praksisser fra 1980 og frem til i dag. Jeg vil gerne allerede fra starten gøre det klart, at jeg ikke mener, at alle kunstnere nødvendigvis skal lave aktivistisk kunst (selvom jeg selvfølgelig gerne så, at enhver kunstner – ligesom enhver anden samfundsborger – var politisk informeret og ansvarlig). Der ligger ikke andet i det, end at dette essay simpelthen handler om aktivistisk kunst, som så tilfældigvis også er omdrejningspunkt for de fleste af mine aktiviteter i øvrigt. Jeg holder lige så meget af at blive overvældet af ren æstetisk nydelse som alle andre kunstyper. Og selvom jeg har hang til den kultur, der ikke fører os ind i



Art Workers' Coalition og Guerilla Art Action Group demonstrerer foran Picassos "Guernica" på Museum of Modern Art, den. 3. januar 1970.

Foto: Jan van Raay

tankeløshedens dal, men bringer os til at flytte bjerge, så ville jeg da være en forbandet dårlig kulturel demokrat, hvis jeg ikke også brugte en masse tid og energi på at betragte og reflektere over alle mulige andre former for kunst. Jeg ville bare ønske, at den proces lidt oftere gik begge veje. En stor del af den aktivistiske kunst er innovativ og ekspansiv, og mainstream-kunsten kunne lære meget af den – ganske som aktivisterne jo også lærer meget af mainstreamkunsten.

## I. Argumenter for aktivistisk kunst

Bevægelsen for kulturelt demokrati er en kritik af homogeniteten i den herskende kultur, som domineres af erhvervslivet og kun er til gavn for meget få af os, selvom den har stor indflydelse på os alle sammen. Vi er i dag vidner til, hvordan denne kultur (som i en mikrobølgeovn) sammensmelter de multietniske og multikulturelle forskelle, som ellers er dette lands største ressource og eneste håb for en bedre forståelse og kommunikation med den resterende del af verden, som vi er på nippet til helt at ødelægge. Den kunst, der afspejler levende erfaringer i vekslende sammenhænge, vil altså i sig selv være forskelligartet. Det kan både være en fordel og en