Conflict, Identity, and Protest in American Art

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

MIGUEL DE BACA AND MAKEDA BEST, EDITORS[1]

By the first decades of the twentieth century, prominent American artists had embraced the function of art as a form of social critique and as a site for raising social awareness. Painter Robert Henri, the voice of the so-called Ashcan School, led the group of New York-based artists who turned the harsh realities of urban life and industrialization into a new aesthetic. Henri's associates, including George Bellows and John Sloan, did not just make paintings. Rather, the group's close association with journalism and interest in the realities of the conditions of urban life inspired some to also contribute artwork to the influential left-wing journal, *The Masses* (1911-17). Under the editorial direction of Max Eastman, the graphic works contributed by Sloan and others like Stuart Davis energetically translated the journal's socialist platform and dramatically portrayed key events related to the labor struggles of the era, such as the Ludlow Massacre during which the Colorado National Guard clashed with striking workers of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. The journalistic eye for key symbolism and the rough immediacy of the technique of Ashcan artists served the journal's goals to illustrate and explain key events and ideologies simply and effectively. When *The Masses* was reborn as *The New Masses* in 1928, the journal continued to employ illustrations. Painter William Gropper made works that were sparing in detail, but that explored with nuance power relationships through dramatic juxtapositions of allegorical figures.

Monica Bohm-Duchen observes that during the 1930s and 1940s, contemporary events, along with two key exhibitions in New York, the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition of Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* (1810-20) and Pablo Picasso's installation of *Guernica* (1937) on behalf of the Spanish Refugee Relief Campaign, galvanized a new generation to produce their own antiwar statements.[2] During this period, artists worked in a range of mediums and styles to respond to the conflict. Painter Ben Shahn produced posters for the Office of War Information that recalled the

work of the German artist John Heartfield. Shortly after the United States officially entered the Second World War in 1941, a consortium of New York-based artists groups came together to create Artists for Victory, Inc., which sought to "render effective the talents and abilities of artists in the prosecution of World War II and the protection of the country."[3] Although African American painter and Army veteran Horace Pippin is well known for works such *Mr. Prejudice* (1943), which illustrate persistent racism in both American society and the Army, such works were part of a broader oeuvre that frequently contrasted American political ideals and its discriminatory attitudes.

Just as the art reproduced in *The Masses* provided the public a way of visualizing what was portrayed in celebrated literary works such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), the relationship between the visual and textual only expanded within the burgeoning literary and media markets of the 1940s. A dynamic mid-twentieth-century print culture offered American artists new ways to communicate to a viewership outside of fine art settings. The regionalist painter Grant Wood provided an illustration of a shirtless farmer working a small plot of land for the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1942, complementing the feature article: "For What Are We Fighting?" Few would have misunderstood the implications of his question. Norman Rockwell's photorealist paintings translated easily into poster form, and he produced a number of seminal works and series, including *This is America... Keep it Free!* (1942).

The rebellions of the 1960s spurred American artists to organize themselves on the historical model of labor unions. On the West Coast, Los Angeles-based artists formed the Artist Protest Committee (APC) and launched antiwar protests, including such artworks as the *Peace Tower* (also titled the *Artists' Tower of Protest*; 1966). *Peace Tower* harnessed currents in contemporary sculptural design to the exigencies of political critique. Likewise in New York City, the civil rights movement, Vietnam War, and a newfound resistance to inequalities within the established art world gave rise to and supported many alternative gallery spaces, artist collectives, and organizations. In their actions and artworks, these East Coast countercultural artists assailed the predominating politics and structures of the social and professional institutions in which art is embroiled.[4] As the critic Lucy Lippard writes succinctly of this period: "Artists perceived the museum as a public and therefore potentially accountable institution, the only one the least bit likely to listen to the art community on ethical and political matters."[5] Artists engaged in these confrontations gave special consideration to the impact and mass appeal of

their actions, which led many of them to participate in collective and community-based, rather than individual, statements of opposition.[6]

The do-it-yourself attitude of the era encouraged artists to turn to new mediums and modes of address for their work, and this aesthetic was an essential quality of the oppositional culture of the era. Specifically, many of these late-1960s protest works were in the form of prints—works that took advantage of printmaking's ease of production, dissemination, and historical associations with protest. For instance, the APC produced the eye-catching placard *Stop: We Dissent* in 1965. Getting the word out to the public beyond the art world was key. To that end, the decisively radical Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), which was founded in January 1969 in New York, published their first statement against the Vietnam War that same year in a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*. Perhaps the best known print of the era was the AWC's lurid indictment of the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam: the now-iconic offset lithograph of a photograph by Ronald Haeberle, emblazoned with the haunting words of the news reporter Mike Wallace's interview with one of the witnesses, which also serve as its title, *Q. And Babies? A. And Babies* (1970). In her landmark survey of political prints, Chief Curator Emerita of Prints at the Museum of Modern Art Deborah Wye identified several classifications of postwar print culture spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s: conceptual pieces, iconic works, and the commemorative print.[7] The APC and AWC prints exemplify Wye's categories; they are thought provoking, bold expressions of the era of dissent.

As is clear in Lippard's criticism of museums' accountability (or lack thereof) to the sociopolitical sphere, the AWC actions—including the strident piece in the *Times*—flagged New York's major institutions' lackadaisical stances toward the increasingly intolerable US military involvement in Vietnam. In questioning their apparent passivity, the AWC pursued networks of corporate and financial sponsorship within the art world at-large, and exposed how they benefitted from American investment in the war. It became increasingly clear that, regardless of medium, the artists who wished to articulate dissent through their work were participating in a growing and comprehensive critique of museums as institutions, which has endured well into our contemporary moment.

The aftereffects of the AWC's efforts additionally raised the larger questions of the politics and power relations implicit in any space of acculturation. No longer could museums, galleries, nor even the public domain, appear politically neutral. As a response, new institutions emerged to dedicate their programming to the demographics of the communities they sought to serve. Martha Vega, the founding director of

New York's El Museo del Barrio explained the goal of the museum to connect the Puerto Rican community with its heritage: "I was ashamed of being a Puerto Rican and I want my three kids to be proud of it," she told the *New York Times* in 1971.[8] Across the country, artists transformed public urban spaces into *de facto* museums in the community interest as rallying points for pride, political activism, and to create ethnic visibility within the visual arts. For instance, Judith Baca's quintessential mural project *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1976-83) engaged an entire community to transform a disused flood channel into powerful paintings about Mexican and Mexican American history and identity.

The revolutionary role of art within the larger movements of social change continued to reverberate over the following decades. For many artists of color, neutrality was no longer an option. The graphic artist Emory Douglas wrote in 1977 to other African American artists: "In order to create accurate images of awareness we must participate in the changing of society and understand the political nature of art, because there is no such thing as art for art's sake."[9] Here, Douglas repeated one of the central aesthetic imperatives of modernism—"art for art's sake"—to dispose of it once and for all. Douglas's invocation to African American artists is one example of the way racial identity played an integral role in the activism of the era. Douglas used his work in support of the Oakland, California-based Black Panther Party.

Throughout the 1960s, women who participated in civil rights protest were honing skills that would be put to use in the following decade's feminist movement. Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), which originated as a caucus within the AWC, frequently launched demonstrations to advocate for the increased visibility of women's art in New York's flagship museum collections and exhibitions. The art historian Linda Nochlin's groundbreaking essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), illuminated that the striking lack of women in the artistic canon derived from hundreds of years of patriarchal systems of patronage that favored men. All the while, other publications in the 1960s and 1970s helped redefine women's attitudes toward their personal lives—including, very importantly, sexual liberation as a means for social transformation.

Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's *Womanhouse* (1972) realized many of these feminist principles in formation. *Womanhouse* originated in these two artists' experimental art curriculum at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), near Los Angeles. Having endured the isolating effects of deeply entrenched sexism within the art school setting, Chicago and Schapiro's program for women artists instead emphasized mutual support

and collaboration, and women-centered experiences as a new and daring content for art. Faced with a lack of studio space, students worked together with women in the community to renovate an abandoned house near the campus and transform it into a temporary artwork. The culmination was *Womanhouse*, an immersive art installation reflecting upon the stereotypes and injustices faced by women societally. For instance, Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch's *Nurturant Kitchen* interrogated the conventional role of woman-as-nurturer by covering the house's kitchen from floor to ceiling with bright pink breast-forms. Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* presented a jarring display of abundant red-painted feminine hygiene products within a pristine white lavatory in order to question blood taboos and to expose the shame that women historically have been made to feel about their bodies. *Womanhouse* opened to the public with additional performances on the subject of women's domestic roles.

Womanhouse transformed the larger field of protest art in the following ways. First, Chicago and Schapiro's work harnessed the politically neutral genre of "happenings" of the late 1950s and 1960s to radical critique, establishing a precedent for installation and performance-based art as protest. Second, understanding the "art school" to be implicitly patriarchal, and therefore intolerable, *Womanhouse* worked outside of traditional institutions to bring art into a formerly non-art context, and thereby launched a critique. Third, the collaborative atmosphere of artists included members of the community as integral participants in, as well as viewers of, the resulting artwork. Fourth, these artists employed a diversity of media, which finally laid to rest remaining vestiges of modernist medium-specificity and allowed for a free range of materials to be employed commensurate to the artist's aims. And fifth, *Womanhouse* provided a space in which women's bodies were not represented as exclusively sexual, but rather a site wherein sexuality was addressed as a social construction.

This last point—gender as a sociologically-defined role rather than something inherent to one's sex—is an important one for the many women artists working in the 1980s and 1990s who wished to use their work as a site of resistance to the mass media. Just as we have seen in earlier decades, many artists working in the last forty years also have called out the pervasiveness of popular culture images in quotidian American life, and have brought new critical attention to its ramifications for defining personal and group identity. Gender is an especially pertinent example. The feminist film critic Laura Mulvey's indispensible essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1974) exposed the subconscious heterosexism and

patriarchy in movies, and has been applied to limitless modes of spectatorship beyond the filmic. The visual artist Cindy Sherman's late-seventies *Film Stills*, for instance, use photography to meditate upon the artifice of cinematic femininity. Barbara Kruger's feminist posters collage images from books, magazines, and other popular forms of print culture, onto which she overlays bold red-and-white text. Her iconic work *Your Body is a Battleground* (1989) adopts a popular slogan from the feminist movement, and was produced as a framed artwork for the gallery setting as well as a poster for a reproductive rights demonstration in Washington, DC.

Other artists continued to think critically about gender and sexuality in the era of gay liberation after the Stonewall riots in 1969 and subsequent uprisings. However, the AIDS crisis in the mid-1980s intervened upon this exploration, and brought profound changes to the political valence of artwork by gay artists. HIV infection and AIDS-related disease disproportionately took its toll on the gay community, and many of those affected blamed the conservative Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan for inaction in the face of a public health crisis. Artists within the gay community were swift to work together to heighten the visibility of HIV- and AIDS-related causes. A collective of gay male graphic designers, later merged with the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), created the unforgettable "SILENCE=DEATH" logo in white letters on a black ground, paired with an upturned pink triangle (imagery appropriated from the triangles that homosexuals were forced to wear in Nazi concentration camps) as a symbol of resistance to governmental indifference. Gran Fury, another group of artists within ACT-UP, designed posters for the cause. Their seminal *Kissing Doesn't Kill but Greed and Indifference Do* (1989) dispelled myths about the transmission of HIV, and reached large audiences as advertisements on public transportation. These guerrilla tactics have long been used in American protest, and artists advocating for AIDS awareness were especially proactive about the dissemination and display of their mass media-inspired artworks.

Collaboration, which as we have seen is one of the core features of democratic art activism since the dawn of the century, continued full force in the 1980s. Collaborative Projects (Colab), was established in New York in the late 1970s on the premise of facilitating experiences with art that were accessible to all. Their refusal to identify with a single issue, social group, or style embraced the anarchist ethos of punk rock. But at the same time, Colab welcomed the emerging hip-hop and rap scene, and celebrated underground graffiti artists as radical appropriators of the public domain. Group Material was another New York-based activist collective whose

artwork pivoted on American involvement in global wars, elections, and rampant consumerism, echoing in many ways the radicalism of the AWC. The Guerrilla Girls, which was established in 1985, is perhaps one of the most identifiable groups. Using pseudonyms and wearing gorilla masks in public, the Guerrilla Girls's disruptive performance style has drawn attention to an impressive array of domestic and international injustices, particularly related to gender inequality.

Art about AIDS, together with the sheer force of collective art activism in the 1980s, shed new light on the growing divide between progressive attitudes toward self-expression, embraced by artists going forward from the raucous 1960s (not only in the US, to be sure), and a more conservative-leaning public sector. Critics invoked the nineteenth century German *Kulturkampf*, or "culture wars," to describe the frequent controversies surrounding government funding of the arts in the late 1980s and 1990s. The most commonly cited chapter in the American culture wars is the contentious removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981), a site-specific Minimalist monolith installed in Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan, in 1989. The episode says much about the elitism of the arts establishment on the one hand, and deleterious effects of censorship on the other; however, in the broad view, the removal of *Tilted Arc* proved what many artists had known all along: that both the visual arts and the uses of public space were in a moment of intense political scrutiny.

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) in Washington, DC is a counterpoint to Serra's *Tilted Arc*. The two sculptures share a stark Minimalist approach to design, but Lin's monument eventually won in the court of public opinion, although not without contest. The memorial was harshly criticized in the years following its unveiling, especially by veterans, who thought that the black granite wall symbolized a "gash of shame" equated with American involvement in the war. Some believed that the V-shaped monument was implicitly antiwar because its form generally resembles the peace sign. Still other critics disparaged the lack of figurative sculpture as insufficiently honorific. However, supporters refute these claims, arguing instead that Lin's non-traditional monument cultivates an appropriately solemn atmosphere of contemplation. Unlike other war memorials, the beholder sees a return vision of his body in the highly polished, reflective monument, crossed over with the names of the dead that are engraved onto its surface, thus cultivating a moment of empathy with the fallen soldiers. The opportunity to leave personal effects, and indeed, to take personal effects in the form of a pencil rubbing of the carved names, contributes to an interactive atmosphere that ultimately accounts for the memorial's popularity.

Public space continues to be the site of artistic intervention. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the site of the World Trade Center's ruins—"Ground Zero"—became a staging area not only for memory, but also for protests for and against the ensuing "war on terror," which continues in various ways to seriously impact global politics. Following the 2004 release of photographic evidence of the torture and humiliation of Iraqi detainees at the hands of the US military and its affiliates working at Abu Ghraib prison, many Americans wondered about the extent of unauthorized war violence and its effects on foreign relations as well as the military itself. The antiwar artists working under the pseudonym "Forkscrew Graphics" appropriated this imagery, deploying it as acrid, Pop-inspired posters that proliferated throughout New York and Los Angeles. But the early twenty-first century has inaugurated a new public space with which to contend: the Internet. New protest artworks ranging from graphics to videos and animations have come to live on websites such as YouTube and find new, worldwide audiences via social media. Websites such as Facebook now provide a forum for a convergence of people from vastly different backgrounds and identities, and present new opportunities for the formation of community based on common causes. The beholder's access to social movements can be as immediate as a click of the mouse, but it brings up questions about whether such superficial encounters amount to political change.

Chapter Outline

Conflict, Identity and Protest in American Art brings together the three concepts in its title to reveal their unique interconnections in the vital context of twentieth-century American art history. The anthology seeks to explore the relationship between artistic production and cultures of conflict in the United States. Such a theme continues necessarily to provoke practitioners and scholars across a range of media and disciplines, especially as definitions of the tools, acts and sites of warfare and protest, globalization, and digital media evolve and change. This topic generates a vital discussion of visual works in relation to national identity, the politics and contexts of artistic production and reception, and the expressive and political function of art within historical periods defined by waged wars, countercultural rebellions, and social revolutions. In addressing race and ethnicity, this anthology seeks to underscore the shifting nature of identity, and specifically how conflict—armed conflict as well as rhetorical conflict—gives rise to new identities. The following selection of essays were either included in, or inspired by, the conference session under the

same title convened at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the College Art Association in Chicago, Illinois.

In order to demonstrate thematic continuity among artists and movements, the essays in this volume are organized chronologically. In the 150 years since the American Civil War, distinct historical contexts have produced and shaped the interpretive possibilities of artistic media. Artists recognized and have understood specific media to register emotions and affiliations, and to enhance messages of memorialization, critique, and dissent. Rather than addressing individual artists, these essays address the contexts of art objects in the twentieth century. Along the way, we discover these artworks' remarkable intersections with technology, politics, community, identity, history, and place.

In 2006, Patricia Johnston's anthology, *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* considered how different media interpret and represent social conflict. Its analyses include fine art, popular, ephemeral, and material cultural creative expression. The essays in *Seeing High and Low* focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: essentially the Civil War and its aftermath. The focal points of Johnston's volume are the emergence of and responses to American pluralism, American modernism, mass media, and industrial revolution. The essayists in our present volume build on the methodologies represented in *Seeing High and Low*, recognizing the exchanges between the fine and popular arts, and how medium affects representation and reception.

However, this anthology remains significantly different. For one, it spans the twentieth century, with particular attention to the impact of the Vietnam War and related protest movements. The diversity of our authors' subjects reflects the growing importance of the contemporary field within art history as a whole and the need to register new and heterogeneous methodologies for the study of this type of activist art. Additionally, this collection's extended trajectory to the present allows for the project of reflection upon the cross-historical relationship between vital contexts and media, such as the Black Power movement and performance art, which has only begun in the last generation. Because the mass media historically served as a prominent influence on activists' artistic processes, production, and reception, we believed it necessary to enlarge our purview to encompass a wealth of practices after the 1960s, when Pop Art famously visualized the subconscious desires and discontents of popular culture. As a related matter, our protracted consideration of artist collectives and vernacular practitioners is unique. Recognizing that collaborative action has long been an identifying feature of both protest and the establishment

of group identity, we were interested in encompassing joint movements among artists in the crucible of unrest during the 1960s and after.

Rather than focusing on New York as the epicenter of cultural output, these essays strive to represent diverse national and international geographies. Indeed, this anthology is truly a product of the contemporary demands in scholarship to engage the global (and globalizing) scope of American conflicts and the nature of the American experience. Several of our authors ask productive questions about immigrant identity or other outsider identities, and the global scope of American conflict as interpreted, memorialized, staged, and contested by immigrant communities abroad and at home. The definition of who or what is American has long been a central question within American art and American studies, and it is our hope to enlarge the question—complicate it, perhaps—and redraw its scope.

Each essay discusses a specific case study, but four broad themes span these discussions. Each of these papers deals with appropriation: images and visual systems that were selected, arranged, or co-opted in order to transform the meanings produced by their sources. Such a politically charged maneuver draws our awareness to the relative agency of the borrower and the mutability of contexts. Second, these essays are united in their different treatments of the motif of memory. How are artworks—photographs, monuments—deployed as a way of stabilizing the past and building community identity? Or, do these images instead engage in a progressive destabilization? What role does memory play in the contemporary monument or moment—or how can it alter contextual frameworks, which are discursive and change over time? Third, many of these essays bracket the discussion of affect. And yet, emotionalism is undeniably a core dimension of activism and its reception. The presence or absence of emotional reflexivity in these works raises the question of what emotional stances and or receptive states are necessary to build collective resistance in the long term. Finally, these papers reveal the art object's entrance into the civic arena as a form of public address. The distinct attributes of these gestures demonstrate the powers and limitations of media and technology to shape a collective consciousness of lived experience.

Tirza True Latimer's essay on the American expatriate World War I era (1914-18) painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970) explores how wartime conditions in which women played a prominent role in the war effort and on the home front influenced a stylistic change in Brooks's style, as demonstrated in the nearly life-size portrait of an anonymous nurse, *La France Croisee* (1914), which signals a departure from her prewar society

portraits and registers the artist's new conception of female agency. Female labor during the war instigated Brooks's artistic exploration of feminine identities; while back in the United States, it was these kinds of changes in the labor force that government and civic organizations sought to exploit in their production of wartime propaganda. Jill Bugajski's study of the Rochester, New York-based Think American Institute, and in particular how it conveyed themes of labor, civic loyalty, and patriotism through graphics, revises the usual association of silkscreen production during the 1930s and 1940s with political dissent. Instead, Bugajski exposes how the technical aspects of the medium—colors, typography—served to promote social order. John Blakinger's paper, "Camouflage, 1942: Artists, Architects, and Designers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia," continues in this vein. Blakinger breaks new ground in analyzing effects of war on art through an investigation of the unlikely reaches between the military-industrial complex and arts institutions, such as the Museum of Modern Art, during and after World War Two. This essay suggests that abstraction itself, enshrined by American Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s and 1950s, was in fact deeply connected to modes of visuality originating in war.

Several of our authors shed new light on the long 1960s, a decade at the root of so much contemporary expression of dissent. In "Shock-Photo: The War Images of Rosler, Spero, and Celmins," Frances Jacobus-Parker introduces a more comprehensive understanding of the "politics of appropriation" of mass-mediated images to Pop Art in the 1960s, especially related to critical studies of gender. Jo-Ann Morgan examines West Coast radicalism in her essay, "From 'Free Speech' to 'Free Huey': Visual Ephemera and the Collaboration of Black Power with White Resistance." Morgan situates the reader in the restless years of protest in late 1960s' Berkeley, California, demonstrating that print and photographic ephemera played an essential role in the curious convergence of African American militant protestors and white student radicals. Kristen Gaylord's "Catholic Art and Activism in Postwar Los Angeles" goes far beyond the existing biographical studies of Sister Mary Corita Kent and Sister Karen Boccalero to situate their voices within the enriching culture of social and political activism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Moving forward from the 1960s, Rebecca Lowery examines the broader legacy of performance art and radicalism in "Art Against the World: Collaborative Antagonism in 1970s Los Angeles." Lowery draws crucial parallels between the general climate of performance artwork in L.A. in the 1970s, daring interventions rooted in the Chicano movement—well-known but seldom addressed in the literature on this subject—and the

nascent radical feminist presence enabled by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's presence at CalArts. The worst nuclear accident in American history, which occurred at Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant in Pennsylvania in 1979, led artists to adopt what Chris Balaschak describes as a strategy of harnessing print media and print techniques in works that graphically and symbolically "recompose" nuclear landscapes in order to protest nuclear power and question legislation that permitted the construction of plants in populated areas and that sought to promote nuclear energy as benign.

This anthology concludes with Erica Allen Kim's powerful consideration of the way in which the public memorialization of the Vietnam War (1954-75) remains a hotly contested issue in Vietnamese communities in Southern California. Allen Kim describes how across the landscape of suburban Westminster, California's "Little Saigon" enclave, the public space of war memorialization has engaged questions of Vietnamese ethnic identity and Vietnamese and American nationalism. If, as the Jacobus-Parker essay in this volume contends, the re-representation of mass mediated images of Vietnam can reveal much about the identity of the artist, indeed, visualizing the Vietnam War from within the Vietnamese community engages a range of personal interpretations of the conflict and its legacy.

The current unabashed violence and seeming indifference of contemporary US culture has become something of a chestnut. However, in light of the essays gathered in this volume, it is apparent that constructive dissent has historically taken extremely heterogeneous forms and comes from all walks of life. Somewhat by design, these articulations of protest have evaded the watch of art history, or indeed, any institutional authority. But we must know these artists and their works. They lend us questions, they illuminate present injustices, and they demonstrate tactics to claim agency. From the ramshackle to the refined, no one can deny that dissent has and will continue to play a vibrant role in American art.

Notes

[1] We, the editors, would like to extend our sincere thanks to Vyt Bakaitis and the Estate of Sharon Gilbert for graciously supplying the cover art to this volume. We would also like to thank our proofreader, Kaisa Cummings, for such attentive work, and of course, the individual authors for their bold and innovative scholarship.

[2] Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 80-81.

[3] Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War*, 83.
[4] Julie Ault, "For the Record," in *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3.
[5] Lucy Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York Since 1969," in *Alternative Art, New York*, 79.
[6] Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 57.
[7] For more information on the historical links between protest and print culture, see: Deborah Wye, *Committed to Print – Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988).
[8] "Puerto Rican Museum Finally Gets Its Own Home," *New York Times*, November 10, 1971.
[9] Emory Douglas, "Art in Service of the People," *Black Scholar* 9, no. 3 (November 1977): 55.

CHAPTER ONE

CROSSING THE LINES: ROMAINE BROOKS AND THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

TIRZA TRUE LATIMER

Before the onset of World War I, the American expatriate painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970) earned critical acclaim in Paris for her novel approach to portraiture and the female nude. Her paintings of aristocratic sitters and the *haute bourgeoisie* broke with decorative traditions of female representation. Her society portraits revealed imperfections of character as well as physique and the women she painted stared confidently, sometimes arrogantly, back at the viewer. Her emaciated nudes turned away from traditions of *volupté* and erotic display. In her memoirs, Brooks described the monumental nude she painted in 1910, *White Azaleas* (for which the Russian ballerina Ida Rubinstein posed) as "Olympia's sister" because it was as unconventional as Édouard Manet's 1863 painting.[1] This nude, like Brooks's early portraits, extend aesthetic trends of the long nineteenth century. Critics compared her to Manet, James McNeill Whistler, and the French Symbolists. With the wartime painting *La France Croisée* (1914), Brooks reached a crossroads in her artistic career. In the 1920s, she would generate a veritable pantheon of modern women painted in a more reductive modern style. *La France Croisée*, like the Great War itself, opened new representational horizons (fig. 1-1).

On its face, this three-quarters figure of a Red Cross nurse, depicted against the backdrop of a war torn wasteland, reads as an allegory of France martyred by the latest German invasion. Yet Brooks layered the painting with more subtle registers of meaning. It is significant that the cross on the breast of Brooks's protagonist, at the exact center of the painting, is not a military cross of valor but the emblem of a neutral humanitarian organization. The Red Cross symbol originated at the Geneva Convention of 1864, where diplomats from all European countries

and several American states convened to forge an agreement ameliorating the conditions of those wounded in war. [2] The symbol of the Red Cross, an inverted Swiss flag (which features a white cross against a red ground), was adopted as a tribute to Henry Dunant, the French Swiss founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Painted in a bright vermillion, the emblem stands out against Brooks's otherwise predominantly grey-blue palette. The title of Brooks's painting also calls attention to the red cross. Yet for the French-speaking public, the phrase "la France croisée" must have seemed enigmatic. The customary English translation, "The Cross of France," is not exact. Brooks's title, which accurately translates "France crossed," suggests but deviates from "the cross of France" to evoke not only the Christian cross and Red Cross insignia, but also the breached frontiers of France under military siege. At the same time, in the word "croisée" an echo of "crusade" (*croisade*) can be heard, summoning up righteous narratives of territorial recuperation. The title in its original French iteration, then, evokes not so much an object (a cross) but an action—the crossing back and forth of land warfare, battle lines drawn, then transgressed, troops pushed back and then resurging to redefine territorial boundaries.

Brooks's allegorical figure of France contributes to an iconography familiar to French men and women. In everyday life, allegorical representations of the motherland were commonplace. At the time Brooks painted *La France Croisée*, French stamps and coins (indeed, the basic unit of the economy, the franc) pictured the allegorical figure La Semeuse (the sower of seeds) striding forward to cultivate the land, robe agitated by the synchronized actions of her arms and legs. During the war, French stamps bore the Red Cross emblem in one corner and half of the purchase price was earmarked for the support of relief efforts.

Another secular goddess, Marianne, recognizable by her distinctive Phrygian bonnet, became the symbol of liberty when the Convention of 1792 voted to use her image on the state seal of the new republic.[3] The bust of Marianne replaced crucifixes and statues of the Virgin in public schools and town halls. *La France Croisée* visibly relates to Eugène Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (*Liberty Leading the People*) of 1830, perhaps the most famous artistic representation of Marianne. Brooks's windswept figure, like Delacroix's allegorical Liberty, exhibits fearlessness in the face of danger. Yet Brooks's personification of France, unlike Delacroix's Liberty, does not bare her breasts. On the contrary, she clutches the Red Cross cape across her chest, concealing her gendered anatomy. Moreover, while the drapery and corporeality of Delacroix's

Liberty reify classical standards of feminine beauty, *La France Croisée* presents something much more rare: a contemporary heroine.

That Brooks's heroine wears a Red Cross nurse's uniform has complex implications. The painting does not, as *Liberty Leading the People* does, idealize armed revolt and soldierly prowess. Rather, it introduces a counter-discourse. The Red Cross nurse enters the battlefield not to overpower an enemy but rather to tend the wounds of those fallen, whether military or civilian, regardless of nationality. Because this nurse, in her dress and demeanor, aligns with the historical profile of women who actually served during the war, she could be understood as a modern feminine archetype as much as a personification of wartime France. This painting, indeed, anchored an iconography of heroic femininity that Brooks elaborated throughout the remainder of her artistic career.

Striking the same pose in both a self-portrait Brooks painted in 1912, *Au Bord de la mer* (*At the Seashore*), and a portrait of the ballet idol Ida Rubinstein she painted in 1917, this female archetype looks like a cross between the two artistically accomplished women. With her sinuous neck, strong jaw line, prominent cheekbones, deep-set eyes, and prow-like nose, the composite figure, if striking, is hardly a conventional beauty. The strong features of her face, painted in three quarters profile, express fearless determination.

The near life-scale of the figure grounds her in worldly reality, as do the details of her attire. The dark blue cape (virtually black) with the red cross over the breast, white blouse, and white headscarf replicate the uniforms worn by Red Cross nurses from France, America, and England serving under the auspices of La Croix-Rouge Française. Typically, each nurse displayed, under the cross, an insignia indicating her specific affiliation and may also have worn, inside the cape on her shirt collar or apron, regimental insignia given to her by the injured soldiers for whom she had cared. Brooks's nurse, though, lacks any such distinguishing marks. She should be viewed, for this reason, as a type, not an individual, just as the city aflame in the background, identified by Brooks as Ypres on the Belgian border, could stand for any one of many comparable sites.

Yet Brooks's nurse stands apart from the generic images of Red Cross volunteers that circulated throughout the war years. One recruiting poster, declaring "Five Thousand by June – Graduate Nurses Your Country Needs You," features in the foreground a three-quarters figure of a nurse wearing a Red Cross cape (fig. 1-2). But this is where the resemblance to Brooks's painting ends. The Red Cross "poster girl" holds her body stiff and upright. No wind of war buffets her perfect coif and starched white clothing. In contrast to the scene of devastation surrounding the nurse in

La France Croisée, the backdrop here consists of military barracks, stretching out in orderly rows almost as far as the eye can see, with the flags of the United States and the Red Cross on proud display. The clouds in the sky are white and billowy, as opposed to those smoke grey skies painted by Brooks. The lithograph's lighter palette contributes to the sense of optimism and buoyancy the image communicates. Downplaying the battlefield dangers inherent to the wartime nursing vocation, it exemplifies the propaganda images generated by the Red Cross on both sides of the Atlantic throughout World War I.

In France, Red Cross postcards conformed to the same template. They typically feature a staged tableau that shows a nurse ministering to a soldier on the margins of the battlefield.[4] These postcards bore inspirational captions: "*Soins Dévoué*" ("devoted care"), "*L'Ange de la Victoire*" ("angel of victory"), "*Courage – Dévouement*" ("courage – devotion") (fig. 1-3). They invariably picture a nurse wearing virtuous white from head to toe. Her young face is plump and pleasing, if plain. Implicitly or explicitly identified as an "angel," she preserves traditional feminine characteristics of modesty, cleanliness, and maternal tenderness even under duress.

Women who served during the conflict pictured themselves in somewhat different ways. They posed for photographs with their units, with one another in twos and threes, and with their vehicles (figs. 1-4 and 1-5). Between twenty-five and thirty thousand American women served as ambulance drivers or nurses staffing Red Cross hospitals and field stations during the so-called war to end all wars. Several prominent Americans, including the banking heiress Anne Morgan and the Singer sewing machine heiress Winaretta Singer (Princess Edmond de Polignac by marriage), founded relief organizations. Singer-Polignac worked with Marie Curie to convert private limousines into mobile radiology units. Morgan's American Fund for French Wounded (AFFW), with a fleet of sixty-five vehicles, trucked medical supplies to hospitals, staffed ambulances, and delivered care packages to soldiers.

Morgan's so-called "Heiress Corps" operated not far behind the lines in the Somme, Aisne, Marne, and Meuse regions of northern France beginning in 1915, well before US military involvement in the conflict. Over 300 American women made their way to France to serve in the AFFW, and 5,000 more drove ambulances for various Red Cross units. They arrived by transatlantic steamer with their stripped down Fords and Dodges in tow. As a condition of service, they learned to perform mechanical repairs, change tires, patch inner tubes, and dig their axels out of the mud. The volunteers often worked without food or rest for days on