

KANTOR GALLERY

PRESS

CRITICAL VISIONS

Mark Vallen January, 2003

Two vital Art exhibitions will be running here in Los Angeles during these ominous days of gathering war clouds, and both shows will offer insights into a certain restive spirit that will undoubtedly be growing in times to come. One exhibit will present historic posters designed as visual protests against war and militarism, the other show will confront the viewer with artworks produced during L.A.'s late 70's Punk rebellion.

Opening this January 11th, the Center for the Study of Political Graphics (CSPG) will present "The Anti War Show The Price of Intervention from Korea to Iraq", at the Track 16 Gallery in Santa Monica. Dozens of posters designed by professional and amateur artists alike will be on display. Some of the posters will no doubt be familiar to the viewer, like Lorraine Schneider's 1968 design for the activist group, Another Mother for Peace. Schneider's simple abstract illustration of a Flower incorporated bold text into its design, with words that read "War is Not Healthy for Children and other living things." The original poster printed in black ink on ocher yellow paper became an iconic symbol of the late 60's international peace movement, with its title entering the popular lexicon of the day. An example of the power of Schneider's poster is that its message is still on the lips of today's peace activists.

Another socially engaged Artist from that period was Sister Corita Kent, whose poster quoting French Philosopher, Albert Camus ("I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice"), is also included in the show. The Catholic Sister was popularly known simply as Corita, and her works became so famous that even Newsweek proclaimed her the "modern Nun" on a 1966 magazine cover. Recognized for her Serigraph Prints that utilized montage techniques and text as part of their aesthetic, she used her Art as a platform to attack racism, poverty, consumerist culture, and U.S. Imperialism in Vietnam. Corita became a Teacher and the Chair of the Art Department at Immaculate Heart College in L.A. But her creations also attracted frequent censure from local Church officials, and as a result Corita left the order in 1969 and moved to Boston where she continued working as an Artist until her death in 1986.

The Price of Intervention exhibition will also include more recent works like Stephen Kroninger's 1991 poster, "Uncle Sam Wants You", a parody based on James Montgomery Flagg's famous Uncle Sam recruitment poster for World War I. Kroninger's skill at photomontage allowed him to cleverly reconstruct Flagg's image into one lambasting then President, George Bush Sr. The text in Kroninger's lampoon reads "Uncle George wants you to forget failing banks, education, drugs, AIDs, poor health care, unemployment, crime, racism, corruption, and have a good war." For anyone interested in studying how visual Artists have responded to war in recent times, "The Price of Intervention" exhibit from the Center for the Study of Political Graphics is a good place to start.

Coming up February 1st 2003 will be "The Art of Punk", the inaugural exhibit for the new Kantor Gallery on Melrose Avenue (formerly the Zero One Gallery). The exhibit will offer artworks and related materials documenting the rise of L.A.'s Punk underground at the close of the 20th century. Not only will my own original Drawings and Paintings from the late 70's Punk explosion be included in the exhibit, but so will the works of Raymond Pettibone (graphic Artist for Black Flag), and Shepard Fairey (known for his "Obey Giant" absurdist propaganda street posters). Original album cover artworks and hundreds of rare Punk flyers will also make up part of the exhibition.

The Kantor family name has long been associated with Fine Art in Los Angeles. Paul Kantor opened a Gallery in L.A. during the late 1940's when the city had no art scene to speak of, and in 1952 mounted the first L.A. showings of Abstract Expressionists Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning. Today Paul Kantor's Son, Niels, is carrying the torch, and his passion for Art burns as brightly as his Father's. Niels Kantor was a pre Teen when L.A.'s original Punk scene was raging away in rented store fronts and seedy back ally basement venues, but the cabaret like netherworld had a major impact on his impressionable young mind. He went to as many shows as he could gain entry to and started to collect the outrageous cut and paste, dada style flyers that announced underground Punk shows.

The two of us undoubtedly crossed paths many times during that riotous period as I was already deeply involved in the city's Punk insurgency. I spent most of my time with a sketch book or camera in hand, furiously documenting the nihilistic passion play passing before my eyes. I worked briefly as a production artist at SLASH magazine (L.A.'s notorious propaganda organ for the Punk revolution), creating two cover Illustrations for the infamous periodical. Like other young Artists working in L.A. at the time (Gary Panter, Shawn Kerry, Pettibone, etc.), I saw the Punk phenomenon as an opportunity to challenge the established order by helping to create an energetically contentious culture. Punk turned accepted aesthetics and notions of "normalcy"

upside down, it admonished the complacent and demanded that people be "more than a witness." Concepts that are perhaps more relevant today than ever before.

The "Art of Punk" exhibition opens with an Artist's reception on the evening of Friday, February 1st 2003, with the show running until March 14th. 2003. The Kantor Gallery is located at 7025 Melrose Avenue (323) 933 6976.

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