

# 1st ISSUE POLITICAL ART DOCUMENTATION /DISTRIBUTION

February 1981

## PAD: Waking Up In NYC

**PAD** (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) is an artists' resource and networking organization coming out of and into New York City. *Our main goal is to provide artists with an organized relationship to society*; one way we are doing this is by building a collection of documentation of international socially-concerned art. **PAD** defines "social concern" in the broadest sense, as any work that deals with issues—ranging from sexism and racism to ecological damage or other forms of human oppression. We document all kinds of work from movement posters to the most personal of individual statements. Art comes from art as well as from life. Knowing this makes us want to learn more about the production, distribution and impact of socially-concerned art works in the context of our culture and society. Historically, politicized or social-change artists have been denied mainstream coverage and our interaction has been limited. We have to know what we are doing. In New York. In the US. In Canada and Latin America. In Europe. In Asia and Africa. **The development of an effective oppositional culture depends on communication.**

## UN CERTAIN ART ANGLAIS!



A Certain English Art, (Postcard) Rasheed Araeen, 1979

**PAD** celebrated its first birthday with a Valentine's evening of entertainment and discussion around a slide show of political art (followed by dancing, but not in the streets—yet). We began in February 1980 as an amorphous group of artworkers dimly aware of a mutual need to organize around issues, but without much notion of how to do it. We met at Printed Matter once a month and agreed to start collecting documentation so we would have a physical core from which to reach out. For a while we looked at each other's work, discussed it, and thought about a social club and various possibilities for cultural activism. Then in late Spring we were offered a room in a former high school on the Lower East Side under the aegis of Seven Loaves—an umbrella group for community arts organizations. Suddenly we existed physically. We *had* to be in the world, and that led to the present structuring, still in process.

We have three kinds of meetings now: 1) The relatively flexible core or work group of 15-20 people gets together on three Sunday afternoons a month at the Seven Loaves space (when not too cold). Here we deal with: soliciting and handling of the archive materials; how to connect with other cultural organizations in NYC with similar purposes so there's no overlapping and duplication of work. (For instance, we are working with Cityarts Workshop, which has an impressive resource center on the community mural movement, and with Karin di Gia of Gallery 345, who has a collection of original political art.) We are also beginning to connect with and inform each other about the political events and struggles taking place in the city, understanding the ways these relate to national and international situations. Finally, we are thinking about collectively created issue-oriented exhibitions in public spaces, such as windows, subways, libraries, etc.

2) The open meetings with which we began. They take place on the second Sunday of every month at 8 PM at Printed Matter (7 Lispenard St., NYC 10013; 925-0325). Here reports are made from the work group and a brief visual or verbal presentation is given by a **PAD** member or guest as a sort of laboratory to stimulate discussion, education, consciousness raising and activism.

3) We are just beginning a series of public events centered around specific social issues seen in their historical perspectives, focusing on how they were opposed or supported by the socially concerned art of the time; for instance in May, a day on militarism in the "cold war" era, the Vietnam era and today, discussed by people from WRL (the War Resisters League), CARD (Committee Against Registration for the Draft) and artists who have done work with anti-militaristic content. We want to understand how the dialectic between oppositional art and society changes and takes different forms at different moments. These public afternoons will be publicized, and will lead up to an Autumn conference, at which we hope to bring together a wide coalition of cultural groups and artists. (For more information on events, see the "Calendar" section of **PAD**.)

**PAD's** theory is going to develop out of real experience instead of from the idealized and romanticized notion of a

"political art" that remains as separate from the action as the art we're educated to make. While we want to move beyond the isolation and alienation of the art world, it is important to us to remain artists, to maintain contact with our roots as image makers, to recognize the social importance of making art. We'd like to encourage the fearless use of objects, and encourage and support disenfranchised people in making their own uncolonized art. We reject the way the art market has denied art's social function and defuses it by setting up false dichotomies between abstraction and figuration, "political and formalist", high and low culture. Perhaps the most insidious idea we have to combat is that you have to give up art to be involved in the world, or give up the world in order to be an artist (the alternative being that impotent neutral ground currently offered artists by the dominant culture).

### **PAD wants to restore the central role of art in our culture.**

We want to become a channel through which artists can take responsibility for their own and other lives. We are convinced that it is possible to overcome the conflict between "my own work" and outreach, between collective work and "getting back to my studio." Individual talent, or the self, is not lost but clarified and enlarged through social practice. So far, the most visible models for understanding the personal/political fusion have been provided by feminists, but we all know a number of people invisible to the mainstream, who are doing equally important work to dispel the negative separation between the personal and the political.

**PAD** recognizes the complex dialectic underlying creativity in social contexts. We do not see the individual artist's gifts and needs being replaced by a dogmatic notion of "social work." Instead, we see one of **PAD's** central tasks as a conscious and patient investigation of the historical twists and turns of interaction between artist and society.

We have to criticize and accept criticism. We have to stop putting down everybody who's not making the same kind of political art we are—which is a classic product of artworld competition. As such, **PAD** can not serve as a means of advancement within the artworld structure of museums and galleries. Rather, we have to develop new forms of distribution economy as well as art, open up the old forms and, most important, support each other in our efforts to understand the process of doing so. We have to identify our primary audience. We have to stimulate the invaluable dialogue between artists and the people we think we're working for. Art is about matter, material, reality, whether it's abstract, or representational, or conceptual. It's about real life, about how we see, touch, experience, feel. Art and politics have in common the capacity to **move** people. But we have to be very clear about who we are moving and why, whose reality our artwork reflects.

### **Artists can be useful and powerful allies.**

In a nation where oppression is primarily carried out on an ideological level, through control of communication, we recognize the central importance of making powerful cross-cultural images, of creative opposition to the dominant culture. One of **PAD's** most crucial tasks is to build an understanding of the importance of the artist in the con-



Photo: Jill Posener  
Farringdon Rd. London, Dec '79



no one will  
for bread be crying,  
we'll have freedom,  
love and health,  
when the grand  
red flag is flying  
in the workers'  
commonwealth

Joe Hill  
1879 - 1915

Postcard

struction of a new "people not profits" society. We want to make art that makes ordinary people's lives, memories and experiences moving and important to others.

Like the Left in general, we see this as a time to resist, to unite around our common needs by encouraging connections, sharing work with other artists (independent and organized), building cultural coalitions. All this is important and necessary work in 1981. **PAD** can provide a way of simultaneously getting feedback for art and carrying through these goals. We know we are in a youthful stage of our development and we're very aware of working into something that is beyond the knowledge of the group and of the histories of the individuals in it. We'll need your input to assess and continue our goals. Just networking in NYC, we've been surprised to find so many people we didn't know about. Finding them makes us realize how many of you out there we still don't know about. A major part of **PAD's** program is to hear from you and to make sure that when one of us hears from somebody we all hear from somebody. There's a lot of energy out there, some of it being dissipated in unsupported isolation. It seems to us that the best way to begin is to get concretely involved with the struggles in our own cities and at the same time be networking and learning from what's being done elsewhere.

**PAD** is building from the grass roots up. We have no funds, grants, etc. and we'll need donations from participating artists to do mailings that will keep us all in touch with each other. (Make checks payable to **PAD** New York and send to the address below.) Eventually the newsletter will serve as a catalogue and supplement to the archive, include selections from it, and provide a forum for dialogue. Right now we are compiling a directory of socially-concerned artists. If you register as an individual, groups will be able to find you for work, exhibitions or jobs. If you have any ideas about how we should structure the outgoing, or distributory half of **PAD** (within our limited resources) please let us know. We want this to be a reciprocal relationship.

We want to talk to people who organize people:  
1) socially-concerned art and cultural groups of all types.  
2) local, national and international issue-oriented groups focusing on the major issues of our time, like anti-militarism, ecological damage, racial and sexual liberation, etc.  
3) community groups organized around local needs like housing, daycare, police brutality, welfare, etc. **PAD** sees this triad as the basis for a powerful alliance.

(This statement was written by Lucy R. Lippard and Jerry Keams, members of **PAD** New York.)

## HISTORY SO FAR

June 1979: Announcement of exhibition "Art From the British Left" at Artists' Space includes a call for socially-concerned artists interested in participating in other events and in an international political art archive. Political disagreements with the then-administration of Artists' Space prevent further cooperation, but material for the archive begins to filter in and the notice is reprinted in several small magazines around the US.

Summer 1979: Idea of an archive is expanded to include a space and organization: still on paper.

February 24, 1980: First meeting finally held at Printed Matter. Some 50 participants begin a mailing list and agree to meet one Sunday a month. Meetings continue with discussions of possibilities and slide shows of work by members and visiting political artists from other cities and countries.

Spring: Members of Artists for Survival on the Lower East Side attend meetings and find us a free space under the auspices of Seven Loaves. We decide on a name: **PAD**.

June: We paint our room at PS 64. **PAD** leaflet goes out. We are represented at social-change art conference sponsored by NEA in Cincinnati.

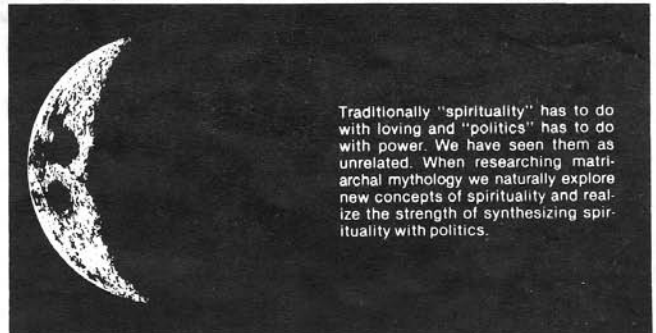
September: Structure tightens. Work groups are set up. Much decoration of space with banners, posters, etc. Cataloguing system for archive material collectively conceived.

November: Second Sunday meetings at Printed Matter begin to include brief presentations.

December: We plan public events and Coming Out party. Contacts are made with Cityarts and Gallery 345. First statement of intent (see above) written.

February 1: **PAD** sponsors Iranian art evening at member's home.

## WOMEN TAKE BACK THE NIGHT



Traditionally "spirituality" has to do with loving and "politics" has to do with power. We have seen them as unrelated. When researching matriarchal mythology we naturally explore new concepts of spirituality and realize the strength of synthesizing spirituality with politics.



© Mary Linn Hughes/Micki McGee, 1978

## HOW TO SEND MATERIALS TO PAD

Please send all material in an 9½ x 12" manila file folder labeled with your name or the subject of your interests. We welcome slides, posters, artists' books, photos, publications, and other multiples, but we cannot accept responsibility for original (one-of-a-kind) material. If you can't send two copies of posters, buttons, bumper stickers, brochures and handouts, one will go to Karin de Gia, the A.J. Muste Foundation.

SEND TO:

**P.A.D. c/o Seven Loaves**  
605 East 9th Street  
N.Y., N.Y. 10009  
phone: 212-533-8695

Political Art Documentation & Distribution (PAD)  
605 East 9th Street  
New York, New York 10009  
Phone: 212-533-8695

## CALENDAR

**April 23-June 19: "The Prison Show: Realities/Representations"** (art from, for and about prisons) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, 48 Old Slip, Mon.-Fri., 11-3, (PAD member Micki McGee is co-organizer). Film series June 12-19, call 483-0011 for schedule.

**April 26: "Anti-World-War-III"** slide show by San Francisco Poster Brigade at Printed Matter.

**May 3: PAD's "Image War on the Pentagon"**—a busload of us took a series of double-sided placards, contrasting destructive (military) with constructive (social) images, to the March on the Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

**May 10: Second Sunday Meeting** at Printed Matter focuses on the history of abortion rights with talks by Harrie Levarowitz of CARASA (Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse) and Karen Durbin of "No More Nice Girls." Chilling slides of imagery from the anti-abortion movement as well as films of recent pro-abortion political actions were shown.

**May 16: International Day of Action on Reproductive Rights.** PAD's first organized effort to work with a coalition of political groups including CARASA, NOW, Women's Pentagon Action, DARE (Dykes Against Racism Everywhere) and others to produce art work for an entire demonstration. 3,000 people participated in a march for reproductive rights in NYC and PAD members Nancy Barton, Bonnie Cooper, Lyn Hughes and Anne Pitrone organized a group of independent artists to make banners, sculpture, costumes and posters for the parade.

**May 31: "The Social Possibilities of Art"**, PAD slide show and panel discussion at the Ethical Culture Society, 2 West 64th Street 2 pm.

**June 1: "Anti-WW III Show"** opening at Parsons School of Design, 2 West 13th Street. Films, video, other evening events will accompany show. Send xerox, collage, photos, postcards, posters, cartoons on the theme of Internationalism/Anti-WW3, to SF Poster Brigade, PO Box 31428, San Francisco, CA 94131 USA. June 1 deadline.

**June 13: Second Sunday Meeting** at Printed Matter focuses on, "No More Witch Hunts: A Day of Resistance" (June 19) opposing the new red scare politics of surveillance and harassment.

**June 14: "Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition"** at Group Material, 244 E. 13th Street. Opening 4-7 p.m.

**June 26:** Opening of PAD show "Demonstrate! Agitate! Participate! Communicate! Liberate!" at Gallery 345 345 Lafayette Street, with a "Fun-Raising Party" afterward from 8:30 on at 32 W. 20th Street (7th floor). The "Demonstrate" show will include the history of progressive demonstrations, new work for demonstrations and fantasies for future demonstration projects. Open to all. Contact Tim Rollins, 69-7350 (ask for library, leave message) by June 16, if you want to participate. Final deadline for work is June 21. PAD's Fun-Raiser will follow the gallery opening on June 26th and will feature two bands: **Off Beach**, and **Dog Eat Dog**. \$5.00 admission.

PAD is hoping to stimulate some new forms of "page art," so if you have an idea for an original artwork for one page of the newsletter please send us a camera ready proposal. All manuscripts and artworks should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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