

SPRIT SQUARE

CENTER FOR THE ARTS

MESSAGE

ART

Exhibitions & public lectures on the subjects of

social and political commentary in the arts.

September - December, 1990

Art can...
take our unexpressed thoughts
and desires and fling them
with clarity and coherence
on the wall,
a screen,
a sheet of paper,
or against the
long silence of history...

Adrienne Rich, poet

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Those of us who recall the early fifties need little reminder to feel the fear generated by the Cold War. We found our nation fighting communism abroad, and at home, in the media and behind secret doors. Even fluoride in public drinking water was evaluated in terms of socialist implications. Russia, the former ally against Germany, had turned rival for world domination, and became the Red scourge of trouble. Anyone found with traces of pink became blacklisted - or in the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, convicted of passing secrets and electrocuted.

Today, however, with very different national interests being exercised, especially in the Middle East, the Soviets are on 'our' side. So too are the Japanese and the Germans. Even Vietnam is being rehabilitated, due to mutual interests in Cambodia. Times change. In Czechoslovakia, a playwright who was jailed for his controversial views of the state becomes president. Political winds sweep the passions of men with the changing interests of the state. The axis of the world shifts once more.

Throughout history, there are those who have expressed their views in terms of feelings and ways of knowing which contradict the 'facts' presented by those in authority. The taking of an oppositional stance is, by its own nature, a source for the political and social commentary of artists and philosophers. In this country, opposition to authority is virtually a tradition, especially in light of the American sense of individualism. The scrutinizing of authority and official policy is a prerogative of citizenship, not to mention being the modus operandi of a free press. When translated into artmaking, pictorial imagery has the unique ability—and unparalleled power—to cut through any argument while appealing to the heart.

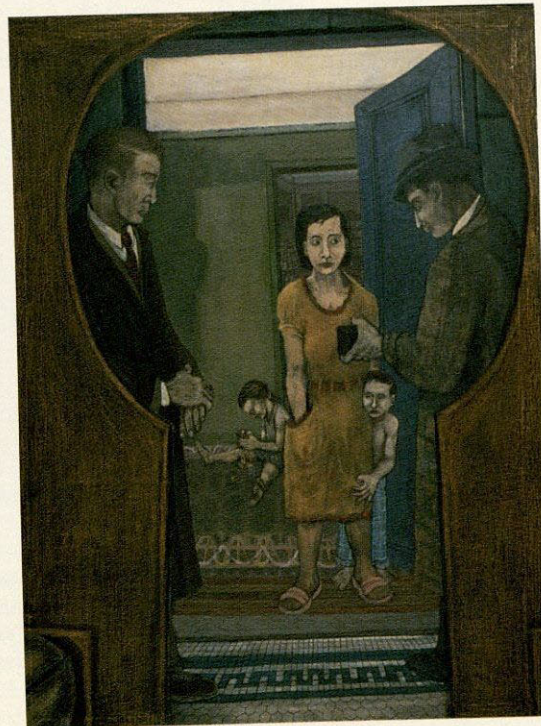
But art is as much a tool for systems of propaganda as it is for raising attention to the failures of the same system. Used as image tools in the service of political or social

strategies, art can be mobilized to influence public awareness and to represent facts. Thus, when events are symbolized by a persuasive artistic image, our collective energies can be focused to either love or strike fire at the heart of fellow beings. Consider, for example, how aspirations for freedom can reach revolutionary proportions when symbolized by a stand-

ing woman with the torch of liberty in her hand (most recently in Tienanmen Square). Or how emotions have been inflamed by using the face of a suffering child who trembles in the presence of a tyrant. Power stems from the image which becomes an icon of truth — however it is attributed.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, artists have directly participated worldwide, both in support of, and in opposition to, the movements of democracies, totalitarian states, and revolutions. Whether in the service of humanity or the state, art with a message has been an integral part of political and social discourse.

Spirit Square Center for the Arts is providing Message Art programs throughout the Fall and into the Winter season of 1991 in response to a number of coincident recent circumstances which include the ending of the Cold War; our



Through the Keyhole, 1984, by Leon Marcus

national involvement in the Middle East; and congressional debate over the role of social commentary in the arts as it pertains to the National Endowment for the Arts. Since it is Spirit Square's mission to help bridge various sectors of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community, as well as to draw lines between the humanities and the arts, and because Spirit Square recognizes the role of the arts as an integral part of social and political discourse, the arts institution offers a forum for the discourse.

The program schedule begins September 7, 1990, with "Unknown Secrets: Art and the Rosenberg Era," a traveling multi-media exhibition in Knight Gallery, curated by Nina Felshin

and organized by the Rosenberg Era Art Project which features the work of artists of the 1950s and '80s. It is followed September 21 by two concurrent exhibitions:

"Occupation and Resistance: American Impressions," in Middleton-McMillan Gallery, curated by Geno Rodriguez, Director of the Alternative Museum in New York, which includes the multi-media response artwork of 16 American artists who were invited to visit the West Bank and Gaza Strip to experience the Israel/Palestine situation firsthand; and in the First Union Gallery, "Colors of the People: Art by Palestinians," named for the fact that using the colors of the Palestinian flag, red, black and green, is illegal in art-making.

Photographs are the vehicle for this display by young Palestinians who make imagery for their revolution since the artwork presented is censored by Israeli authorities. The original artwork could not be removed from the country.

To provide a better understanding of the broader social and political context of these artworks, Spirit Square will co-sponsor a public panel discussion on the Israel/Palestine situation with the Charlotte World Affairs Council. Speakers will come through the auspices of Charlotte's international community and will include the exhibition's curator, Geno Rodriguez.



from Michael A. Kelly Rosenberg
Picasso

Untitled, 1952 by Pablo Picasso.

These exhibitions and activities serve to bring together the work of artists from across the nation and abroad, exposing the community to artists from the '80s whose work comments upon contemporary issues — and in the case of "Unknown Secrets," historical sources to current-day issues. Some of the artists who have vivid memories of the heat of the Cold War have been asked to contribute their work on issues which energized McCarthyism, which blacklisted artists with great zeal and publicity during the '50s. These targeted artists have much to say about such issues as communism, anti-Semitism, freedom of speech, and due process of law. To illuminate the collective and individual experiences of many Vietnam Era soldiers-turned-artists, poetry readings will be presented by former U.S. combat Marine

Opening November 2, 1990, in Middleton-McMillan Gallery, is "An Allegorical Landscape: Through Israeli Eyes," which features paintings by Pamela Levy and multi-media installations by David Melamed. The work of both Israeli artists addresses a deep crisis in their society. Pamela Levy portrays dissonant circumstances between figures and the landscape. David Melamed mourns the loss of an idealized mythic source for Israel's Zionist heritage.

The Vietnam Era represents another crucial historical period of extraordinary involvement by artists. In film, literature, performance and visual art, Vietnam has become the source for a wide range of creative expression. Following the Palestinian artwork in First Union Gallery, beginning November 4th, is "A Soldier's Heart," a painting series by Kate Collie in collaboration with Stephen Piscitelli, which images trauma and transition of Piscitelli as a Vietnam veteran from recruit through his war experience to his becoming an artist. Unlike any public media stories of war trauma, in this collaboration between painter and soldier, there is a message of understanding. Charlotte veterans groups will provide assistance for this program by contributing support toward readings of Vietnam Era poetry.

William D. Ehrhart, who is a poet and editor of several Vietnam Era poetry anthologies. Also included will be selected readings of the writings of Charlottean Loch Walker.

Other connections can be drawn as the program unfolds. There is much that the Israeli and American artists have in common, not the least of which is fundamental influence from a Western art tradition. Simpler correlations can be seen between up-and-coming regional artists, such as those of Charlotte/Mecklenburg and young Palestinian artists. Each group would like to have exposure to an arts audience and each would like to have their artwork regarded with appreciation from an otherwise tough-to-enter art world. But that is a minor consideration when compared to the issue of the Western dominance which occurs in political and economic realms along with the artistic. Even with the humanist sympathies expressed by American and Israeli artists for the plight of oppressed people, the operative relationship between the Palestinians and the Americans/Israelis has been forged by the heat of an inevitable conflict between the Western and Third World points of view.

In East Jerusalem there is a small, bedraggled, but highly energized arts center called El Hakuwati, if you can imagine a Spirit Square after twenty years of government interference. The artists, actors, journalists and politicians meet to talk and produce theater, music and exhibitions. There, artists of all stripes congregate while drinking tea and coffee amid rising cigarette smoke. Talk revolves around how art serves the people and, not incidentally, who is currently in jail.

One is easily struck by the passion and commitment of the Palestinian artists of East Jerusalem. They operate with limited resources, while bearing extraordinary artistic hardship. They see their role in the service of the intefada. One wonders how their American counterparts would be able to function under such circumstances.

In August, 1990, Spirit Square and the community experimented with an unjuried arts program entitled "Freedom of Expression." Open submissions were welcomed by anyone who wished to submit artwork, films and videos, as well as performance art proposals. What followed was a weeklong celebration of opportunity and artistic expression, exemplified by a wide variety of visual statements. More than a thousand people came to see the exhibition and more than 300 danced in the gallery one clear summer night.

By whatever means ideology dominates a culture, either through military occupation or an ongoing system of propaganda, the degree to which it is held in the minds of the populace will be a function of its success in supplanting inquiry with the imagery of power. The look becomes a substitute for the real. Although artists are implicated in perpetuating values of dominant culture, they are also apt to take license in articulating the flaws in the system of power. Sooner or later artists will portray a contradictory image of the mainstream and challenge authority. That is when artists who are employed by the state one day are expendable the next. This can be seen from the Soviet Union's constructivists in the 1920's to the American abstract expressionists in the 1950s. Today we face the NEA controversy. From the perspective of the viewer, it is important to remain always vigilant in the asking of one fundamental question: In whose interest is the message anyway?



Drawing by 10 year old Palestinian.

**Unknown Secrets:
Art and the
Rosenberg Era**

Knight Gallery
September 7- November 4, 1990

Symposium featuring exhibition organizer Rob Okun
and Dr. Harold Josephson with documentary film
October 5, 1990
7:30 PM

KIM ABELES
DENNIS ADAMS
VICTOR ARNAUTOFF
ROBERT ARNESON
DOUG ASHFORD
KAREN ATKINSON
GARY BACHMAN
RUDOLF BRANIK
TERRY BERKOWITZ
ANGEL BRACHO &
CELIA CALDERON
CHRIS BRATTON
LUIS CAMNITZER
SUE COE
ADELYNE CROSS-ERIKSSON
MORT DIMONDSTEIN
FRED ELLIS
RALPH FASANELLA
RUPERT GARCIA
HUGO GELLERT
COOK GLASSGOLD
ALEX GREY
MARINA GUTIERREZ
JERRY KEARNS
ROCKWELL KENT
MARGIA KRAMER

FERNAND LEGER
LEON MARCUS
ARNOLD MESCHES
LOUIS MONZA
FRANCISCO MORA
ANTONIO MUNTADAS
ALICE NEEL
LORIE NOVAK
SAUL OSTROW
PABLO PICASSO
ADRIAN PIPER
ARCHIE RAND
MARTHA ROSLER
JUAN SANCHEZ
PETER SAUL
GREG SHOLETTE
KENNETH SHORR
DEBORAH SMALL
ANTHONY TONEY
PATTY WALLACE
DAVID WOJNAROWICZ
WORDSWORTH

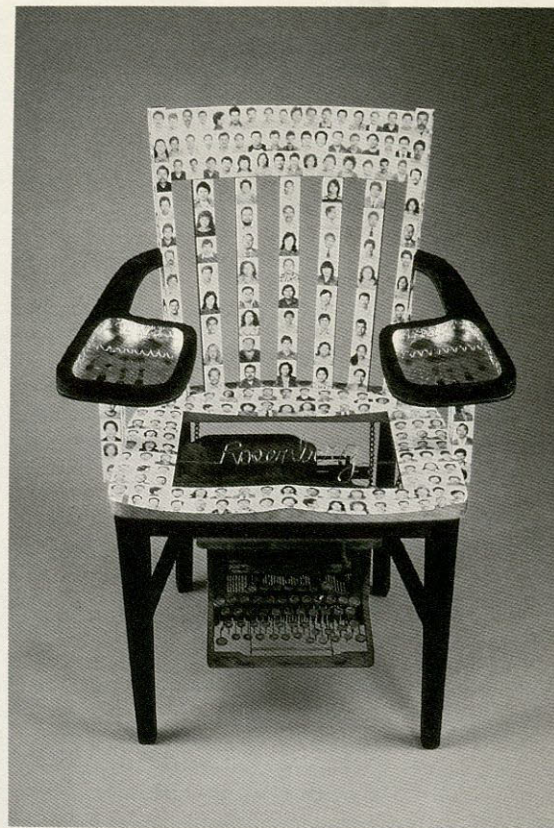
NINA FELSHIN, CURATOR

"Unknown Secrets: Art and the Rosenberg Era began traveling the United States in the fall of 1988. Since its inception in 1985, the organizers, the Rosenberg Era Art Project, have uncovered artworks from around the world addressing the Rosenberg case and the McCarthy period in which it unfolded. The quality and quantity of these discoveries — including works independently completed in the last 10 years — convinced the organizers to invite contemporary artists to create new work. The result is a provocative examination of political and social similarities between the 1950s and the 1980s.

Some important questions raised by the exhibition include: What is the role of the arts in addressing social issues? What is the individual artist's responsibility in addressing these issues? What effect does political persecution have on art and popular culture? What motivates some artists to address political themes?

As a companion to the exhibition there is an illustrated book which serves as the exhibition catalogue. It includes reproductions of the exhibition artwork, as well as excerpts of novels, plays, poems, and essays of the period.

A symposium is planned for Friday, October 5 at 7:30 pm which will address issues brought forward by the artwork, as well as a documentary film which provides sights and sounds of the period along with interviews with many of the participating artists. Rob Okun, Director of the Rosenberg Era Project, will discuss the Rosenbergs and Dr. Harold Josephson, Director of the Center for International Studies at UNCC, will address the historical period of the early 1950s.



Other (In memory of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg), 1987, by Kim Abeles.

Occupation and Resistance:

American Impressions

Middleton-McMillan Gallery
September 21-November 18, 1990

Public panel discussion on the Israel/Palestine
situation co-sponsored by the Charlotte
World Affairs Council
NCNB Performance Place
October 10, 1990
7:30 PM

TERRY BERKOWITZ
BILL BIGGART
MAGDA DAJANI
DIVID DONIHUE
MING FAY
GADI GOFBARG
TOM HAYES
MARYLU MEIBERS
YONG SOON MIN
JOHN MORITA
TARIQ ABU SAMMIE
(AKA GENO RODRIGUEZ)
JOS SANCES
COREEN SIMPSON
DEBORAH WILLIS
AND
BREAK THE SILENCE
MURAL PROJECT:
MIRANDA BERGMAN
SUSAN GREENE
DINA REDMAN
MARLENE TOBIAS
GENO RODRIGUEZ,
CURATOR



Nables Hospital, West Bank.
Hand broken by Israeli Soldier 3/7/88,
by Bill Biggart

Personal impressions and commentary are presented in the works of 16 American artists who visited the Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1989. The trip, organized by the Alternative Museum in New York City, was meant to provide direct contact with the forces of occupation and the spirit of resistance by the Palestinians. The artwork testifies to the dynamics of Israeli military occupation in this war-torn area of the Middle East.

The artists met with members of Palestinian families who had lost sons, went to sites of demolished family homes, and visited previously incarcerated artists, as well as children in hospitals. The artists also had discussions with senior political advisors at the United States Embassy and traveled through Israel to meet with Israelis.

Accompanying the exhibition is an illustrated catalogue featuring essays by artists and Middle East experts. A panel discussion co-sponsored by the Charlotte World Affairs Council will be held in Spirit Square's NCNB Performance Place on October 10 at 7:30 p.m. The exhibition is supported in part by a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council.

Colors of the People:

Art by Palestinians

First Union Gallery
September 21 - October 28, 1990

MICHEL 'AYYAD

FATHI GHABEN

JAWAD AL-MALHI

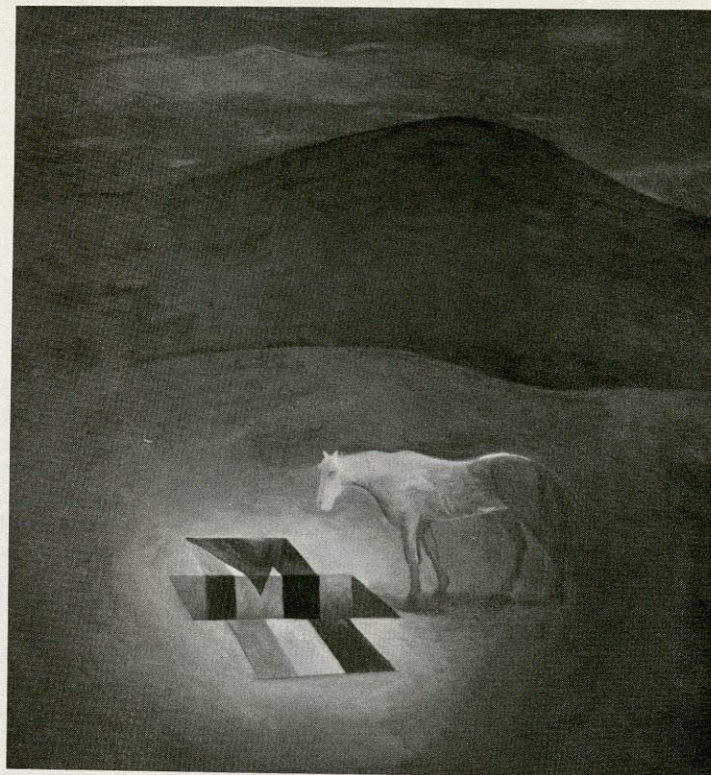
SULEIMAN MANSOUR

KAMEL AL-MUGHANNI

GHASSAN SALSA'

SALWA AL-SAWALHI

'ADNAN AL-ZUBAIDI



Untitled, 1988,
by Suleiman Monseur.

One of the artists, Jawad al-Malhi, describes the situation: "As time passes, a new society is born with its own characteristics: this is the social fiber knit into the Refugee Camps. It is not easy to decipher the depths of such a society, but I can sense a mix of pain and a will to survive; the women bear children and the children dream of a new tomorrow. These very women and children are making history in giant strides and a unique struggle upstream against all odds — they persevere."

Using a combination of red, green and black is illegal for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That is because those colors represent the colors of the Palestinian flag — a flag that is outlawed in Israel. Words and songs of a Palestinian nationalist character are illegal also because, according to Israeli censors, they "incite violence."

The Palestinian artists' work in this exhibition is shown in the form of photographs which were made under difficult circumstances, by Geno Rodriguez, Terry Berkowitz and Ken Bloom.

A Soldier's Heart: A Vietnam Veteran's Journey

Works by Kate Collie

First Union Gallery

November 2-December 23, 1990

Artist lecture November 2, 1990 7:30 PM

Poetry readings November 11, 1990 3:00 PM

TO THOSE WHO HAVE
GONE HOME TIRED

After the streets fall silent
After the bruises and the tear-gassed
eyes are healed
After the concensus has returned
After the memories of Kent and My Lai
and Hiroshima lose their power
and their connections with each other
and the sweaters labeled Made In Taiwan
After the last American dies in Canada
and the last Korean in prison
and the last Indian at Pine Ridge
After the last whale is emptied from
the sea
and the last leopard emptied from its skin
and the last drop of blood refined
by Exxon
After the last iron door clangs shut
behind the last conscience
and the last loaf of bread is hammered
into bullets
and the bullets scattered among
the hungry

What answers will you find
What armor will protect you
when your children ask you

Why?

— W.D. Ehrhart

Reprinted from TO THOSE WHO HAVE GONE HOME
TIRED, W.D. Ehrhart, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1984.

Statement by Kate Collie

I became interested in the psychological after-effects of warfare on warriors by getting to know some men who fought in Vietnam. I was shocked to find out that the lives of many of the men who fought that war are still dominated by the trauma, frequently to the point of psychological incapacitation, and that of the men who saw combat in Vietnam, more have committed suicide than died in combat. In order to turn the powerful feelings generated by these facts into a coherent and, I hope, profound anti-war statement, I chose to do an "expanded portrait" of a particular Vietnam combat veteran: a series of paintings accompanied by documentation in the form of letters, first-hand accounts, and hospital reports.

The veteran is Steve Piscitelli, who served with the Marines in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. He was a rifleman in the 2nd Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Marine Division. He was in I Corps in the northern combat zone and he was involved in heavy combat for eight of his nine months in Vietnam. He was wounded three times, the last time severely.

Twenty years later, he still feels the effects of the war. He is now a full-time art student, but he continues to experience many of the symptoms of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and combat Survivor Syndrome. The most common symptoms are disrupted sleep, nightmares, acute anxiety, intrusive thoughts and flashbacks. Steve's story is typical of veterans who experienced heavy combat in Vietnam at that time.

The images and text for "Soldier's Heart" were put together with Steve's assistance. Soldier's heart is an old term that means shell shock or combat fatigue.



Da Nang, February, 1970.
by Kate Collie.

The Allegorical Landscape Through Israeli Eyes

Works by Pamela Levy and David Melamed

Statement by Pamela Levy

In my work, the viewer is located behind the lens of a camera (the paintings are based on photography) and the painted figures stare back or shy away in response to the viewer's gaze invading their space.

I use the image of women and children (few male adults) because they are the true victims of the conflict, not Arab, not Jew — innocence, helplessness. The conflicts are within people, between people, between people and place. There are also conflicts between different areas of the canvas. Just as different people don't inhabit the same linguistic sphere, neither does the language of the paint. Figures force the picture space to be interpreted as an envelope, a place to be which is not one's chosen place to dwell.

Statement by David Melamed

My work is defined and perpetuated by three concentric circles: personal—need, urge, pro-anti, merging-submerging; family—tribal—being a first generation of immigrants who became an immigrant himself; national—belonging to a people that have been moving through the history of the Western Civilization backward and forward entangled in reoccurring self-imposed promise/dream/vision.

I utilize symbols and icons from the art world and from my own unique cultural experience like a whitesand hill which refers to the twenties, Tel Aviv, raw pure, building material, the bare romantic abundance of Mediterranean dunes. Another is the Dancing Pioneer (Circa 1925) which is taken from a silhouette drawing of Jungenstill graphics. Also I use a publisher's logo by the name Isre'e'l, which is an outline of a man working in a field.

The outcome of all this, like the labors of Sisyphus, demonstrates an attempt to link space between concentric circles.



Luna Park,
by Pamela Levy.

Middleton-McMillan
Gallery
December 6, 1990-
January 27, 1991

Artists' lectures
December 6, 1990
7:30PM

SPIRIT SQUARE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

JOSEPH GOLDEN - President

VISUAL ARTS DEPARTMENT

KEN BLOOM - Curator

FRAN KAPLAN - Visual Arts Administrator

JOHN RODGERS - Gallery Manager

LEAH BLACKBURN - Exhibition Designer/Preparator

GALLERY HOURS

TUESDAY - SATURDAY 10AM - 6 PM

Spirit Square is an annually funded member of
the Arts and Science Council,
Charlotte/Mecklenburg, Inc.

For more information, call 372-9664.

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