

POLIS #1: A Newsletter of Art Museums & Politics

PARIS: MAY 1968:

Posters of the Student Revolt, at MoMA Curator: Emilio Ambasz, 1968

Art Museums usually have stayed away from politics. That has not been regarded as their "function." However, the decade of the '60s has been a time when all social and cultural institutions have been forced to reconsider their basic assumptions.

New York's Museum of Modern Art has always been a progressive institution since its founding in 1929. The most important political painting of the 20th century, Picasso's "Guernica" has been on view at MoMA since World War II. No modern painting has said more against war.

MoMA became more directly involved with political events last year when a decision was made to exhibit a selection of posters made by art students in Paris during the student uprisings of May 1968.

These riots and strikes were against the repressive government of de Gaulle, widespread poverty, limited student freedom, heavy police brutality, and the Vietnam War. Millions joined the students in protest against all this. The economy came to a standstill. De Gaulle fled the country. The government almost fell.

I had been in Paris that spring and collected some of the most powerful images. Here were political statements that also were works of art. I proposed to my boss, Arthur Drexler, head of the Department of Architecture & Design at MoMA, that we do a show.

He agreed, and put Emilio Ambasz, our newest curator, in charge of the exhibition. The show ran from Nov. 23, 1968 to Feb. 24, 1969.

It was small but powerful, and opened the door to more radical MoMA activities in the months that followed.

FLG
Spring 1969