

The Art of Revolution

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Instructors:

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Course Description

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.” -Bertolt Brecht

This course offers an international and multidisciplinary tour of revolutionary art from the 20th and 21st centuries, including cinema, literature, visual art, theater, and performance art. It focuses on art practices that have emerged from and contributed to Left political movements, including socialist movements, struggles for national liberation from colonial and imperialist domination, and movements for sexual liberation and against racism and sexism. Particular attention will be given to thinkers and movements from the Global South and to experimental art practices. Students will learn about the cultural politics of revolutionary movements and will gain skills in analyzing a wide array of art forms. The course will also introduce crucial theories and debates about relationships between aesthetics and politics, the role of artists and other intellectuals in political struggle, and the way the culture industries attempt to control what artists make and who it reaches. Students will develop and present their own creative project as part of the course assignments. No previous knowledge of these topics or experience in making art is required.

Topics addressed in the course will include:

Cinema of the Cuban Revolution

Socialist theater against fascism

Mexican workers in the US & Chicano Liberation

Arts of the Black liberation movement

Brecht and his insurgent legacy

Gay Liberation vs. queer incorporation

Revolutionary literature from Central America

Muralism and state funding/censorship

Political poster art and internationalism

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation: While this course will be organized around lectures, there will also be ample time for discussion of the readings and lectures. It is important that you come to class prepared and that you contribute to these discussions.

Canvas Discussion board: You are required to post a short commentary to Canvas once a week that reflects on the readings assigned for that day.

Research paper: You will provide an analysis of one or more of the artworks or movements discussed in class. You are required to use at least two secondary scholarly sources not from the syllabus. Your instructors can help you identify appropriate secondary sources.

Creative project, artist statement & in-class presentation: The idea behind this project is that, after learning about different approaches to political art-making, you will do some of it yourself. You may do your creative project individually or in a group. It may take any form, e.g. a visual artwork, a performance piece, a short story or collection of poems, a short screenplay, a zine, podcast, oral history, a one-act play, a video, a comic, digital media, urban intervention, a work of critical cartography, etc. Your creative project must directly engage with the theories and topics we have discussed in the course. You must submit a short statement (2-3 pages in length) with your project that explains how it relates to the topics and theories discussed in this course. You will give a short presentation about your project to the class during one of our last two final meetings and you will submit your completed project to me on the last day of class. If your project is a physical object, please be prepared to present to the class and submit documentation of it (e.g. photos, video).