



Press Release

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smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/about/press

Vision and Communism

September 29, 2011 – January 22, 2012

From the heart of the Cold War, advertising for a Communist future that never arrived

The University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art presents *Vision and Communism*, the first

Viktor Koretsky, *Africa Fights. Africa will win!*, 1971, Poster. Ne boltai! Collection.



major museum exhibition to focus on the aggressive, emotionally charged work of Soviet artist and designer Viktor Koretsky (1909–1998). Featuring more than ninety posters, photographs, and maquettes—the majority of which date from the heart of the Cold War—the exhibition reveals a Communist vision of the world that is utterly unlike that of conventional propaganda.

“Twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Koretsky and his art remain largely unknown in the West,” said Anthony Hirschel, the Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum. “But he created a powerful and provocative body of work that deserves close consideration because of the important questions it raises about the nature and emotional potential of visual communication in the Soviet Union.”

In the last thirty years of the USSR, Koretsky's art sought to ensure world Communism's moral health. In contrast to more conventional Soviet propaganda—filled with happy workers, glorious leaders, and uplifting slogans—Koretsky created striking scenes of survival and suffering that were designed to create an emotional connection between Soviet citizens and others struggling for civil rights and independence around the globe. This vision of a multicultural world of shared sacrifice offered a dynamic alternative to the sleek consumerism of Madison Avenue and the West and, according to the exhibition curators, can be thought of “as a kind of Communist advertising for a future that never quite arrived.”

Vision and Communism is part of the Soviet Arts Experience (www.SovietArtsExperience.org), a Chicago-wide showcase exploring the arts of Soviet Union. The exhibition's themes will be considered in depth during a daylong symposium on October 14 and extended to cinema through a film series featuring the work of Aleksandr Medvedkin and Chris Marker at the University of Chicago's Film Studies Center.

Exhibition overview

For high-resolution images of works in the exhibition, please contact C.J. Lind at 773.702.0176, cjlind@uchicago.edu, or visit smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/about/press.

The curators designed *Vision and Communism* to “emphasize the experiential over the informational.” Introduced by contrasting quotes about Communism by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Nelson Mandela, the exhibition includes little immediate historical or contextual information for visitors. South African protest music will be played from a central room within the gallery, offering visitors a aural counterpart to the struggles against inequality that animate much of Koretsky’s work. Set apart from the works of art, this small space at the center of the exhibition will also contain information about Koretsky, the recorded music, the films of Aleksandr Medvedkin and Chris Marker, and other related reference materials.

About Viktor Koretsky

Coming of age at the close of the relative artistic freedom and dynamic avant-garde experiments that defined the Soviet 1920s, Viktor Koretsky (1909, Kiev – 1998, Moscow) belongs to the generation of Soviet artists who negotiated the fraught landscape of Socialist Realism and Stalinist political repression. After being educated in Moscow art schools, Koretsky embarked on a professional career as a poster artist in 1931. And even in these early years, he did not adhere to the narrow orthodoxy of official Socialist Realist method. Instead, he sought out the most innovative work in poster design, both in the USSR and abroad—including familiarizing himself with the photomontages of artists such as Gustav

Klucis, Valentina Kulagina, and John Heartfield. In these early years, Koretsky began experimenting with a variety of new visual techniques, even as he contributed graphic work to various publishing houses and theater companies.



Viktor Koretsky. *Save us!*, 1942. Lithograph poster. Ne bollai! Collection.

During World War II, known in the USSR as The Great Patriotic War, Koretsky became famous for his powerful, emotionally charged images produced on behalf of the war effort. His design for the anti-Nazi poster *Save Us!*, which depicts a Soviet woman and child, evoking a modern-day Madonna and Child, being threatened by a Wehrmacht (German army) bayonet, is arguably the most well-known work of Soviet propaganda from the entire era. In the

postwar years Koretsky diversified his art by taking on new subjects, many of them dealing with themes of international cooperation, such as Soviet-led campaigns for human rights and nuclear disarmament. In 1964, Koretsky received one of the most prestigious awards for a Soviet artist, the title of “Honored Artist of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist

Republic.” Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Koretsky’s art continued to grow in international stature, as younger generations of Eastern European poster artists adopted his aggressive, confrontational visual style.

Koretsky’s posters have long been in the collections of Moscow’s Russian State Library, the Central Museum of Russian Armed Forces, the Office of the Moscow Mayor, and St. Petersburg’s State Public Library. More recently his works have entered numerous private collections and museums worldwide.

Vision and Communism film series

In collaboration with the University of Chicago’s Film Studies Center, the Smart Museum presents three screenings of the militant films of Aleksandr Medvedkin and Chris Marker. In 1967 the French filmmaker Marker happened upon Medvedkin’s 1935 film satire *Happiness* and discovered for the world a lost giant of Soviet cinema. Featuring several films that have rarely, if ever, been shown in the United States, the screenings explore how Soviet vanguard cinema provided a model for Marker’s insurgent, grass-roots filmmaking in the West. For a complete list of films and synopses, visit filmstudiescenter.uchicago.edu.

October 12, October 19, and November 2, 7 pm

Films by Marker and Medvedkin

Film Studies Center, The University of Chicago, 5811 S. Ellis Avenue, C307

The series begins with Medvedkin’s early shorts and Marker’s films documenting the turmoil of 1968–1969. The second screening examines both filmmakers’ interest in the effects of Cold War politics on the Third World. The final screening presents Marker’s magisterial reflection on the history of the International Left, *A Grin without a Cat* (1977).

Related programs

Unless noted, all programs are free and open to the public and take place at the Smart Museum of Art. The public may register for lectures and workshops at smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar/register.

Thursday, September 29, 5:30–7:30 pm

Opening Reception

Discover Viktor Koretsky’s challenging vision of the world during an introductory panel discussion with the curators followed by a reception and exhibition viewing.

Friday, October 7, 8–10:30 pm

Communist (Art) Party

UChicago students—drop by the Smart and make posters inspired by Soviet propaganda. Enjoy free food, short films, music, and engage in some Cold War-style diplomacy by connecting with rival students from Northwestern University.

Open exclusively to University of Chicago and Northwestern students. Presented in collaboration with the Block Museum of Art.

Friday, October 14, 9 am–6:30 pm

Agitation! a Symposium

Special Collections Research Center, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, 1100 E. 57th Street

Join leading scholars for a public symposium that examines art and political agitation. The daylong event includes panel discussions and the keynote addresses “From Activists to Followers: Children in the Soviet Imaginary” by Catriona Kelly (University of Oxford) and “Neither God nor Master” by William Ayers (University of Illinois at Chicago) and Bernardine Dohrn (Northwestern University). Register to attend and find a full schedule of topics and speakers at smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/symposium

Presented by the University of Chicago’s Smart Museum of Art, Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies, Center for International Studies, Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures, Franke Institute for the Humanities, Special Collections Research Center, and University of Chicago Presents.

This symposium is part of a series of academic programs in Chicago devoted to discussing Soviet graphic arts. For information on October 13 and 15 events at Northwestern University and the Art Institute of Chicago, visit www.SovietArtsExperience.org.

Friday, October 21, 12 pm

Lunch-hour Talk: “Envisioning Another World and Taking on Big Enemies”

Learn about the triumphs and failings of African liberation struggles during the Cold War. This free talk is presented by Prexy Nesbitt, who currently teaches African History at Columbia College and has lectured extensively on issues of racism, war, and militarism. *Space is limited. Please register in advance.*

Saturday, October 22, 3:30 pm

Humanities Day Tour

Join exhibition co-curator Robert Bird, Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at The University of Chicago, for a tour of *Vision and Communism*.

Presented as part of the University of Chicago Humanities Day. Learn more at humanitiesday2011.uchicago.edu.

Wednesday, November 2, 12 pm

Lunch-hour Talk: “Empire of Liberation? The Soviet Union, US Race Relations, and the Cold War”

Racial discrimination in the United States was a frequent subject in Soviet posters from the 1950s and 60s, but Soviet attitudes toward minorities was complicated. Examine the

historical record behind the events depicted in Viktor Koretsky's propaganda posters during this lunch-hour talk by Rachel Appelbaum, a PhD candidate in Russian and Eastern European History at the University of Chicago.

Space is limited. Please register in advance.

Saturday, November 5, 9 am–3:30 pm

Teacher Workshop: Art and Activism

Teachers—explore the art and politics of the Soviet Union and take part in a discussion on ways to integrate themes of visual communication and activism into unique, interdisciplinary lessons for the classroom. Soviet historian Leah Goldman will provide a contextual background, and teachers can create their own posters incorporating techniques seen in *Vision and Communism*.

Presented in collaboration with the Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies at the University of Chicago.

CPDUs available. Open to teachers of all disciplines. Space is limited. Please register in advance.

Sunday, November 6, 1–4 pm

Family Day: Artistic Visions

Drop by the Smart Museum and make some art! Create your own abstract collages, take part in a photomontage workshop, and collaborate with others to make one giant work of art.

All materials provided. Best for children 4–12, accompanied by an adult.

Saturday, December 3, 1–3 pm

Make a Provocative Print

Make silkscreen prints inspired by Soviet propaganda. Watch as a crew from Anchor Graphics demonstrates printmaking processes. Then use templates that combine text and image to create your own poster to take home.

All printing materials and poster paper provided. You're welcome to bring your own t-shirt or tote bag to screen. Open to adults of all skill levels.

Sunday, January 22, 2 pm

Closing-day Tour

Get an in-depth look at *Vision and Communism* during a closing-day tour led by exhibition co-curator Matthew Jesse Jackson, Associate Professor of Art History and the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago.

Related Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue that presents a series of interconnected essays devoted to Viktor Koretsky's art and the social worlds that it hoped to transform. Produced

collectively by the exhibition curators, the book is published by The New Press and is available in the Smart Museum Shop.

Related exhibition

The Smart Museum of Art also presents the related exhibition *Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard*, on view August 30 to January 22, 2011. This intimate exhibition offers a rare glimpse at the experimental creative processes that generated iconic Soviet propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s. Featuring works by Gustav Klucis and Valentina Kulagina, it traces classic compositions from preparatory drawings and collage studies to approved designs to posters and other mass-produced print material. *Process and Artistry* is curated by Kimberly Mims, Smart Museum curatorial intern and PhD student at the University of Chicago, in consultation with Richard A. Born, Smart Museum Senior Curator.

The Soviet Arts Experience

The Smart Museum's exhibitions *Vision and Communism* and *Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard* are part of The Soviet Arts Experience, a 16-month-long, Chicago-wide showcase of works by artists who created under (and in response to) the Politburo of the Soviet Union. Additional exhibitions on view during the showcase include *Windows on the War: Soviet TASS Posters at Home and Abroad 1941-45* (July 30 to October 23, 2011) at The Art Institute of Chicago; *Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary* (August 22 to December 31, 2011) at the Special Collections Research Center at The University of Chicago Library; and *Views and Re-Views: Soviet Political Posters and Cartoons* (September 20 to December 4, 2011) and *Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910-1917* (September 23 to December 11, 2011) at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University. For a full schedule of events, visit www.SovietArtsExperience.org.

Curators

Vision and Communism is jointly curated by Robert Bird, Associate Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, The University of Chicago; Christopher Heuer, Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University; Matthew Jesse Jackson, Associate Professor of Art History and the Department of Visual Arts, The University of Chicago; Tumelo Mosaka, Curator of Contemporary Art, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Stephanie Smith, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Smart Museum of Art; with Richard A. Born, Senior Curator, Smart Museum of Art, as coordinating curator.

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About the Smart Museum of Art

As the art museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to acclaimed special exhibitions and a permanent collection that spans five thousand years of artistic creation. Working in close collaboration with scholars from the University of Chicago, the Smart has established itself as a leading academic art museum and an engine of adventurous thinking about the visual arts and their place in society.

Smart Museum of Art

The University of Chicago

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Hours

Tuesday–Friday	10 am–4 pm
Thursday	10 am–8 pm
Saturday and Sunday	11 am–5 pm

Galleries closed Mondays and holidays
Thursday evening hours will return in
the fall.

Admission is always free