

CHECKLIST

Albrecht Dürer, German, 1471–1528
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, about 1497
Woodcut on laid paper
Gift of Helena Mein Wade in memory of her husband,
Alfred Byers Wade; PR.950.21.10

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, German, 1884–1976
Melancholy (Woman with Bowl), from the portfolio
Ten Woodcuts by Schmidt-Rottluff, 1914 (published 1919)
Woodcut on laid paper
Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund; PR.953.4

Rockwell Kent, American, 1882–1971
Workers of the World, Unite!, 1937
Wood engraving on wove paper
Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Memorial Fund;
PR.937.3

Leopoldo Méndez, Mexican, 1902–1969
Jugoslav Guerillas: The Second Front in Europe, about 1942–45
Offset lithograph
Gift of Willis S. Fitch, Class of 1917; Gift of Edward Tuck,
Class of 1862; PS.987.6.145

Eric Avery, American, born 1965
Chimera, 1991
Linoleum block print on reduction silkscreen on Arches paper
Gift of Trevor Fairbrother and John T. Kirk; 2010.88.2

Roger Peet, American, born 1975
What the Market Will Bear, from the *Occuprint Sponsor Portfolio*, 2012
Screenprint on French wove paper
Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2012.38.7

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Leopoldo Méndez, *Jugoslav Guerillas: The Second Front in Europe*, about 1942–45, offset lithograph.
Gift of Willis S. Fitch, Class of 1917; Gift of Edward Tuck, Class of 1862; PS.987.6.145.

EMBLEM

Figuring the Abstract in Social Commentary



Rockwell Kent, *Workers of the World, Unite!*, 1937, wood engraving on wove French paper. Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Memorial Fund; PR.937.3.

Emblem, type, symbol, token, trope, image, sign—all of these words describe specific visual forms that represent abstract ideas through recognized shapes, colors, and figures. Many emblems contain culturally specific messages, often taken from sacred or ancient texts, the meanings of which evolve over time. Since these images are quickly legible to members of a shared culture, artists mobilize emblems to provoke certain reactions in an audience. This exhibition draws together various types of emblematic prints—primarily woodcuts—that address social problems and issues. For many artists, the stark black-and-white duality of the woodcut becomes the ideal medium to demonstrate

social problems boldly and graphically. Depicting heroes, villains, and the powerless, from fifteenth-century visions of the apocalypse to the Gulf War, these prints use Western artistic traditions to shock or to problematize various historical moments.

Albrecht Dürer's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (about 1497) presents a vision of the destruction of the unworthy by the four riders described in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Though Revelation only names Death, the other riders are typically known as Conquest, War, and Famine, as depicted in such early texts as the Trier Apocalypse (800 CE). By Dürer's time, the image of the riders had become codified as four riders followed by a demonic creature with an open mouth, representing Hell, as in the Koberger Bible (1483). While Dürer's print uses this trope of the riders, he foregrounds their dynamic and heroic nature as they charge across the figures below. Around the end of the fifteenth century, interest in the apocalypse spiked; in

a world governed by famine, war, and uncertainty, it seemed very likely that the End of Days was nigh. Dürer personifies the abstract concepts of war, pestilence, and famine as middle-aged men (and the elderly Death) who trample a variety of sinners, including a corpulent burgher and a figure that could either be a bishop or the Holy Roman Emperor. Through his depiction of these icons, Dürer criticizes corrupt practices among the elite of the Catholic church and members of the merchant class and aristocracy, a subtle reminder that heavenly rewards differ from earthly ones.

In the early twentieth century, Germany was a place of inequalities of wealth, class, and status. Only recently formed, it was a nation ready to assert its place on a global stage. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, along with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and other German Expressionist artists, created an artistic counter-discourse to the proclaimed ideas of German progress, efficiency, and industrialization. Through bold, stark woodcuts, Schmidt-Rottluff pared figures down to their most essential components. *Melancholy*, or *Woman with Bowl* (1914, published 1919), crops a nude, bejeweled woman and foregrounds a hunched woman who pushes two bowls towards the viewer while refusing to meet the viewer's gaze. The print's meaning remains ambiguous, but it likely refers to the eruption of urban poverty, which led to increased prostitution and begging. Schmidt-Rottluff's emblematic figures serve neither as heroes, nor as inspirational figures representing ideals, but rather as reflections on the realities of urban life in prewar Germany.

Rockwell Kent's *Workers of the World, Unite!* (1937) and the Leopoldo Méndez poster *Jugoslav Guerillas: The Second Front in Europe* (about 1942–45) both emblemize the powerful everyman rising up in a violent defense against fascism. With their mirrored central figures, the two images present powerful, masculine symbols of revolution. Both Kent and Méndez were active communists. Kent supported a peaceful revolution in America, though he was disheartened after his participation in the failed Vermont Marble Workers' Strike (1935–36), in which workers' demands for higher wages ended in a two-and-a-half-cent increase. Kent wrote to the union chair in 1937, "As I look back on the marble strike I realize that the crowd can never get anywhere until it develops political consciousness." *Workers of the World, Unite!* could be a visual attempt to inspire the "crowd," using a heroic and muscular man to symbolize the need for revolution. The Yugoslavian uprising against the fascist invasion in 1941 inspired Méndez's original 1942 wood engraving, *The Vengeance of the People*, which became the basis for the poster that included a large English-language title across the image, foregrounding the nationality of the participants. Though Kent's universal worker exists in a world unmarked by political ties or events, Méndez's image protests a specific incident of global interest.

In *Chimera* (1991), Eric Avery describes the contours of an entire conflict—the Gulf War—in a visual appropriation of an eighteenth-century etching of a monster by Louis Jean Désprez. Désprez created his *Chimera* (about 1777–84) at the height of a neoclassical revival, drawing on a classical myth of the fire-breathing chimera who stalked the destroyed palaces of African kings, always hungering for human flesh. In his work, Avery frequently appropriates traditional images from Western art and gives them shocking new meanings. Avery's chimera presents the heads of President George H. W. Bush, James Draper (Secretary of State), and Norman Schwartzkopf (leader of Coalition Forces), while the cormorant, line of prisoners, and tanks in the lower right question the cost of war. Through the creature's penis in the form of an armament and the caption "Father of all wars," Avery presents the conflict as a contest of male egos, turning Saddam Hussein's allegation that this is the "mother of all battles" into a critique of male leaders as instigators of imperialistic war.

The recent Occupy movement has also produced its own visual language to question the entrenched idealization of capitalism, as seen in the creation of the 2012 *Occuprint* portfolio, a collection of screenprints curated by artists involved in the Occupy movement. Roger Peet's *What the Market Will Bear* visualizes the economic language of the bear and bull markets, presenting the destruction of the economically positive bull by the savage bear. The Great Recession in 2007 decreased public confidence in the expanding market sector, graphically presented by Peet in the spilled blood of the bull. The command to "Occupy" reminds the viewer of the economic motivations of the movement and of Occupy's demands for a less corrupt financial system that does not favor the wealthy.

Through central figures, these artists create images that inspire viewers to think critically about their contemporary circumstances, whether the image is a fine art print, a propaganda poster, or an illustration for a religious text. The prints speak from specific historical moments, both drawing on and subverting Western icons, to create emblematic figures that stand in for the abstract concepts of poverty, revolution, apocalypse, war, and protest. The prints demand a response from the viewer, not a passive acceptance of present circumstance. Even across time, these images challenge viewers today.

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Roger Peet, *What the Market Will Bear*, from the *Occuprint Sponsor Portfolio*, 2012, screenprint on wove French paper. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2012.38.7.