

ETHAN COHEN

RED ATTACK

ETHAN COHEN GALLERY

FEBRUARY 25, THROUGH APRIL 29, 2017

Ethan Cohen Gallery is pleased to announce the group exhibition RED ATTACK that explores the artistic vision of today's global political climate through the ideological lenses of the Cold War: Consumerism and Collectivism.

When both sides woke up from the Cold War, artists realized that, despite apparent differences, Communism and Consumerism shared crucial similarities. In the West, Pop Art iconized consumerism. In the Soviet system, the masses were fed political icons in place of consumer goods. Both the political icons and consumer goods acted as a kind of subliminal wallpaper, ubiquitous, strident, tendentious and often luridly naive. In both, faux-egalitarianism flattered the viewer with the message that he or she belonged to a collective identity as embodied in the icon. Andy Warhol loved Coke because Kings and Queens could enjoy it as much as the pauper. In both commercial and political Pop, artificial populism pretending to arise from the masses themselves in fact came from propagandists on Madison Avenue and in the Kremlin. Each side created populist icons to evangelize citizens for their own system to function. That aesthetic myth-making is examined in RED ATTACK at Ethan Cohen Gallery through the work of 22 artists - Russian, Chinese, Korean and American - who illustrate the disparate yet shared themes of Pop Art around the world.

As the quasi-religious fervor of the opposing systems ebbed, artists looked around and across the battle-lines and recognized commonalities. The post-Pop era birthed a new iteration of Pop, often parodistic, kitschy, self-conscious or at least conscious of the ironies. Artists picked up on the mechanisms of constructed narratives and began to play with them. They woke up to the propaganda techniques of their respective societies. They explored the poses, looking through and under the lamination of the images. In RED ATTACK, we see varied semiology of artists' reactions as they deconstruct the phenomenon around the two central artifacts; a

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Warhol print entitled *Electric Chair and Ai Weiwei's Eye Bag*. Warhol seems to posit the idea that the system of Consumerism, which he celebrated, is underpinned by sinister power i.e. the electric chair. Meanwhile, Ai Weiwei subtly suggests that a commercial object is the transparent tool of Big Brother's hold over us. In both works, the viewer witnesses the mass-consumer genre being subverted by the content within.

In Kosolapov's *It's The Real Thing*, the artist juxtaposes Lenin and Coca Cola, inviting us to consider how apparently opposing systems sell us on their propaganda. The Russians, Kosolapov along with Komar and Melamid, adopted irony as an early means of highlighting and indeed defying industrial-strength, iconic manipulation. In China, as the Gods of commerce supplanted the Maoist code, artists quickly explored the contradictions assaulting the public mind. Hence Sui Jianguo's empty Mao suit, a famous and provocative artifact, in which the totalitarian leader has clothes, but he himself has disappeared. Similarly, Zhang Hongtu's *Material Mao* presents a framed profile of the Chairman as a void, his presence gone but his imprint forever branded into the earth. Artists looking back on their own innocence in the face of Pop imagery often focused on the instant manufacture of nostalgia, and the manipulation of memory. Hence Zhang Hongtu's lapidarian Bronze Shang dynasty Happy Meal, or Isaac Aden's ancient Native American urn inscribed with the Pepsi logo - the latter itself a tribute to Ai Weiwei's 'desecration' of Chinese Neolithic pottery.

Manufactured nostalgia is seen in Mina Cheon's self-portraits in the style of North Korean propaganda posters. Full of bright colors and dawning futures, her works are invitations to a fantasy identity that seem to exist in a dream world, as merchandised products do. Conversely, the Social Realist style of approved art also conscripts the past and future in its fantasy. Liu Xiaohui's panels of multiple paintings in academic genres dwell on idyllic images of West and East from the past. He subtly mixes Western academic and Social Realist styles and content, giving memories of a past cultural interchangeability through his seductive manipulation. Another forerunner of the Chinese Pop tradition Yuan Yunsheng illustrates in his self-portrait

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how a Chinese artist can assert himself as a disciple of the Western tradition, using his masterful painting technique that recalls those of Gauguin and Picasso. With Communist political consciousness and Capitalist Consumerism being commonly thought of as diametrically opposed, the artists of Pop Art seem to pose this question: 'Are we really so dissimilar?'

Co-curated by Vladislav Sludskiy

Featuring Works By:

Isaac Aden

Ai Weiwei

Mina Cheon

Eric Doeringer

Han Xin

Jeffrey Hargrave

Huang Yan

Komar and Melamid

Alexander Kosolapov

Li Daiyun

Liu Xiaohui

Sui Jianguo

Tang Hui

Wu Junyong

Wu Shanzhuan

Wang Guangyi

Andy Warhol

Yue Minjun

Yuan Yunsheng

Zhang Dali

Zhang Hongtu

Zhang Zhaohui

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