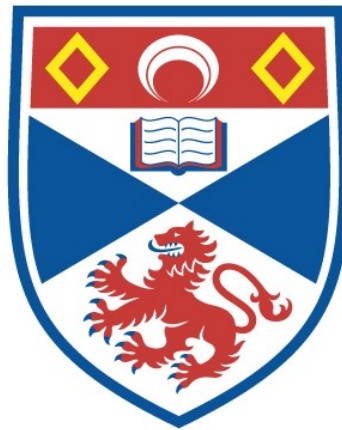


GRAPHIC REVOLT!
SCANDINAVIAN ARTISTS' WORKSHOPS, 1968-1975
RØDE MOR, FOLKETS ATELJÉ AND GRAS

Anna Sandaker Glomm

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Graphic Revolt!

Scandinavian Artists' Workshops 1968-1975

Røde Mor, Folkets Ateljé and GRAS

Volume 1

Anna Sandaker Glomm

Submitted in application of the degree of Ph.D in the
University of St Andrews, 5 September 2011

I, Anna Sandaker Glomm, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 85,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D in September 2005; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2004 and 2010.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between the three artists' workshops Røde Mor (Red Mother), Folkets Ateljé (The People's Studio) and GRAS, who worked between 1968 and 1975 in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Røde Mor was from the outset an articulated Communist graphic workshop loosely organised around collective exhibitions. It developed into a highly productive and professionalised group of artists that made posters by commission for political and social movements. Its artists developed a familiar and popular artistic language characterised by imaginative realism and socialist imagery. Folkets Ateljé, which has never been studied before, was a close knit underground group which created quick and immediate responses to concurrent political issues. This group was founded on the example of Atelier Populaire in France and is strongly related to its practices. Within this comparative study it is the group that comes closest to collective practises around 1968 outside Scandinavia, namely the democratic assembly. The silkscreen workshop GRAS stemmed from the idea of economic and artistic freedom, although socially motivated and politically involved, the group never implemented any doctrine for participation.

The aim of this transnational study is to reveal common denominators to the three groups' poster art as it was produced in connection with a Scandinavian experience of 1968. By '1968' it is meant the period from the late 1960s till the end of the 1970s. It examines the socio-political conditions under which the groups flourished and shows how these groups operated in conjunction with the political environment of 1968. The thesis explores the relationship between political movements and the collective art making process as it appeared in Scandinavia.

To present a comprehensible picture of the impact of 1968 on these groups, their artworks, manifestos, and activities outside of the collective space have been discussed. The argument has presented itself that even though these groups had very similar ideological stances, their posters and techniques differ. This has impacted the artists involved to different degrees, yet made it possible to express the same political goals. It is suggested to be linked with the Scandinavian social democracies and common experience of the radicalisation that took place mostly in the aftermath of 1968 proper. By comparing these three groups' it has been uncovered that even with the same socio-political circumstances and ideological stance divergent styles did develop to embrace these issue.

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In loving memory of Gerda Jensen who inspired me with her stories of art and artists as I was growing up and without whom I would never have thought of studying art history. This thesis is for you, farmor.

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During my research I have visited collections such as those in Göteborg Konstmuseum, Moderna Museet and Kungliga Biblioteket where I met some wonderful people. In connection with my travels I would like to thank the Elizabeth Gilmore Scholarship and the Wilhemina Barns Graham Trust for enabling me to travel back and forth to Scandinavia to complete the interviews and visit collections.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

By their very nature the truth of a philosophical judgement, the goodness of a moral action, and the beauty of a work of art should appeal to everyone, relate to everyone, be binding upon everyone.¹

Historically *revolutions* – and I use the term loosely here – have always inspired artists, be it the French or Russian Revolutions or the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’ of the 1960s-1970s. Immense creativity in the Arts is often born out of great changes in the human condition; for example the world wars prompted heightened levels of production in literature, art and philosophy, which saw the development of collective efforts such as the Dada group during the First World War and the COBRA group after the Second World War. The latter might be characterised as ‘collectivism after modernism’ as indeed Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette do in their 2007 collection of papers on collectivism ‘after 1945.’² In their view: “Modernist collectivism [...] was the first real effort to develop a sustained alternative to commodified social life by cultural means [...] Modernist artists understood the collectivization of their professional roles, functions, and identities to be an expression of and, at best, a realization of the promise and/or pitfalls of social, political, and technological progress.”³ However, collectivism after modernism (or after WWII) was fulfilled through a shared experience, such as mass consumer culture, and was no longer class-specific. It is true that the aftermath of Second World War and the immediate beginning of a Cold War created a new world view where it was deeply divided around the Americans on one side and the Soviet Union on the other. In this climate, socialism, and by association collectivism, was generally discredited as a loss of individual will or freedom as Stimson and Sholette point out. However, artists from the smaller countries in the European periphery, such as Scandinavia, seem to have had ‘national’ reasons for coming together in collectives both at home and in the art centres (Berlin, Paris, New York) and they were not deterred by the world wars. As it will be discussed below, this might have been due to neutrality and economic stability during the

¹ Marcuse, Herbert, ‘The Affirmative Character of Culture’, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, London: Free Association Books, 1988, p94

² Stimson, Blake & Sholette, Gregory (ed), *Collectivism After Modernism – The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007

³ Stimson & Sholette, *Collectivism After Modernism*, p4-5

First World War, and the firm establishment of a social democratic ‘Scandinavian model’ – rooted in the nineteenth-century – after the Second.

If modernist collectivism had struggled against individualism then “...the aspiration of collectivism after the Second World War rarely claimed to find its unity as the singularly correct avant-garde representative of social progress but instead structured itself around decentered and fluctuating identities.”⁴ And instead of fighting heterogeneous characteristics it embraced them, which “marked a shift within the practices of visual artists from a focus on art as a given institutional and linguistic structure to an active intervention in the world of mass culture.”⁵ The three Scandinavian groups covered here – Røde Mor (RM), Folkets Ateljé (FA) and GRAS – both refute and affirm this interpretation of post-war collectivism. Heading to calls for study into collectivism as a form of production and intervention by Stimson and Sholette, as well as calls by Scandinavian 1960s-1970s scholars to study the cultural aspects of ‘1968’, this thesis responds by suggesting that these poster collectives actively sought to intervene in society and to differing degrees manifested productions that both resisted and accepted individual artistic practices within the constraints of the collective.

1.1 Scandinavia and 1968

The geographical definition of Scandinavia is the northern European countries that make up the Scandinavian Peninsula (Fig. 1.1-1.2): Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Through cultural, political and historical associations one might include Finland, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands too, however I am concerned here with the former three countries. From a European viewpoint Scandinavia might be defined as isolated and “...because of an environment which in physical terms was relatively deprived, the countries [...] received more from Europe than they contributed to it.”⁶ The modern Scandinavian states, characterised by the attitudes and institutions of social democracy, developed between the mid nineteenth-century and the early 1930s.⁷ The Scandinavian states are inherently disparate but common institutions and aims mean a community relationship has developed. Historian Thomas Ekman Jørgensen has summed up:

This ideal represents an egalitarian society in which poverty and need are abolished and welfare for all is guaranteed by a state that redistributes the

⁴ Ibid., p10

⁵ Ibid., p9

⁶ Mead, W.R., *An Historical Geography of Scandinavia*, London: Academic Press Ltd., 1981, p23

⁷ Carey, Frances, *Modern Scandinavian Prints*, London: British Museum Press, 1997, p10

returns of economic growth. This entails an explicit class compromise in which the social democratic state provides the stability and structural requirements of the capitalist economy, which in turn provides the economic basis for the welfare state.⁸

Ekman Jørgensen has indicated two common historical denominators for the three countries: “...the hegemonic narrative of social democratic modernity [...] consists of the workers’ movement as the main agent of history that leads the country from the ineffective and unjust rule of the upper classes to a *folkhem* (or “home for the people”); and political and cultural consensus that encourages a “...political culture of broad compromises and integration of diverse groups into the decision-making process.”⁹ The Scandinavian states are small-scale, homogenous communities and social democratic practice has permeated all levels of cultural life. The Cold War, however, managed to split Scandinavia as Sweden, which had a tradition of strong neutrality, remained nonaligned, while Denmark and Norway joined NATO in 1948 after the Czechoslovakian Communist coup d’état in 1947. The Scandinavian social democratic parties had established a stronghold in parliamentary politics, but throughout Scandinavia the communist parties were still dominant within the working class. However, after the invasion of Hungary in 1956 the communist parties faced harsh criticism, which forced a reconsideration of their relationship with the Soviet Union.

In accounts of Scandinavian art from the nineteenth-century onwards one is given the impression that the strong individual (male) modernist was all there was to find, and figures such as Carl Larsson, Anders Zorn, Edward Munch, Gustav Vigeland, Jens Ferdinand Willumsen and Asger Jorn have all been awarded their extensive list of biographers. From this one might draw the conclusion that collective activity was less prominent, yet collectivism, seen through artists’ associations for the purpose of control of exhibitions and sale as well as to act as pressure groups and influence policies, was more typically Scandinavian than such literature suggests. The social function of art applied through art education and public decoration is seen as an important factor to Scandinavian conception of an egalitarian society, both ideas that emanated at the turn of the twentieth-century. It is therefore astonishing that very little has been written in the three countries about the collective artistic practice in connection with 1968 or what can better be termed as the ‘long

⁸ Ekman Jørgensen, Thomas, ‘Scandinavia’, ed. Klimke, Martin & Scharloth, Joachim, ‘1968 in Europe - An Introduction’, *1968 in Europe – A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008, p239

⁹Ibid.

1968.’¹⁰ The poster as a political medium transgressed the boundaries of style and classification and became an emblem of the 1960s and 1970s consciousness.

It is appropriate when dealing with ‘1968’ in most national contexts, yet especially in Scandinavian, to speak of a period that stretches between the late 1950s till the close of the 1970s. Marwick considered it more accurate to speak of the ‘long sixties’ as a time of transformation or ‘dynamic years’, avoiding the terms ‘revolution’ or ‘contestation’, because as he puts it, “...now that we recognize that revolutions on the Marxist model simply don’t (and never will) happen...” we speak freely of revolutions of all sorts.¹¹ In Marwick’s view, a multiplicity of single-topic ‘revolutions’ took place simultaneously and reacted and interacted with each other during “The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties.”¹² To a certain extent this is the opinion of Scandinavian historians dealing with the history of a specifically Scandinavian experience of ‘1968’ too. In the 2008 special issue of *Scandinavian Journal of History* one has only to look at the titles of the articles to see that consensus is that the veneration of 1968, as one year of action, is insufficient to explain the transformations that Scandinavian society underwent in the longer term. Even though the focus in this thesis is limited to the Scandinavian countries; artistic responses to such a ‘long’ moment there is no denying that “the radicalization of 1968 – or rather around 1968 – was a transnational phenomenon” as the guest editor Tor Egil Frøland put it.¹³ The events during that year were “...profoundly international, transcending any given national context...” as a more recent publication on memories of 1968 states.¹⁴ One cannot but agree with Frøland when he qualifies the moment as international, but with a significant role played by specific national topics of concern. The question arises as to how artists reacted to this ‘long moment’ and it is clear that internationally collective activity was at one with the time. The groups covered in this thesis are examples of specifically Scandinavian attributes to such an international event, yet tinged with nation-specific ideological affiliations and meanings relating to very local issues. It is therefore fruitful to look into what might distinguish the Scandinavian experience of 1968.

¹⁰ I borrow the term from Arthur Marwick’s definition of c.1958-1974 as the ‘long sixties’ in *The sixties : cultural revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974*, Oxford University Press: Oxford; New York, 1998

¹¹ Marwick, Arthur, “‘1968’ and the Cultural Revolution of the Long sixties (c. 1958-c. 1974)”, Horn, Gerd-Rainer & Kenney, Padriac (ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, p82

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tor Egil Frøland Guest Editor (2008): Introduction to the special issue on 1968, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p319

¹⁴ Waters, Sarah, ‘Introduction: 1968 in Memory and Place’, Cornils, Ingo & Waters, Sarah (ed.), *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives*, Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010, p11

If one can speak of a common denominator that united Europe in its 1968 experience it was democratic revolt: in the East against dictatorship, in the South against fascism and in the West against liberal democracies. On the other hand, Scandinavian social democracies had a strong civil society that provided channels of integration for different social, religious and political groups and extensive systems of negotiation that integrated groups in the decision-making process. 'Counter-cultures' and changes in daily life were therefore easily absorbed into society, an example of which is the disappearance of the formal pronoun in the Scandinavian languages.¹⁵ In relation to 1968, Ekman Jørgensen has pointed out that "in comparison to especially the topdown dirigisme of France and Italy, the co-operatism of post-war Scandinavia seems markedly egalitarian, integrative, and void of conflicts. The egalitarian part of the democratic revolt hence took place in a political culture that could accommodate most of the demands without major confrontations."¹⁶ This explains why the turmoil seen elsewhere was not pronounced in Scandinavia, and why violence and repression was the exception from the norm. Nonetheless, the 'Scandinavian model' was challenged by the far left, which pointed out the shortcomings of the class compromise as the middle class had grown, at the same time as a lower class still existed that had a battle to be fought, and the state bureaucracy seemed to be ever growing. However, the left in Norway and Sweden developed differently to that of its Southern neighbour, Denmark, due in part to cultural and geographical features particular to these two countries. Radicalisation in the 1960s and 1970s in Sweden and Norway must therefore be understood in terms of a conflict between centre and periphery. The Scandinavian communist parties had an eclectic ideology combined with strong national agendas and distanced themselves from 'fifth column' communism.

The left in Scandinavia went through a period of transformation, like elsewhere in Western Europe, from the late 1950s till it stabilised by the end of the 1970s. In the beginning of the 1960s all three Scandinavian countries had similar ideological traits where an anti-Stalinist, humanist brand of socialism was mixed with moral judgement exemplified by resentment towards the Cold War arms race, colonialism and consumer society. In comparison to Sweden and Norway, Denmark's far left was dominated by intellectualism, in particular as the universities became the main recruitment pool for the left around 1968. According to historian Thomas Ekman Jørgensen this might to some extent explain why Maoism never really took hold of the Danish left to the extent it did in Sweden and Norway.

¹⁵ Ekman Jørgensen, Thomas, 'The Scandinavian 1968 in a European Perspective', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p327

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Danish left was far less totalitarian than in Sweden or Norway, where Maoist dogmatism took hold in the 1970s. Within Danish student circles new, daring and complex interpretations of Marxism took shape rather than a strict one-line reading of the *Little Red book*. On the other hand, Swedish and Norwegian Maoists challenged the eclectic and pacifist attitudes of the new left and “...emphasized ideological orthodoxy and full solidarity with the armed struggle of the liberation movements.”¹⁷ In the two countries, the Maoists cultivated a culture of the broad masses, looking back at the popular (workers’, farmers’ and religious) movements of the nineteenth century, with simplicity and authenticity becoming the core of an invented tradition of a popular counterculture. “This was consciously connected to the ongoing conflict between centre and periphery in the two countries.”¹⁸ Kristin Ross, in her re-contextualisation of French *May ’68*, says that the inclusion of the peasant or farmer into the proletariat happened by way of Maoism. As in Scandinavia, for the French radical left “Maoist China exemplified a third-world renewal of the promise of revolutionary socialism that had been betrayed by the Soviet Union.”¹⁹ However, Ross makes the claim that it was only in Italy and France that the struggle of the ‘Other’, as she puts it, was to make the leap from foreign militant to the indigenous worker, but as we will see this happened in Sweden and Norway too.

Ross states in the introduction to her book: “...May ’68 itself was not an artistic moment. [...] Only the most “immediate” of artistic techniques, it seems, could keep up with the speed of events. But to say this is already to point out how much politics was exerting a magnetic pull on culture, yanking it from its specific and specialized realm.”²⁰ This immediacy can be seen in the poster work of the three groups covered in this thesis. And it is the aim here to investigate how the themes of ‘1968’ came to artistic fruition through the collective method. The main themes that can be drawn out of the discourse on Scandinavian ‘1968’ is: an opposition to the war in Vietnam and by effect American imperialism; a solidarity with freedom fighters and Third World *revolutions*; a radicalisation of the left, which lead to infatuation with popular culture associated with Marxist-Leninism; and a challenge to the transparency and proficiency of the social democratic system. As might be evident from this Scandinavian themes were similar to the rest of the world, however as will be shown here these issues were dealt with not only by radical youths, students and workers, but by artists who turned away from formalist tropes of inward looking artistic production to

¹⁷ Ekman Jørgensen, Thomas, ‘Scandinavia’, p243

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ross, Kristin, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 2002, p80

²⁰ Ibid., p15

express the collective experiences of their contemporary comrades. As this thesis title *Graphic Revolt* suggests Røde Mor, Folkets Ateljé and GRAS were all part of a wider societal protest that in their individual cases were symptomatic of an internationally thematic *revolt*, yet as will be discussed there are conditions that formed in this ‘long moment’, between 1968 and 1975, which can be described as specifically Scandinavian. It is in connection with the outcomes of ‘1968’ that one can speak of “a remarkable dismantling of traditional hierarchies [in Scandinavia], and in many ways a thorough cultural revolution.”²¹ The challenge by the left was by the end of the 1970s fully integrated into existing structures and social democracy survived, which resulted in the viewpoint that the student revolt and leftwing movements were colourful examples of the particular mixture of individual freedom and social responsibility found in Scandinavia.²²

1.2 Political Art or Propaganda

The political poster often blurs the boundaries between art and propaganda in the streets of any given city. We are surrounded by graffiti and posters wherever we travel or live. We have become, some might argue, too familiar and approving of commercial billboards screaming at us to buy a certain product or service. However, it is not long ago that these kinds of advertisements were less frequent and took on a less sight polluting task. Opposing ideologies have eagerly used the poster to convince the public that one set of beliefs is better than another. Nonetheless, campaigns for political power are slightly different than campaigns for or against a set cause, politically the issue might or might not dismantle the ruling party’s hold on power on the other hand it might not even make it into the policy making process at all. It may be promoted by non-governmental organisations or interest groups within a nation or state or it might be a global campaign to enhance awareness. In all cases, from political posters, to event promotion, to advertisement billboards, an artist or group of artists could be behind the image. There is no arguing against the fact that advertisement rose to new heights in the economic boom of the late 1950s and 1960s. Yet how did this effect art and artists? One might say that this was exactly why artists such as Andy Warhol utilised commercial everyday products in his silkscreens.

Arnold Hauser wrote in *Propaganda, ideology and art*: “Art contains propaganda, assertion and intent if the artist expresses his political views in such a way that they remain

²¹Ekman Jørgensen, ‘Scandinavia’, p249

²² Ibid.

distinguishable and separable from the strictly aesthetic factors of his work.”²³ This can be said for many of the works covered in this thesis, however Hauser continues, “In art with an ideological content, on the other hand, the philosophical and corresponding political motifs form an inseparable unity with the work’s other components: the universal intent – the ideology – interlocks with the aesthetic structure and is completely integrated into the totality of the artistic creation.”²⁴ Again this may also be said about the three Scandinavian groups’ artistic production. “The difference is merely tactical”, Hauser asserts, “– the choice between the direct or the indirect approach – and does not affect the aesthetic stature or the artistic validity and suitability of the means employed.”²⁵ It seems therefore valid to claim that in the work of political poster groups, such as Røde Mor, Folkets Ateljé and GRAS, it is only a matter of which vein they belong. I would argue that the work of Røde Mor and GRAS generally could be said to attain to the term ideological art, while Folkets Ateljé could be viewed as more propagandistic. However, all of the groups, although to differing degrees, do produce art that can be characterised as propaganda, particularly if the term is “used to describe images and information produced and disseminated for social, ideological or religious purposes.”²⁶ The word is most commonly associated, however, with particularly negative connotations in connection with totalitarian regimes. It will become clear from this thesis that deliberate manipulation of narrative and symbols to alter public opinion is integral to the work presented, and since this is by definition propaganda one can only admit that this is the case. However, works will appear in this thesis, particularly in connection with GRAS, that cannot be said to be propaganda. In *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* the term is described thus:

Propaganda can be defined as any message intended to modify the attitudes and behaviour of people at whom it is directed, primarily by appealing to their emotions. Its use is not confined to dictatorships and authoritarian organizations. Democracies have employed it extensively in wartime. In peacetime it plays a significant role in electoral politics, and in public-service campaigns relating to social problems. Messages may range from simple verbal texts to elaborate combinations of aural and visual signals (e.g. television commercials). The media used have included print, graphic art,

²³ Hauser, Arnold, ‘Propaganda, ideology and art’, Mészáros, István (ed), *Aspects of history and class consciousness*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1971, p129

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Taylor, Kendall, ‘Propaganda’ In *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T069819>

film, radio, television, and architecture, from baroque palaces to fascist monuments.²⁷

The above definition seems then applicable to all forms of art, and thereby loses its meaning and becomes too vague. To return to Hauser, who states, “Art is partisan because of its thoroughly social character. It always speaks *for* somebody *to* somebody and reflects reality from a particular social standpoint so as to be seen from that standpoint.”²⁸ It can be said that the poster production of all of the collectives in question here do produce pictures that most certainly speak for ideology to the ordinary man/woman in the street. One might even go so far as to say that attempts were made to speak to the working class and at least in the case of Røde Mor for the working class – in their aim to produce an art *of* the working class. Political art thus, in this context, always presents the viewer with a social and political meaning that may be described as propaganda.

1.3 Historiography and chapter overview

Academic research on Scandinavian art is mostly limited to Norwegian, Danish or Swedish.. Surveys on Scandinavian art in English are scarce and usually focus on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. In the area of political Scandinavian art there have been no major publications in English or a Scandinavian language. As this is the case, this thesis is the first transnational study of Scandinavian artist groups in English to date. Because of this fact each chapter will have a national art historical introduction to ease understanding of the context of the groups in question. The literature pertaining to the individual groups is even limited in their native tongue, and some historians of Scandinavian 1968 call for more research to be presented on the relationship between the political and the cultural ‘1968’ – it is this gap that this thesis attempts to fill.

In 2004 Thomas Kruse, former member of Røde Mor, co-wrote a good historiography on the collective with Olav Harsløf, which details the developments of the group.²⁹ Although the book features a meticulous drafting of the history of Røde Mor it does not contain any

²⁷ Sachsse, Rolf & Lenman, Robin, ‘propaganda’, In *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, Ed. Robin Lenman, Oxford University Press 2005, *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t207.e1282> (accessed October 13, 2009)

²⁸ Hauser, ‘Propaganda, ideology and art’, p131

²⁹ Harsløf, Olav & Kruse, Thomas, *Røde Mor*, Århus: Husets Forlag, 2004

unbiased art historical analysis of the posters produced within its lifetime. Kruse and Harsløf focus on the overall history of the whole group, including the theatrical and musical sides of the group, these were of course symptomatic of the times and have lived on in most Danes memories as part of popular culture. However, this will not be discussed in much detail here, as for the purpose of this thesis the graphics workshop and the printed posters are the main focus. Other than this text no other published material on the group has surfaced during the course of my research. It is the goal of this thesis to shed light on the mainly unexplored pictorial material that was produced within the group and link this directly to their ideological stance, as well as give more prominence to the graphics workshop itself, as generally the performing part of the collective has received a great deal of attention. The research conducted has therefore included all of RM's self published material, which includes comic books, picture books and annual progress catalogues. Another source of information has been Dea Trier Mørch's books, such as *Sorgmunter Socialisme: sovjetiske raderinger* and *Polen*.³⁰ Furthermore, interviews with the artists Thomas Kruse and Tommy Flugt were conducted in 2006 and correspondence via post with Yukari Ochiai took place in 2009 (See Appendix I). The analysis of the group is mainly made on the basis of these sources in close conjunction with the pictures.

There has been no academic or otherwise study of the Swedish artist group Folkets Ateljé before this thesis completion. The group is mentioned in connection with the extensive investigation of the sixties' art scene by Leif Nylén in 1998 and in the Marxist art historian Bengt Olvång's book *Våga se! Svensk Konst 1945-1980*, published in 1983.³¹ However these two authors merely recognise the group's existence and make no attempt to clarify who its members were or its origin. Interviews were conducted with the majority of the participants in 2008 (See Appendix II) and these have laid the foundation for the mapping of the group's works, ideology and history. Since this group produced street posters very few examples survive in artists' hands or in collections and the few posters that do survive have been reproduced here. This does not mean, however, that there might not be more posters in private hands that have not been discovered in the course of this research. If a poster has been mentioned during an interview that has not been found by the author, it has been included as a

³⁰Dea Trier Mørch, *Sorgmunter Socialisme: sovjetiske raderinger*, Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1968; *Polen*, Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1970

³¹Olvång, Bengt, *Våga se! Svensk Konst 1945-1980*, Uddevalla: Författarförlaget, 1983; Nylén, Leif, *Den öppna konsten – Happenings, instrumental teater, konkret poesi och andra gränsöverskridningar I det svenska 60-talet*, Borås: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1998

point for future research and as information pertaining to the group's, until now, unexplored history.

The Norwegian group GRAS is the only one out of the three that has been covered in art historical research, however this is only available in Norwegian, until now. This is except for a catalogue produced for *Amerikanske sommerfugler: GRAS, politikk og pop* (*American butterflies: GRAS, politics and pop*), exhibition at Rogaland Kunstmuseum in 2003, which contains article abstracts in English.³² Sidsel Helliesen's chapters on GRAS in *Norsk Grafikk I-II-III: Norsk grafikk fra 1945 til 1990* (*Norwegian Graphics I-II-III: Norwegian graphics from 1945 to 1990*) and *Norsk grafikk gjennom 100 år* (*Norwegian graphics through 100 years*)³³ are good starting points for learning about the group, however these both in Norwegian. However until Nora Ceciliedatter Nerdrum's chapter on GRAS in *Arbeiderhistorie* there had been no writing on the political side of GRAS production.³⁴ Nerdrum, though, falls into the repetitive mode of analysis when it comes to the imagery produced and by focusing on the connection between the far-Left Marxist-Leninist movement and GRAS her pictorial analysis suffers. Nerdrum perpetuates the myths and stories that surround this time in Norwegian political history by linking GRAS too closely with the Marxist-Leninists.

As previously mentioned, the first part of this thesis is divided into three chapters that deal with the individual Scandinavian groups. First Danish Røde Mor will be situated in its national context. Then the political climate in Denmark will be touched upon to situate Røde Mor ideologically. The rest of the first chapter will discuss Røde Mor and its body of work, style, techniques and manifestoes. The second chapter will analyse Swedish Folkets Ateljé and its wider context, followed by a mapping of its activities based on its body of work as never before discussed. This chapter will also discuss a couple of posters which are unconfirmed as Folkets Ateljé, but have been included because I am certain they belong to Folkets Ateljé's and the interviews I conducted strongly indicated I may be correct. The last group chapter is focusing on GRAS, situating it within Second World War art history and the development of political pop art in Norway. This is followed by an introduction to the practise

³² *Amerikanske sommerfugler: GRAS, politikk og pop* (*American butterflies: GRAS, politics and pop*), exhibition catalogue, Rogaland Kunstmuseum, Stavanger, 2003

³³ Helliesen, Sidsel, *Norsk Grafikk I-II-III: Norsk grafikk fra 1945 til 1990* (*Norwegian Graphics I-II-III: Norwegian graphics from 1945 to 1990*), exhibition catalogue, Oslo, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991; Helliesen, Sidsel, *Norsk grafikk gjennom 100 år* (*Norwegian graphics through 100 years*), Oslo, H. Aschehoug & Co., 2000

³⁴ Nerdrum, Nora Ceciliedatter, 'Et reklamebyrå for ml-bevegelsen', *Arbeiderhistorie: Årbok for Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, Oslo: Valdres Trykkeri AS, p95-111

of GRAS through the run up till its formation. A section of Chapter 4 has been devoted to the graphic folder presented in 1971 as a good example of the group's diversity and a manifesto of sort. Finally Chapter 5 will compare the three groups to each other on the basis of political issues supported by their posters. The comparison is divided into two loosely mapped out sections – national and international concerns. What is meant by this is that the themes for which they produced posters can be seen to portray issues that are close to home, such as the worker's struggle or the EEC referenda in 1972, and posters that deal with debates not only common to Scandinavia but the rest of the Western world, such as the Vietnam War or Third Worldism.³⁵ In the final chapter groups or individual artists from around the world are brought into the discussion to show evidence of differences or similarities with the Scandinavians.

³⁵ Kristin Ross uses the term widely in her *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 2002

Chapter 2 – Røde Mor

2.1 The Development of Modern Art pre-Røde Mor

Before the 1930s, the majority of Danish artists were Colourists, landscape painters or produced a synthesis of Expressionism and Symbolism, culminating in highly emotional works. Because of a prevailing conservatism within Danish art circles, aspiring artists were expected to attend the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen where students were encouraged to follow traditional examples, for instance late nineteenth-century styles such as Impressionism. This attitude fostered artistic endeavours which were preoccupied with the art of the past rather than recent European advancements. Not until the publication of the Bauhaus-inspired periodical *Linien* in January 1934, followed closely by related exhibitions, did abstraction influence ‘young’ Danish art, with particular reference to the works of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. In 1933 Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen, who had studied at Bauhaus Dessau, founded the exhibition group *Linien* with artists Ejler Bille, Richard Mortensen, Henry Heerup and Hans Øllgaard.¹ Bjerke Petersen’s 1935 exhibition *Cubism – Surrealism* had an even greater impact on Danish art, where he introduced foreign artists, including Miró, Arp, Dali, Magritte and Man Ray, to Danish audiences for the first time. This exhibition was of pivotal importance for the emergence of Surrealism within Copenhagen’s artistic milieu. Bjerke Petersen and Wilhelm Freddie became Denmark’s foremost Surrealists. However, the Danish Surrealists quickly divided into two clearly defined groups.

Linien staged *Post-Expressionism – Abstract Art – Neoplasticism – Surrealism* in 1937 at Den Frie (The Free) in Copenhagen where Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Klee, Kandinsky, Miró, Max Ernst and Tanguy appeared alongside Danes affiliated with *Linien*. The exhibition also introduced the work of new members Asger Jorn, Egill Jacobsen and Sonja Ferlov.² Undoubtedly, Egill Jacobsen’s work made the greatest impact due to the sensational and spontaneous colourism of *Ophobning* (Accumulation, 1938, Fig. 2.1). Completely unique and prefiguring the work of COBRA,³ *Ophobning* demonstrated a move towards informality and a freedom from the contradictions between form and colour. Within the picture plane, which seems to spill over the bounds of the picture, there is a magnificent explosion of vivid colours and black lines. Jacobsen later “...recalled that the picture was

¹ Bjerke Petersen studied at the Bauhaus Dessau during the years 1930-31

² Bjerke Petersen alienated himself from *Linien* at an early point after turning to illusionary Surrealism and thereafter did not exhibit with the group, which had aligned itself with abstract Surrealism.

³ COBRA is an acronym and abbreviation of COpenhagen, BRussels and Amsterdam, which existed between 1948-52

painted during anxiety caused by the menace of Hitler, the annexation of Austria and the threat to Czechoslovakia.”⁴ The bloodstained sun in the upper right corner was probably a representative of the state of affairs in Europe, and a premonition of sorts of the events after 1939. The painting also anticipated the development of Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s. The *Linien* artists are generally referred to as the Abstracts, since the group became increasingly preoccupied with stylisation and abstraction after Bjerke Petersen’s departure.

Copenhagen was a haven for artists, scientists, intellectuals and activists who had been forced into exile from Hitler’s Germany before the Second World War, and it had a thriving political and intellectual milieu in the mid 1930s. This, too, increased the national awareness of contemporary foreign movements and a growing number of artists were compelled to explore beyond Danish borders, with many visiting France before the outbreak of the Second World War. The conditions of Danish artists during the German occupation (1940-1945) were rather different from those of their colleagues elsewhere in Europe, due to the intricate arrangement under which the Danes were able to continue to govern the country themselves.⁵ Artists could therefore work relatively freely without extensive censorship. Specifically, artists associated with the journal *Helhesten* (Hell Horse) exhibited works until Germany tightened its grip on Denmark in 1943.⁶ The *Helhesten* artists were later involved in the formation of the short-lived international COBRA group and the journal, which contained articles and notes on music, poetry and art, was a forum for the arts until 1944, when economic difficulties forced it to close. Similar in character to *Minotaure* and the semi-clandestine *La Main à Plume*, which attempted to keep Surrealism alive in France during the war, *Helhesten* represented defiance and freedom of expression for Danish artists and intellectuals. Artists, who had travelled abroad before the war, began reworking their impressions when Danish borders were subsequently closed, immediately turning to the Scandinavian environment and past for inspiration.⁷ A modern Danish tradition emerged through the influence of a variety of sources: abstraction mostly influenced by Bauhaus principles, predominantly Kandinsky and Klee; Surrealism and interest in Freud’s and Jung’s

⁴ Hovdenakk, Per, *Cobra – To Forløp*, Edition Bløndal, Hellerup, RH Offset, Snæslev; 1988, for Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, p31

⁵ The Danish government made a ‘deal’ to cooperate with the Germans so that Denmark would be spared extensive bombardment. The government and its Social Democratic Prime Minister had legislative power until resigning in 1943 in protest over several forced changes, such as the death penalty and the persecution of the Jews.

⁶ *Helhesten* was first published in 1941.

⁷ Led by Asger Jorn, other members of this group included Egill Jacobsen, Ejler Bille, Svavar Gudnason and Carl-Henning Pedersen, with close ties to Else Alfelt, Erik Thommesen, Henry Heerup, Robert Jacobsen and Sonja Ferlov Mancoba.

theories of psychoanalysis, alongside the reading of *Minotaure*; and a rejection of Bretonian Surrealism. Furthermore, artists rediscovered their Danish national identity through folk art, folklore, mythology and pre-historic/primitive Danish art. The artistic explorations of the inter-war years resulted in the development of an intricate language of spontaneity and emotional, inward-looking abstraction, which remained uncontested for decades. Advances in abstraction made during the war became intertwined with notions of a specifically Danish art, and therefore a bias arose in favour of abstract art and artists.

In the aftermath of the war, two Abstract art movements gained considerable ground in Denmark: the Spontaneous Abstract Expressionists, led by Asger Jorn, who took part in COBRA; and Concrete Abstraction centred around the 1947 establishment of the exhibition group *Linien 2*. Richard Mortensen, who lived in Paris between 1947 and 1964, was the main exponent of the latter movement, focusing mainly on a geometric approach to art. Mortensen took up a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen upon his return to Denmark, where he promoted geometric abstraction to younger generations of artists. However, from the sixties onwards, the Danish art scene experienced a series of events which challenged the two movements' hold on the Danish public.

In 1958, the German artist Arthur Köpcke and his Danish wife Aase opened Gallery Köpcke, immediately exposing Danes to contemporary international trends represented by Dieter Roth, Piero Manzoni, Jean Tinguely, Wolf Vostell, Robert Filliou and Niki de Saint Phalle, amongst others. During its short lifespan the gallery became the key Danish contact point for so-called neo-avant-garde art movements such as Fluxus, Nouveau Réalisme and Art Informel.⁸ In the same year that Gallery Köpcke was founded, the visionary Knud W. Jensen established the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, located on the North Zealand coast. Jensen intended to create an independent institution to house Danish and international modern and contemporary art by both established and unknown artists.⁹ Though situated almost an hour north of Copenhagen, Louisiana provided an important point of intersection for Danish and international art, which encouraged new ways of thinking about art from its inception. The infamous 'material-action' (performance) *Hesteofringen* (The Horse Sacrifice, 1970, Fig. 2.2-2.3) took place, in which Bjørn Nørgaard carried out a heathen ritual sacrifice of a horse, whilst Lene Adler Petersen, clad as a priest and carrying a large cross, chanted Christian

⁸ Gallery Köpcke existed between 1958 and 1962 in Læderstrædet, Copenhagen and moved in 1963, its final year, to Nicolaj Church where Kunstbiblioteket (The Art Library) provided exhibition space. The 1962 Fluxus festival took place there as part of the international Fluxus network.

⁹ <http://www.louisiana.dk>

hymns as part of the Louisiana exhibition *Tabernakel*.¹⁰ Nørgaard believed that art's traditional methods and practices were not enough to express contemporary reality, such as the Vietnam War and the famine in Biafra, Africa.

In 1961, the artist Poul Gernes and art historian Troels Andersen started Den Eksperimenterende Kunstskele (The Experimental Art School), commonly known as 'Eks-skolen', as a critical alternative to the Academy of Fine Arts. Eks-skolen attempted to break down accepted hierarchies and work methods, in opposition to the Academy's authoritarian educational structure, and Eks-skolen students, as well as teachers, felt there was more to gain from a collectivist approach. A familiar, creative environment developed, closely modelled on the notion of 'brotherhood', in which art was created from a completely open concept, yet always in the spirit of the collective. Students were encouraged to develop their own idioms through their choice of material, style and technique. This in turn led to a renewal of Danish painting, as well as increased experimentation with new artistic forms of expression and production. Often these forms expressed a deeper engagement with society and political decision-making than had been seen previously. A self-managed printing workshop was established in connection with the school, called Eks-skolen Trykkeri. Within Denmark, Eks-skolen is seen as the quintessential expression of 1960s consciousness, particularly because it was instrumental in the introduction of Happenings to Denmark. Egon Fische, Per Kirkeby, Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, Peter Bonnén, Bjørn Nørgaard and Lene Adler Petersen were among those connected with the school. In an attempt to banish Capitalism, Adler Petersen and Nørgaard shocked the brokers at the Copenhagen Stock Market when on 29 May 1969, Adler Petersen walked through the main hall completely naked carrying a cross, in the action work *Uddrivelsen af templet / Nøgen kvindelig Kristus I* (The Expulsion from the Temple / Female Nude Christ I, Fig. 2.4).

2.2 The Political Climate

During the 1950s and 1960s, Denmark experienced its second wave of industrialisation, through the professed 'urbanisation' of the countryside. Throughout this period, high economic growth enabled industry to move into former agricultural centres, where the

¹⁰ *Hesteofring* was both a Danish and international sensation. The horse, named Røde Fane (Red Flag), was slaughtered in a field at Kirke Hyllinge and different body parts, such as eyes, ears and intestines, were preserved in 112 jam jars, which are now at the Aarhus Art Museum. The action reflected on the way history is defined by the collection, categorising and preservation of cultural heritage by the museum. It was also an attempt to make life itself the material for art. This linked it closely with the avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes. It was followed by public outrage as a result of misunderstanding the action not as a critique of the ongoing Vietnam War and the killing of civilians, but as the distasteful slaughtering of the horse.
http://www.aarhuskunstmuseum.dk/om_aros/presse_detail.asp?id=99

increasingly mechanised agricultural sector left many former farm workers unemployed, and large industrial abattoirs and dairy factories were established. This is significant when considering the Danish worker's struggle, since the Danish word for worker can apply not only to the urban worker, but also to the new type of agricultural worker in the industrialised countryside. Furthermore, the rapid growth of the working class led to a prevalence of Socialdemokratiet (The Danish Social Democrats, SD) governments from 1957 until 1968. The SD believed in increasing governmental involvement in cultural affairs, as indicated by the establishing of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1961 and governmental institutions such as Statens Kunstfond (The Danish Arts Foundation), which were intended to improve different sections of cultural life during the 1960s.¹¹ Welfare legislation was based upon the principle of universalism, meaning that not only the poor and needy would benefit, but all areas of society for all citizens, including artists.

In 1967, a new political party, Venstresocialisterne (The Left Socialists Party, VS), emerged from Socialistisk Folkeparti (The Socialist People's Party, SF). VS worked openly in support of national liberation movements in the Third World, such as the FNL (Front National de Liberation) in Vietnam and PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) in Israeli-occupied Palestine. The split happened after a sequence of compromises had been made with the governing SD. These compromises were seen to contradict SF policies by some of its constituents. The ad hoc cooperation between the government, Dansk Kommunistisk Parti (Danish Communist Party, DKP) and SF was perceived as leading the party towards the right, thus letting the workers down. This was particularly pertinent after the devaluation of the Danish currency in December 1967, when the SD proposed an automatic adjustment of wages, which most strongly affected the working class. VS has been closely linked to the 68-generation, in part because many members were 'flower-children' and a large number of students joined the party after the 1968 uprising in Paris, and its Danish counterpart.¹²

As with the rest of Europe, in the late 1960s Denmark experienced a clash between the younger generations, who grew up in an established welfare state, and older generations, who had faced difficulties prior to and during the Second World War. This youth revolution had many themes: opposition to American involvement in the Vietnam War, anti-nuclear weapons

¹¹ Still in existence today, Statens Kunstfond's main goal has been to promote Danish artistic creativity. Its funds are used for three-year grants, composer fees, work and travel scholarships, the purchase of artworks and the execution of public art. Furthermore, the foundation awards prizes to artists for specific works. Literature, music, performing and visual arts are provided with state funds' through the Danish Arts Foundation and Danish Arts Council. The majority of government funds now go into the lifetime allowance for artists, which provides income support for 275 artists. <http://www.kunststyrelsen.dk/english.php>

¹² *Blomsterbørn*, i.e. flower-children, is the Danish word for hippie.

and nuclear energy, antagonism towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Economic Community (EEC), and – more generally – hostility to the inefficient bureaucracy within the social democratic system of governance. In addition to the cultural debate, political debate underwent an ideological renewal, which was strongly influenced by Communism and other radical Left ideologies. “The new activism was expressed in untraditional extra-parliamentarian actions: Protest marches, sit-ins in houses, factories and universities, the so-called "wildcat" strikes, street theatre and happenings.”¹³ There were calls for representation from all levels of society; students, for example, demanded a say in the running of their institutions. As when, in March 1968, between 300-400 psychology students went on strike at Copenhagen University, 150 of whom barricaded themselves inside the psychology laboratories. These events sparked a radical activism that quickly spread across Denmark, a precursor to the widely discussed French May Revolt that started at the Sorbonne during the same year. Although groups working against the escalating war in Vietnam had appeared earlier in the decade, a wide variety of social movements sought to influence political decision-making from 1968 onwards, the strongest and most influential of which was the women’s movement, typically referred to as Rødstrømperne (Red Socks).

2.3 Røde Mor – Mother of the Revolution

The publishing house and bookshop/café *Demos* was established in Copenhagen during 1967 and specialised in literature, theory and music produced by the radical Left. It emerged from the loosely organised Vietnambevægelsen (The Vietnam Movement) and in particular Vietnamkomitéerne (The Vietnam Committees), a coalition of small organisations whose common goal was to end the Vietnam War. *Demos* was the main outlet for Røde Mor (Red Mother, RM). It released RM’s LPs and sold its posters in its bookshop. In many respects *Demos* had a similar role in the radicalisation of ideas emerging from the left in the ‘long sixties’ as Kristin Ross has given François Maspero’s *La joie de Lire* (1956-1975) in relation to the events in Paris. Editions Maspero, published translated texts in which “...theory itself was [...] generated not from Europe but from the third world” and both the freedom fighter and the thinkers were represented - Che Guevara, Mao, Fanon and Cabral for example.¹⁴

¹³ ‘The Developing Welfare State’, *Denmark*, Compiled by the Editors of the Danish National Encyclopaedia, The Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002; 2003
<http://www.um.dk/Publikationer/UM/English/Denmark/kap6/6-17.asp>

¹⁴ Ross, Kristin, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p84

During these years of revolt, violent street demonstrations – previously unheard of in twentieth-century Denmark – started to occur. From the late 1960s until well into the 1980s, the Danish Left mobilised tens of thousands of people for demonstrations and events in Fælledparken, Copenhagen, designed to encourage grassroots culture and politics. These included Socialistisk Kulturfront (Socialist Cultural Front), rock festivals, 1 May rallies, *Land og Folk* (Country and People) festivals, Nordisk Gruppeteater Festival (Nordic Theatre Group Festival) and women's festivals.¹⁵ Within this climate, RM arose under an explicitly Communist agenda in the spring of 1969. Established by artists Troels Trier, Ole Finding, John Ravn and Dea Trier Mørch, RM sought to combine art with political intent. Their chosen name was in itself a clear statement of their political alliance with the Left – spoken out loud with the word *Red* – and at the same time indicated an all-embracing openness to all fellow humans, symbolised by the word *Mother*. In the autumn, the group extended to include Ole Thilo, Tommy Flugt, Yukari Ochiai, Lars Trier and Thomas Kruse.

Although they were rewritten many times, RM's manifestos always incorporated a position on art's ideological role in the class struggle and harshly criticised artists who did not, as they saw it, create art for the people. The desire for straightforward communication with the grassroots effort was clearly shown by the group's first collective exhibition in 1969 at Rådskælderen, Kunstakademiet (The Academy of Fine Arts), at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen.¹⁶ At the exhibition RM's first collective programme poetically proclaimed their ideological intent:

Red Mother is the revolution's mother
The oppressed and the weak and the orphans' mother
Red Mother awaits you, forgets you not and keeps the food warm
Red Mother is a wild and furious lioness
Red Mother walks with an olive branch in her beak
Red Mother is a black sheep and furthermore a red flag¹⁷

At the Rådskælderen exhibition, RM comprised of artists (Trier, Finding, Ravn and Trier Mørch) who exhibited their individual artworks under a collective name. This initial grouping had come to know each other as students at the Academy and through Copenhagen's jazz and rock circles. One of the first collective posters was produced for the exhibition. It was made up of four separate images, one by each artist, with hand-carved text that would become one

¹⁵ *Land og Folk* began as DKP's clandestine monthly newspaper during the Second World War, which became the main working class newspaper in Denmark after the war.

¹⁶ The exhibition was also shown during the same year at Odense Kunstmuseum (Odense Art Museum), which is part of Fyns Stiftsmuseum (Funen Diocese Museum).

¹⁷ Harsløf, Olav & Kruse, Thomas, *Røde Mor*, Århus: Husets Forlag, 2004, p16

of the recurring features of RM's pictorial language (Fig. 2.5). As subsequent member Thomas Kruse explained,

In a way we were fond of the primitive, we often chose to do the typography ourselves, partly because it was inexpensive. Back then you didn't have a computer and if you were to put something on the posters it cost a type-setter and then we wouldn't know what font was used. Therefore, it was better to integrate lettering into the picture by making it hand drawn [...] something almost pre-Gutenbergesque...¹⁸

In the poster's upper left segment we have Dea Trier Mørch's depiction of an androgynous young protester situated behind a barbed wire fence with lips parted as if shouting the text above: "All troops out of Vietnam, the black ghettos, and Berkeley! Amnesty to all political prisoners. Free Huey, bring back Eldridge! All land belongs to the people!"¹⁹ Of the four, this image is the most obviously political and clearly reflects the poster's radical intent as it includes these slogans. The upper right is occupied by John Ravn's image of a giant devouring, mythical insect more akin to Danish imagery of the 1950s than the political language RM would become known for.

On the bottom left of the poster is Ole Finding's overtly politicised landscape. The United States of America is represented as a large figure that seems to be permanently attached to a car, drinking with one hand while offering gold with the other. In the foreground, sombrero-wearing farm labourers are bent over working on the land probably owned by the USA. The fourth part of the poster by Troels Trier promotes anti-commercialisation by representing the biker counterculture that could be found in Danish suburban areas. RM thought it important to highlight society's countercultures and dropouts so as to reflect all aspects of society; inclusion of everyone in society was an important goal, and as the poster states, everything belongs to the people. The collective poster presented the viewer with a range of styles that united to represent a common idea – a vision. These four artists provided different viewpoints on art and life which resulted in an array of different styles put together to express a universal goal. The red RM stamp, seen through the barbed wire in Trier Mørch's picture, discreetly implies the connection between them, although their

¹⁸ Author's interview with Thomas Kruse 11 November 2005, see Appendix I

¹⁹ Berkeley was a hub for political and social radicalism and counterculture in the 1960s. In June 1968, during a demonstration in solidarity with French students in Paris, a battle between youths and police broke out. In 1969 a dispute between students and the university over the so-called 'People's Park' area, ended in a month-long occupation of Berkeley by the National Guard under orders from Governor Ronald Reagan. Huey P. Newton, one of the founders of the Black Panther Party for Self Defence, dedicated to armed revolution in the United States, was convicted of murder in September 1968 and imprisoned. Eldridge Cleaver was a fellow member of the Black Panthers who, in 1968, jumped bail after he was convicted for assault and escaped to Cuba and later Algeria.

names take up much space at the poster's base. The silhouette of the Red Mother is reminiscent of a ghost, recalling Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* quotation, "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism," much in the same way that RM eventually swept through Denmark and awakened the workers to join the 'new' revolution.²⁰ This early group poster takes an individualistic approach, and does not reflect the collectivist method that RM would later perfect.

In my 2005 interview with Kruse, the artist gave his impressions of the first exhibition:

I was a little envious that they had found each other because I was making linocuts and graphics and political posters at home in Aarhus, and then I saw those people and how they were printing – of some of the things I said 'they are bad at carving.' I thought some of the pictures were poorly made, but there was also a very striking energy about them.²¹

While organising a conference in the autumn of 1969 at Vallekilde højskole (Vallekilde College), close to Holbæk and Tusenæs where Troels Trier and Ole Finding were living, Kruse's wife Anne-Mette met Dea Trier Mørch and Troels Trier. Mørch and Trier had become partners by this point and had expressed interest in organising a RM appearance at the conference. Subsequently Thomas Kruse met the couple, showed them his work and was thereafter invited to join the group. At the end of 1969, RM expanded to include more artists as well as musicians and a trend developed to include friends, partners and wives too. By 1970, the group had expanded to fourteen members, including Alice Faber, Erling Benner Larsen, Pia Funder and Anne-Mette Kruse.²² In its first year RM went from a small artist collective to a large group of professional and amateur artists who intended to change the Danish art scene forever.

2.4 The Style must be Easily Understood

RM deliberately produced prints in a popular style that combined realism with a naïve style directed at the people. If one assumes, as Matthew Beaumont does that "...realism is perpetually at issue" and that it can be inclusive of depictions that do not merely replicate reality. Then realism can "...be sketched as the assumption that it is possible, through the act of representation, in one semiotic code or another, to provide cognitive as well as imaginative access to a material, historical reality that, though irreducibly mediated by human

²⁰ Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p8, Connection made by Tommy Flugt. Author's interview with Tommy Flugt 10 November 2005

²¹ Kruse, 11 November 2005

²² Harsløf & Kruse, *Røde Mor*, p16

consciousness, and of course by language, is nonetheless independent of it.”²³ Postmodernism has made of realism “an act of representation that, in replicating empirical reality as exactly as possible, dream of attaining a complete correspondence to it.”²⁴ In relation to RM’s posters one must assume that the realism they make use of is based in an imaginative and essentially popular ambition to by all cultural means available to them present the working class with a culture – one they had not attained before. While the group rarely used offset and silkscreen techniques, the easily recognisable imagery was mainly made in linoleum and was particularly designed with the working class in mind. From 1964 onwards there had been a public debate about the implementation of the government’s art policies under the new ministry, and specifically The Danish Arts Foundation. In particular, the favouritism involved in the handing out of three-year artist grants to modernist writers and abstract artists facilitated the development of a populist standpoint against it. This standpoint was shared by RM. The general public did not fully comprehend formalist artworks and, as the collective saw it, called for more accessible and approachable kind of artistic expression, such as the political poster.

Until 1972, RM did not clearly state its alliance with what they called social realism, but the collective’s production clearly harked back to older forms of expression – pre-literacy – and they preferred linocut’s simple, yet vast possibilities. The necessary, contemporary political messages, in the group’s opinion, could not be conveyed through abstraction or non-figuration; the images had to tell a readable story. This wish for narrative form can be seen in many of RM’s collective posters, where sequences of different thematic images were put together to be read as a whole, but nonetheless complex, Communist message. As we will see later in this chapter, even posters made by individual artists would mostly follow the same pattern. Artworks, such as RM’s posters make us aware of the individuals’ struggle in industry, exhibit class consciousness and materiality, and according to Andrew Hemingway a “...rejection of the chromatic palette [...] and a renewal of chiaroscuro as a way of denoting the intractable materiality of things” are part and parcel of realist works.²⁵ Then surely RM’s work must be viewed as such.

Upon viewing RM’s complete poster production, it is evident that what they coined as ‘social realism’ may be more akin to Socialist Realism in a Northern European cloak. In

²³ Beaumont, Matthew, ‘Introduction: Reclaiming Realism’, Beaumont, Matthew (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Realism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010, p2

²⁴ Ibid., p4

²⁵ Hemingway, Andrew, ‘The Realist Aesthetic in Painting: “Serious and committed, ironic and brutal, sincere and full of poetry”’, Beaumont, *A Concise Companion to Realism*, p132

Danish artistic terminology, social realism encompasses both socialist realism and social realism proper. However, as Louis Aragon has been quoted commenting: "...one only arrives at socialist realism on the national road [...] Socialist realism will find its universal values in each country only if it deeply penetrates into the national reality of the soil in which it arises."²⁶ RM was probably closer to socialist realism in their works than social realism if one is to see the term as a manifestation of what Matthew Cullerne Bown, in his comprehensive study on the subject of Soviet painting, divides into five categories: *Narodnost* (the 'peopleness' or popular nature of art), *Ideinost* (ideological content), *Klassovost* (class character or working class cause), *Partiinost* (party-obedience or Communist Party spirit) and *Tipichnost* (typicality).²⁷ "The great protagonist of socialist realist painting", Bown states, was "...the concept of a morally, physically and intellectually superior New Person."²⁸ This optimistic and superior 'type' does not appear in RM posters as it did in USSR painting, but this might be due to its Danish context. Furthermore, Bown defines the style thus:

Socialist realism (a concept first formulated in 1932) ran counter to artistic development in the West in fundamental ways. It emphasised the social role of art; it insisted on the superiority of content over form; it required a wholesale return to traditional skills and regarded the history of European art from the Renaissance onwards as a living source of inspiration. It was directly and deliberately opposed to the solipsism, formalism and yearning after a tabula rasa of the modern movement; and it provided the only full-blooded and thoroughly conceived alternative to it.²⁹

However, the choice by the Danish group to avoid the term might be, as Bown points out, "the mind-set which emerged in the late 1940s, in which a political condemnation of Soviet culture combined with artistic disparagement of it as stylistically retrograde, [...] shaped Western attitudes to socialist realism..."³⁰ Yet it is clear from the definition above that RM shared many of the values promoted by the doctrine, nevertheless RM's playful and eclectic style is rooted in a wide variety of sources, which are, as we will see, not all strictly *realistic* in form.

Predictable sources of inspiration for RM imagery can be found in early post-revolution Russian artists, and the Communist-Futurist Vladimir Majakovskij, known as the Bolshevik revolution's poet, was a universal influence and inspiration for the artist

²⁶ Gomez Gutiérrez, Juan José, 'The influence of Socialist Realism in Italy during the Immediate Postwar Period', Horn, Gerd-Rainer & Kenney, Padriac (ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, p70

²⁷ Bown, Matthew Cullerne, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p10

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pxiii

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pxiv

collective.³¹ The Futurists' revolt against bourgeois art struck a chord with RM ideals. The way in which Majakovskij pursued Communist theory with all his available means – poetry, poster-making, theatre and film – has much in common with RM. The all-inclusive performance and street theatre which took place during RM's almost ten-year existence brought Danish artists, actors, musicians, filmmakers and ideologists together in the consolidation of working class culture. Majakovskij used the language of the streets to deconstruct idealised and romanticised notions of the poet and poetry. His poems fuse subjects as diverse as love, politics, religion and art; much in the same way the RM collective mixed subjects and styles in the one 'real' language of the street – the poster.

The 1 May poster *Solidaritet* (Solidarity, 1969, Fig. 2.6), made for VS, consists of five images on the theme of solidarity which reference contemporary international struggles: the American Black Panthers, the North Vietnamese, the liberation wars in Angola and Mozambique and Che Guevara's martyrdom.³² Similarly, when Majakovskij started working on the Rosta Windows (Okna ROSTA),³³ he introduced the concept of centralised ideas to the poster where separate images were combined to express one theme, reminiscent of a storyboard.³⁴ This idea is exhibited in *Solidaritet*, where both the title and the images focus on international solidarity and in particular with the third-world, freedom fighter. Adding to this anti-imperialist sentiment is the Marxist statement included: "Proletariat of the world unite!" On Majakovskij, Kruse said:

He made comic strip pictures because the population was illiterate and then we said 'the modern Dane,' our audience, 'is also in one way or another spiritually illiterate.' They can read, but they are anaesthetised by bad entertainment and bad taste and commercial amusement culture, weekly magazines and awful television and idle images. Therefore we wanted to give them a few images that would burst through [...] – Majakovskij was one of my great heroes.³⁵

³¹ Majakovskij was later attacked for being a bourgeois modernist.

³² The Black Panthers struggled for equal rights, social welfare and basic dignity for African-Americans; the Vietnamese struggled for independence and sovereignty. Three Angolan groups had sporadically been fighting for independence from Portugal since 1961 – two of these groups were Communist: UNITA was Maoist and backed by both the US and China, and the Marxist-Leninist MPLA was backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba. From 1964 until 1974 the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), backed by the Algerians, Soviets and Chinese, used guerrilla tactics against Portuguese rule. Ernesto Che Guevara was executed by the Bolivian Army on 9 October 1967, after being captured in a military operation supported by the US.

³³ A form of poster art that was initiated in 1918 by the Russian Telegraph Agency, whose purpose was to spread information, agitation and the supervision of the Soviet Press. Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p72

³⁴ Ades, Dawn, *The 20th-Century Poster – Design of the Avant-Garde*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1984, p49 (Victor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and his circle*, London: Pluto Press, 1974)

³⁵ Thomas Kruse, 11 November, 2005

The play and satire that Majakovskij applied to his imagery seemed to be situated in, as Kruse put it, "...a kind of comic strip universe."³⁶ Capitalism, for instance, is represented by Majakovskij as a monster with claws who devours the globe and likewise the bourgeoisie are fat and greedy, and symbolically most of the Soviet Union's class enemies wear suits as opposed to the worker's overalls. The iconography is far from complex but that was exactly how one could reach the masses; through simple, easily understood stereotypes. Majakovskij's poster *Hear, hear! One and all: Attention! How can we guard the Republic from this intervention?* (September 1921, Fig. 2.7), for example, illustrates the French government and their policy of anti-Bolshevism through a combination of text and image.³⁷ Through a series of 'windows' the struggle against capitalist France is fought out, in this case by a German worker who is completely red, of course. The iconography used by Majakovskij and other Rosta artists reappeared over and over again, and therefore became commonplace. Similarly, RM often reproduced the same iconographic figures in their work, as these were considered to be universally understood.

It is more than likely that both Dea Trier Mørch and Yukari Ochiai were introduced to Majakovskij's work while living in Leningrad (St Petersburg).³⁸ Trier Mørch had obtained a one-year research grant to study at the Repin Institute of Fine Arts (1966-7) and during her studies she met Ochiai, who had been granted a two-year scholarship (1967-9). Trier Mørch studied at different institutions across Eastern Europe from 1964, after she finished her initial art education at the Academy in Copenhagen, until 1967.³⁹ In 1968, she debuted as a writer with *Sorgmunter socialisme: sovjetiske raderinger* (Bitter-Sweet Socialism: Soviet Etchings), in which she described her impressions and experiences in the Soviet Union. The book is illustrated with her own etchings inspired by her stay. She referred to the painter Ernest Ernestovitj as the one person in Leningrad who would discuss Malevich and The Institute for Artistic Culture in Petrograd,⁴⁰ "...he gets a whole stack of periodicals from the bookshelf and opens one on the images of Tatlin's model of Monument for the Third International."⁴¹ At the end of her stay, she was asked to display her work from the past year before a panel of teachers and professors where she was questioned about her reasons for

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ward, Alex, *Power to the People: Early Soviet Propaganda Posters in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem*, Lund Humphries, 2007, p133

³⁸ There is mention of Majakovskij in Trier Mørch, Dea, *Sorgmunter socialisme: sovjetiske raderinger*, Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1968, p67; p74

³⁹ She spent time in Warsaw in 1964, Krakow in 1965, Beograd in 1966 and Prague in 1967.

⁴⁰ I have been unable to find any biographical information on this artist. It may be that Trier Mørch gave the artist in question an alternative name for his own protection.

⁴¹ Trier Mørch, *Sorgmunter socialisme*, p38

coming to the Soviet Union and which artists had meant something to her. She writes in response: "...my Socialist sympathies, [...] the desire to live in a large country and my love for Slavic art. [...] I am first and foremost fond of the revolutionary generation – Filonov, Moor, Grigorjev, Petrov-Vodkin, Falk, Favorskij, Majakovskij."⁴² Some of these artists did not influence her work directly, but the revolutionary passion their work possesses evidently moved Trier Mørch towards producing not only expressive images but social realist pictures that sometimes displays socialist realist tendencies.

Another important inter-war figure to note is the Belgian anti-war graphic artist Frans Masereel, whose woodcuts are clearly related to RM's graphic work. Masereel's impact was due to direct messages conveyed through the prints by the way of straightforward compositions and the use of the black and white contrast. Furthermore, the striking emotional content, denouncing all cruelty and oppression of humanity, speaks to the viewer in a popular, story-telling fashion. When RM sought inspiration they looked predominantly to art from the 1920s and 1930s, and in the case of Masereel it was his sincerity and honesty, which appealed across different segments of society, that they wanted to reiterate. RM's artistic output is often influenced by Majakovskij and Masereel, a combination of political slogans and types with the straightforwardness of the linoleum technique. One could pick almost any work from Masereel's oeuvre to see the significant impact he had on RM's production. An appropriate example is his capitalist, which he made for *Les Tablettes* (1918, Fig. 2.8). Though Masereel distanced himself from political parties, it is easy to see why the Left took such great interest in his work. As a comment on the profitability of war, Masereel depicted the fat, cigar-smoking bourgeois businessman grinning as he thinks about the profits that he has made out of the war. In stark contrast the bodies of soldiers slaughtered on the battlefield lie behind him. The power of such a simple representation as this appealed immensely to RM, and one might say they took Masereel's straightforward style and combined it with Majakovskij's notions on thematic representation to create compositions which assimilated contemporary socio-political issues.

Besides these two, the collective's members were individually influenced by disparate sources. Kruse recalls Käthe Kollwitz as a clear impact on Trier Mørch's pictures, in particular citing Kollwitz's warmth and solidarity towards her subjects. Trier Mørch does not attempt to capture the masses or the political slogans in her prints, but focuses on the individual human being to illustrate the proletariat and its struggles. She highlights the

⁴² Ibid., p127

symbolic representative of class struggle – the female crane driver, the hearty worker, the washerwoman – and depicts them intimately within their environment where these wholesome figures become icons. These icons are personal, however, and the viewer gets to know them and thus understand the reality of their struggles. Trier Mørch aspired to establish solidarity and although her figures are working class archetypes, they also embody a humanism that appeals across society. Her compassion and understanding of her subjects is extremely close to Kollwitz's, however, Trier Mørch is generally less expressive of suffering in her RM motifs mostly, one would assume, because of the poster's role as a persuasive tool in the class struggle. For example, her illustration *Undertrykkere og undertrykte har stået i stadig modsætning til hinanden* (Oppressors and oppressed have been in constant contrast to each Other, 1968, Fig. 2.9), in the 1970 translation of Marx and Engels' *The Communist Party Manifesto*, portrays water-hosed demonstrators rather than the weak starving poor. The spirit of the year of production, 1968, has to be emphasised in relation to this specific image.

Troels Trier, on the other hand, was predominantly concerned with the grotesque and satirical caricature which frequently appeared in comic strips. His inspiration originated from the American 'father' of the underground comic, Robert Crumb, whose *Fritz the Cat*, which first appeared in the January 1965 issue of *Help!*, had a great impact.⁴³ Crumb's impertinent, naughty, but ultimately witty comics clearly influenced Trier's approach to drawing figures, and his use of comical stereotypes to illustrate Røde Mor's ideological goals. A late example is *Ud med pap-næseindustrien* (Out with the Fake-nose Industry, 1974, Fig. 2.10), which is a twelve frame story about a fictional industry called 'cardboard-nose' or fake-nose industry. The comic strip-like poster illustrates the Danish proverb of getting a long nose, not in the Pinocchio sense, but rather of being cheated by someone. In this case Trier comically illustrates the exploitation of a factory's workers, as they carry the daily load of the production of goods while the factory owner enjoys a lavish lifestyle at their expense, and – as an additional point – it is seen through a worker's dream at the expense of the starving Third World. The exploitation of the workers is illustrated by their noses growing long over time, in that they are being cheated out of the profits they deserve for their hard labour.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the images illustrate the growth of consumerism within society. It is clear that

⁴³ Fritz the Cat acquired his own title as late as 1969, but he had previously appeared in such publications as *Cavalier*, *Fug*, and *The People's Comics*. In 1972 a film was made by Ralph Bakshi starring Fritz as an icon of 1960s college life, the first animated movie to be X-rated. Robert Crumb was so disappointed with the film that he eventually killed off Fritz in 1972 in the story entitled *Fritz the Cat "Superstar"*, where Crumb plays off the success of the feature film.

⁴⁴ In RM performances Trier dressed up as an overweight character with a huge nose, again emphasising the link between the long nose and the cheater/liar.

Trier was inspired by the popular form of the comic strip and its ability to use humour to express serious issues pertaining to society. Trier often drew his images rather than using linocut – yet another feature linking his poster work with the comic book.

Many artists took ideas and artistic stimulation from documentary photographs and news reports which were meant to portray contemporary international issues. However, Tommy Flugt, who was a student at Den Danske Filmskole (The Danish Film School), found inspiration in films, particularly those by Russian filmmakers. Boris Karloff's 1930s interpretation of Frankenstein's monster and Sergei M. Eisenstein's infamous close-up from *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in which a nurse stands in front of the Odessa steps mid-massacre, with her glasses shot into pieces, were both poetically reproduced in linoleum by Flugt. In two of the four posters titled *Solidaritet med de lavtlønnede* (Solidarity with the low income Earners, 1971, Fig. 2.11-2.14) we find these two images. Both seem very out of place in connection with the theme when viewed on their own and knowing their source of inspiration. However, viewed together with the other images the two works to add emotive value and act as more than mere reproductions of stills.⁴⁵ Subsequently each artist brought his/her own background into RM. "We all have our own histories and ideals that we bring together, and when it works out then they [the posters] become great fun because we express ourselves in the same linoleum technique, but express ourselves widely differently" Kruse explained.⁴⁶

2.5 The Development of Røde Mor

Art and class are inseparable concepts. In all earlier class-societies each class has had its art. Art was not universal, but always class art. All art has a political function. In the bourgeois society culture is industrialised and oppression systemised. Therefore there is largely only talk of one art: the bourgeois, which expresses bourgeois ideals.

This relationship is a result of the ruling classes' culture politics, which deprives the oppressed of their own culture. In place of genuine, popular art one is providing the people with false experiences. As a part of the exploitation one is robbing the lower classes of its own artists and allows them to carry out the upper classes' art.

Mao says, "An army without culture is a listless army." Class art is part of the necessary prerequisites for an active class struggle.

The bourgeois artist and his work is part of the oppression. His dependence on capital has made him into the bourgeoisie's court fool. We sign ourselves

⁴⁵ Note the reuse of Trier's image from the first exhibition poster. Many images were reproduced in different posters with different contexts. It is not entirely clear why this is, but most likely it was easier for the public to recognise their posters and it saved RM extra work, as it would have been almost impossible for anyone to produce as many posters as RM did without reusing images.

⁴⁶ Thomas Kruse 11 November 2005

up for the other side. We want to participate in the creation of THE FREE PROLETARIAN ART.

Our society's art is created for the ruling, and the oppressed do not understand it because it is not their art. The art, which the proletarian does not understand, is therefore contra-revolutionary.

The characteristic of proletarian art is that it can be understood and utilized by the oppressed classes. Proletarian art is popular by form and content. It is a weapon in the class struggle.

Long live that art that lives in the people!⁴⁷

Thus begins the first of six A5-formatted annual catalogues produced by RM over five years (1970-1975), dated 21 June 1970, stating their unmistakably political aims which were illustrated by reproductions of their work. Marxist-Leninist views were frankly established here by the group as a cornerstone of collective practice. The RM annual publications were inexpensive to produce with their monochrome cardboard backs (Fig. 2.15-2.16) and small number of pages, nevertheless their uncomplicated black and white design efficiently highlighted the group's ideological viewpoints to its readers.⁴⁸

For the most part the catalogues were produced for the group's own use, as a keepsake of important productions and events. Nonetheless, after a couple of years they found that they had made a contribution to other smaller avant-garde groupings, such as student circles and choirs, who used the booklets, to a certain degree, as 'recipe books' for how to run a collective. "For that reason" Kruse states, "we made an effort to write as straightforwardly and as downrightly – as practically minded – as possible."⁴⁹ The catalogues encapsulate RM's experience with collective production and political art, while illustrating their work and progress with full page illustrations. Short articles explained the group's stance on a variety of subjects, which mainly took shape as political comments on popular culture and the interrelationship between art and politics. In the first issue some very important and topical images appeared, including the linocut by Trier Mørch on the inside cover, depicting a heroic worker in profile, with his fist clenched, standing in front of a banner stating: 'Long live art that lives in the people' (Fig. 2.17).⁵⁰ Trier Mørch's worker clearly relates to Majakovskij's red worker type, in a cap and blouse, and is depicted flat against the background. This image also introduces the 2004 biography on Røde Mor, thereby underlining the importance of this image's statement to the group: for the group's duration, they worked continuously towards this concept.

⁴⁷ *Røde Mor*, no. 1, Holbæk Ekprestrykkeri: Holbæk, 1970, p2

⁴⁸ The first has a vibrant red back especially significant to their political agenda; others were made in different colours such as green and blue.

⁴⁹ Kruse, November 2005

⁵⁰ The image is not signed, but has her characteristic line and style, signified by the banner in the background.

A page consisting of citations on art and society, which recurred in later issues, follows the manifesto reproduced above. First, Arne Bruun Rasmussen, a famous Copenhagen auctioneer, commented on the state of popular taste after the war. In an excerpt taken from an interview in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, Rasmussen stated that the art-buying public did not want anything but peace in their pictures, calm scenes particularly landscapes, because of the traumas experienced during the world war. This obviously contradicts what RM wanted to achieve and is countered on their behalf by Ernst Fischer on the issue of art's important relationship with society. He suggests that art can only be truthful when it displays the decay and change within a society. Hence art and artists contribute to the changing forces of society. In Fischer's words, Socialist art is superior to its bourgeois counterpart in that it inhabits "...a world historical vision of the future."⁵¹ Lastly, Mao Tse Tung is quoted: "An art for art's sake, an art, which positions itself above the classes, an art, which develops beyond politics and is independent of it, does not exist in reality".⁵² Mao's statement epitomised the group's goals and was an important part of the background from which their ideological beliefs developed. During 1970-71, RM was deeply fascinated by the Chinese Cultural Revolution because of its stance against bureaucratic Socialism, characterised mainly by the Soviet Union and its failings. The People's Republic's special emphasis on culture and art as political priorities on an equal footing with industry and material issues was a model that the artists wanted to implement in Denmark. RM agreed with Mao that "proletarian literature and art [was] part of the proletariat's and the revolution's cause, or as Lenin said, 'a small wheel and a small screw in the revolution's machinery.'"⁵³ In later years most of RM would realise the shortcomings of Chinese policies, above all, towards artists, writers and intellectuals.

A well-known image from the first catalogue, which was repeatedly used in various forms, was *Onkel HO og USA på månen* (Uncle HO and USA on the Moon, 1969, Fig. 2.18) also referred to as *Den dag amerikanerne landede på månen* (The day the Americans landed on the Moon) by Yukari Ochiai. Here, the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh occupies the larger upper part of the image, portrayed as a wise man gazing down upon Neil Armstrong, who has just planted the American flag on the moon, thereby claiming it for the United States of America. Flowing lines give the impression of a mountain or a river, which divides the two subjects. These turn into foliage further from Ho Chi Minh, and seemingly grow towards the astronaut. The picture reflects on the fact that while the Americans won the

⁵¹ *Røde Mor*, 1970, p2, Ernst Fischer quote, translated from Danish by A.G.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Chairman Mao Tse Tung quote, translated from Danish by A.G.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

race to the moon, the Vietnamese were winning at home and beating the economically and technologically more advanced Americans. A critique of the race to outer space as well as the worldwide struggle against Communism through capitalist-invoked wars – justified by the domino-effect theory – was exposed as American Imperialism. Compared to other images by group members where the Americans are generally caricatured, here the irony of the current situation was clear enough for Ochiai to state her sympathies. There is no need for her to use ridicule, as the world's status quo proves her point. On the same day the Americans landed on the moon (21 July 1969) RM painted an approximately 150m² mural on a gable wall in Holbæk commenting on their view of an absurd global situation in which the superpowers and richest states spent billions on space programs while poorer nations were starving. *Onkel HO og USA på månen* is a good example of the area in which RM created its images, somewhere between reality and fantasy, where political comment is made through highly skilful aesthetic representations.

Part of the celebration of popular diversity was the incorporation of music and theatrical performances into RM. Even at the first exhibition the group had jazz musicians playing inside the gallery space. In essence they wanted to incorporate all areas of culture, particularly working class culture, into their group. Therefore in the autumn of 1970 Røde Mor Agit Prop (RM-AP) was born, playing on the words AGITation and PROPaganda, wherein all of RM contributed through either music, dance, slides or posters. In RM's second catalogue RM-AP was explained:

When we discovered that the traditional exhibition form was too stagnant, we began to include new activities into the showroom. [...] We use the combination of music and slides to create a common experience that emphasises the political content. [...] AGIT PROP becomes an interaction between audience and RED MOTHER. [...] In bourgeois art the audience is passive.⁵⁴

Thus the combination of music, theatre and art was important in order to renew a more popular interest in art as well as in the proletarian cause. The term *agitprop* derives from the Russian cultural policy initiated by Anatoli Lunacharski, the first USSR Commissar of Education and Art.⁵⁵ Lunacharski's essay from 1903, *Foundations of a Positive Aesthetic*, is hailed by Matthew Cullerne Bown as "the single most important and prophetic essay in the pre-history of socialist realist painting."⁵⁶ Post-revolution, many avant-garde artists, such as

⁵⁴ *Røde Mor*, 1971, p6

⁵⁵ Ward, Alex, *Power to the People*, Lund Humphries: Jerusalem, 2007, p19

⁵⁶ Bown, Matthew Cullerne, *Socialist Realist Painting*, Yale University Press: New Haven; London, 1998, p29-30

Majakovskij and the Constructivists, contributed to agitprop activities, mostly with poster designs. However, agitprop art and design ranged from theatrical performances and ‘agit-boats’, ‘agit-trains’ and ‘agit-cars’ to sweet wrappers.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Majakovskij, with Meyerhold and Malevich, organised a mass spectacle, a theatre performance called *Mystery-Bouffe*, to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution, which eventually made a tour of factories.⁵⁸ These methods of bringing the art to the people were similar to RM-AP themes.

RM-AP was found everywhere, from Copenhagen to the countryside, at demonstrations against the Vietnam War and against the EEC. RM became a common sight at all types of rallies, particularly those organised by the left. The shift towards performance occurred because they saw gallery exhibitions as dull and conservative, and not reaching the grassroots audience with whom they so passionately wanted to connect. In December 1970 RM-AP’s first LP came out, *Johnny gennem ild og vand* (Johnny through Fire and Water), written mostly by Trier. It is a highly topical musical story about an American soldier in Vietnam, who returns home as a ghost. The LP had other relevant songs, such as *The bird over Rio Grande*, about Che Guevara’s death, and the historicising *Rosa Dancing*, which reflects upon Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht’s last dance before they were captured, tortured and killed by the German militia, Freikorps. The LP ends with Eugene Pottier’s Socialist march, *Internationale*, sung by the whole collective. One is compelled to reflect on the conscious parallels drawn here between the 1871 Paris Commune and 1971 RM. Though the LP was only obtainable in alternative bookshops and book cafés, it sold over 80.000 copies, which proved the group’s vast appeal to the ‘masses’. Trier Mørch designed the LP’s sleeve with the characteristic red RM logo on the front. The FNL flag, which is red and blue with a yellow star in the middle, adorns the back and represents an obvious association with Vietnambevægelsen as well as with the LP’s theme.

During 1971, the group changed the format of their working process and stopped exhibiting individually signed works. As a result, many artists stopped signing their works, and a collective workshop was set up. RM aimed to produce fully collective posters where selections of images by various artists were combined to make one poster. Although they had been doing this all along, works by individuals were, for a time, extremely rare. The main reason for taking such a step was to create distance between RM’s collective work process and person-specific bourgeois art. The individual was less important than the group and since

⁵⁷ *Utopies et réalités en URSS 1917-1934: agit-prop, design architecture*, exhibition catalogue, Centre de creation Industrielle, Paris, 1980, p15

⁵⁸ White, Stephen, *The Bolshevik Poster*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1988, p76

the workshop consisted of both professionals and amateurs who collaborated equally on the development and production of the posters, there should be nothing separating the two. In September 1971, RM stated: “Røde Mor has chosen to make collective images. By collective images we not only mean things that everyone in Røde Mor has contributed to, but also individual works that arise through shared discussion and criticism. Røde Mor will no longer sign or number its graphics.”⁵⁹ RM now started to receive serious commissions from social movements and organisations to produce overtly political posters on specific subjects, such as Feminist Liberation or protests against the Vietnam War. RM had created posters supporting these causes since 1969, but primarily in accidental ways. *Hanoi-aktionen* (The Hanoi Action, 1969, Fig. 2.19) for example was made for Studenterrådene (The Student Councils). The poster consists of images that commented on the ongoing Vietnam War and continues to point up the paradox between space travel and fighting an Imperialistic war. At the bottom Trier Mørch’s iconic female guerrilla fighter, which she reworked many times (Fig. 2.20-2.21), appears. *Hanoi-aktionen* also has two caricatures of American President Richard Nixon, a favourite figure of fun for Trier and Kruse.

The graphics group discussed ideas and motifs together, which were further developed within the whole community. Artists then went their separate ways to carve and later returned with linoleum-plates and prints, seeking approval from the collective group. Early on, the group decided communally on the linocut as the medium which they wanted to use extensively, because it was cheap, soft to cut and easy to print from. It was also simple to reproduce in a variety of printed forms.⁶⁰ Furthermore, they believed that the rough character of the prints demonstrated protest and revolt. Additionally the black and white contrast was easily reproduced without loss of grey-scale; on occasion a colour replaced either black or white. The only set criterion for individually made images was their narrative essence and an effective display of political subject matter. After many collocations, test prints and discussions, which would often take months, the finished result reflected RM collectively rather than the individual artist. The amateur hereby had an important role in production through his or her criticism, which Kruse saw as one of the most beneficial attributes of the collective.

Debatteatret (The Debate Theatre) commissioned the illustration of a collection of Socialist songs popularly named *The Little Red Songbook*, which was published on 1 May

⁵⁹ *Røde Mor*, 1971, p14

⁶⁰ On occasion RM would use offset, silkscreen and photomontage; however the expression produced by the linocut was always present. The linocuts would often be the initial technique and then prints would be sent to the commissioning organisations to be reproduced through another printing method.

1971, after Mao Tse Tung's *Little Red Book*.⁶¹ This in turn led to the publishing of *Red Mother Illustrated Songbook* later that year, which included an LP and linocuts, in conjunction with the lyrics, illustrating contemporaneous political subjects including police violence against demonstrators and Vietnamese freedom fighters. The LP was by the newly formed Røde Mor Rok Ork,⁶² which signified the establishment of RM's music group as a semi-professional rock-band. In the same way that youth rebellion balked at authority and hierarchy, the rock orchestra demonstrated a musical collective and non-soloist expression in the face of such powers. "The end of the 1960s saw the emergence of political rock bands that explicitly sought to change society, and fast and aggressive rock music emerged as both the expression of an outspoken lifestyle and an ideal medium for the transmission of revolutionary messages."⁶³ Detlef Siegfried has pointed out the transnational nature of electrically amplified music to signify, essentially, left-wing sympathies, which "represented cosmopolitanism, a do-it-yourself activity, and shared participation."⁶⁴

The first Danish rock groups were formed around 1967-8 and had literary names, such as Steppeulvene (The Steppe Wolves), Burnin Red Ivanhoe and Ache; ethnic associations with Buki Yamaz, Nana Banana and Salsa Na Ma; or jazz rock, fusion and funk in the shape of Pakhus 1 (Warehouse 1), Caracas, Secret Oyster and Cox Orange. Through exotic names and the use of an international genre, rock music became the expression of the international youth movement on Danish soil.⁶⁵ The overtly Socialist bands, Jomfru Ane Band (Virgin Ane Band), Slumstormernes Orkester (The Slum Storm Troopers' Orchestra), Røde Vilfred (Red Vilfred), Røde Lue (The Red Cap) and not least Røde Mor Agit Prop, appeared in the early 1970s. These rock bands were often the element that drew people of different classes together at demonstrations, festivals and other events staged during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In

⁶¹ Debatteatret (1970-74) was one of many political theatre groups founded during the late 1960s, which were defined as street and action theatre groups. Its performances were staged in the workplace and were made for and by workers. The plays were presented in a social realistic vein and were inspired by Bertolt Brecht's *verfremdungs* techniques, Piscator's epics, German/Russian 1920s agit-prop theatre, Dario Fo's *comédie dell'arte* and August Boal's open forum theatre – particularly the latter where the audience is drawn in to participate.

⁶² Rok Ork is a foreshortening of Rock Orchestra.

⁶³ Siegfried, Detlef, 'Music and Protest in 1960s Europe', ed. Klimke, Martin & Scharloth, Joachim, '1968 in Europe - An Introduction', *1968 in Europe – A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008, p57

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Harsløf, Olav, 'Røde Mor 1969-1978', www.roedemor.dk (All of the bands mentioned are Danish, and were widely known in the late-1960s, 1970s and 1980s)

addition, Siegfried claims that “music contributed substantially to the participants imagining themselves as part of a transnational revolution.”⁶⁶

1972 saw the RM collective transformed through inner political fragmentation. The group’s Maoists departed because they wanted a stronger emphasis on ideological sentiment and clear cut doctrine rather than a fusion between art and politics. After appearing as eighteen members in the 1971 catalogue, by 1972 only a small group remained, including Dorte Fasting, Dea Trier Mørch, Troels Trier, Yukari Ochiai, Thomas Kruse, Andreas Trier Mørch, Lars Trier, Kim Menzer, Niels Brunse and Anne-Marie Steen Petersen who saw “...artistic expression as their political idiom and weapon.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, in November an 88-page A3 formatted manuscript named *Kollektive Billeder* (Collective Pictures), which consisted of extracts from the group’s production since its formation in 1969, was produced. The introductory essay, ‘All art is Classless’, explained bluntly for the first time RM’s aesthetic emphasis:

There is [...] only one ism, which has the proletariat’s cause on its agenda, and that is social realism. Social realism is the only one that consciously works for social justice and towards the breakdown of the bourgeoisie’s cultural monopoly. That is why social realism is counted as a sort of impure art, a less good ism.⁶⁸

The publication was a portfolio of the posters and graphics that the collective had created together for the student councils, the labour settlement negotiations, the Vietnam-committees, International Forum, Danish Communist Youth, the Feminist Movement, the Campaign against the EEC, and so on. Each image either had an explanation or a commentary on its subject matter. In a national referendum in October, the Danish people had marginally voted for Denmark’s entry into the EEC. Røde Mor pointed to this defeat of the Left as a display of the disunity within Danish Socialist and Communist ranks; one of the main goals of which had historically been to stand stoutly together against the forces of Capitalism. It did not help the campaign that the left had been unable to reach out to the middle class, which was to decide the referendum, since it became clear early on that the working class would vote against it in any case. Until the referendum, RM, alongside the rest of the left, did what they knew best for the campaign against Danish entry – they produced posters for the streets. In 1970, Trier Mørch illustrated the first Danish translation of Marx and Engels’ *The Communist*

⁶⁶ Siegfried, Detlef, ‘Music and Protest in 1960s Europe’, ed. Klimke, Martin & Scharloth, Joachim, ‘1968 in Europe - An Introduction’, *1968 in Europe – A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008, pg. 66

⁶⁷ Harsløf & Kruse, *Røde Mor*, p26

⁶⁸ Ibid., p28

Manifesto, for which she made a portrait of Karl Marx (Fig. 2.23) which was reprinted for the campaign and titled *Nej til EEC, siger Karl Marx* (No to the EEC, says Karl Marx, 1972, Fig. 2.22).⁶⁹ In the original image Marx is situated on a black background. However, in the campaign poster the background is white and Marx states “No to the EEC” through a speech bubble on the right. Often images were reused for different purposes, and universal images of workers or sharp critical cartoons would reappear on any posters ranging from 1 May demonstrations to bookshop posters. The EEC poster campaign will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

The third annual catalogue contains the first of two comics on RM’s progress called ‘Røde Mor tegner og fortæller – de sensationelle afsløringer af Røde Mors hemmelige indre liv...’ (Røde Mor draw and tell – the sensational revelations of Røde Mor’s secret inner life...Fig. 2.24-2.25).⁷⁰ The comic strip illustrates the entire history of RM to date with much humour and insight. The concept is clear; the collective used the comic strip to include their audience in the processes that took place within the group. In an attempt to be open and frank, RM displayed their faults, such as their focus on theoretical ideological studies or their strict rules on how work should be done. It also showed the group’s strengths as they learn from mistakes and look towards a better way of serving the working class. One of the most obvious problems for a proletarian artist is the actual exhibiting of works, as audiences frequenting galleries are typically art connoisseurs belonging to the middle class. To bring the grassroots into the galleries and create a relationship between the working class and art, RM had to devise new ways of displaying art and new ways of interacting with the audience:

By maintaining and reinforcing the political content [...] we eventually managed to get a new audience into the exhibition halls. During three years we have organised exhibitions, and the people who came to see art in general have been replaced by those who come to see **political** art. At the same time, we put together a few travelling exhibitions and these circulated in workplaces, schools and libraries. Here we were also in contact with more and more ordinary people than in galleries.⁷¹

In only three years RM managed to bring its ideals into practice, and if one is to take them at their word RM successfully handled the ‘problem’ of exhibiting art to better reach the intended proletarian audience. By creating exhibitions that met the grassroots community in their own environment rather than merely exhibiting in galleries and museums, RM bridged the gap between the political artist and the working class.

⁶⁹ Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich, *Det Kommunistiske Partis Manifest*, translated from the 1848 text by Sven Brüel, illustrated by Dea Trier Mørch, 1st edition, Rhodos: Copenhagen, 1970

⁷⁰ *Røde Mor*, November 1972, p2-21

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p22

All six of the RM catalogues present the reader with a group statement, sometimes called *arbejdsprogram* (work programme or agenda) and other times a manifesto: the language changes over the course of time. As RM developed a clearer ideological standpoint within the group, so the formulation of an agenda followed it. In November 1972, RM wrote:

Our technique, our form, seeks a forerunner in social realism, as it has developed alongside the labour movement's history. We believe that the realistic form is best suited to uncover the contradictions in our society and provide a socialist solution to the problems. Realism shows [...] reality in a form that explains things. Those in power [...] try to disguise the contradictions. We want to expose them. We find the grotesque and satirical form suited for this. At the same time we want to show a way out, [...] we therefore believe that an expression of solidarity and optimism can be used.⁷²

The statement explains the stylistic methods of the group's work and situates it firmly on the left, yet it does not state alliances with one specific leftist vein, using 'socialist' in an unspecified manner. However, the text does distance RM from the SD government, insinuating that it is only disguising the problems within society rather than fixing them – a typical far left view.

By 1973, RM had refined and adjusted their earlier manifestoes and divided into two separate, more professional groups: a band and a graphics group.⁷³ The restructuring meant that an even smaller group was responsible for the poster production, mainly the RM graphics group focused around Trier Mørch, Ochiai and Kruse, although Trier continued to make comic strips and occasional posters. Alongside the usual minutes and announcements of the two divisions, the 1973 catalogue featured a revised version of the 1970 manifesto.⁷⁴ The revisions to the language made the manifesto easier to understand. The 1973 manifesto is less of a confrontation, although it still situates the group in opposition to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture. The revisions to the language made the manifesto easier to understand, more explanatory and it has less intellectual political rhetoric:

Art and class struggle apparently have nothing to do with each other. But in reality, art and class are inseparable notions.

In earlier societies each class had their art. But art history only tells us about the ruling classes' art, for it is the ruling classes who wrote history. Oppressors and the oppressed each had their art, which gave them their identity.

When in our society apparently only one art exists – bourgeois – it is because the bourgeoisie has monopolised even art. Fine Art is made for the bourgeoisie, while the workers are held down by entertainment.

⁷² Ibid., p24

⁷³ *Røde Mor*, 1973, p11

⁷⁴ Statement dated 21 June 1970, *Røde Mor*, 1970, p2 (reproduced at the beginning of the section)

Thus culture serves to entrench the monopoly of bourgeois power and to disseminate the bourgeois ideology within the working class. The bourgeois artist is involved – whether he wants it or not, and whether he is conscious of it or not – in this oppression.

We sign ourselves up for the other side. We will make our art available to the working class and participate in the creation of a political, proletarian art.

By political art we mean an art that describes social conditions and takes a political position. By proletarian art, we understand an art that takes a – in the Marxist sense – proletarian standpoint.

The proletarian artist's job is to lead the class struggle in the cultural field. We will prevent the prevailing ideology from spreading to the classes that are opposed to capital.

We will create art that facilitates a working class identity. An art that is a weapon in the class struggle.⁷⁵

The manifesto also appeared on a poster by Kruse (Fig. 2.26) – the first time since the group started – which illustrated the intent of the collective. It contains three figures depicting RM's cooperation with the working class, who collectively fight off the bourgeoisie, the military and other representatives of the middle and upper classes. Astonishingly, the three figures are male, although RM took great care to include female figures in their collective image. The first figure holds a guitar, the second a giant pencil and the last figure points to the miniature group of bourgeoisie representatives. The ratio between the figures' sizes invokes the notion that as the working class and RM stand together they will be stronger than its counterparts. Inspiration here was Chinese revolutionary posters.⁷⁶ The image also clearly displays the statement that RM's art was "...a weapon in the class struggle."⁷⁷ The poster was produced to promote their purpose as well as inspire others to start agitational poster workshops.

The manifesto above was the last written by the group, even though it appeared in an almost identical form in the fifth catalogue. However, from its origin as a primitive and popular picture book, the last two editions of RM's catalogues took on a much more professional appearance. This is probably due in part to the reader's ability to donate money directly to the collective from the fourth pamphlet.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the professionalization of RM, along with the rise in popularity of the LP *Røde Mor Rok Ork*, would have provided the group with more available funds to produce their annual catalogue. The two last catalogues are more akin to accounts of the past year's production. They are mere accounts of work plans and productivity of the two professionalised groups: the music (and lighting) group and the graphics group, which for the last three years consisted of Trier Mørch, Ochiai and Kruse.

⁷⁵ *Røde Mor*, 1973, p15; *Røde Mor*, 1974, p2

⁷⁶ Harsløf & Kruse, *Røde Mor*, p68

⁷⁷ This is the concluding point above the figures on the poster.

⁷⁸ On the last page of the fourth catalogue a bank account number is given for donations.

2.6 The End of the Collective Poster

RM produced most of its posters for specific organisations, movements or workers' clubs, and by the mid-1970s RM had become fully integrated with the workers' movement. Enormous record sales testified to their popularity among ordinary people. The group was even invited to take part in major exhibitions initiated by workers. One such exhibition was *Hverdagsbilleder* (Everyday Images) at Vejle Kunstmuseum in 1974. For this exhibition a new and final method of working had been decided: the artists would collectively discuss the theme for the posters then individually work out the poster designs. RM were criticised by outsiders and patrons that their posters were messy and the theme could not always be extracted from the context of the other images. The work method can be seen as a move away from the inherent collectivism that had been the cornerstone of RM from the outset. Furthermore, the new method reintroduced the signing of works and thereby reconstituting the emphasis on the individual artist so heavily criticised by RM in its manifestoes.

For en Folkets Kultur (For a People's Culture, 1974, Fig. 2.27) by Trier Mørch was produced for *Hverdagsbilleder*. In a sequence of frames, similar to a story-board rather than previous RM posters which echo the informal practices of comic strips, we see a young woman's experiences when faced with contemporary Danish culture. There is a schematic progression of the story line from the first upper frame through to the twelfth, which makes the poster easy to read. The female worker encounters the arts in its various forms. First the theatre, then the opera, followed by a modern art exhibition and finally, she falls asleep during a lecture. Entering the image's narrative via a sign giving directions to *kultur* (culture), she leaves bourgeois culture behind after six frames having been so discouraged that we see she has gone from being content and smiling to heavy with doubt and dissatisfaction. We are led to believe that this was the working class experience of 'high' culture. In the next three frames we see her encountering RM: the graphics workshop, the rock band and the street theatre. By the end of this sequence she is happy and smiling again; in other words, RM's popular imagery, music and theatre performances satisfy the grassroots. Finally, in the bottom frames she then joins the open collective and partakes in meetings, as well as a festival in celebration of a people's culture.

As seen in Trier Mørch's poster, RM imagery became, from this point till the end in 1976, less unpredictable and increasingly readable as thematic stories. The format had become more regulated and static as the images within the posters were now all the same size. In addition, the whole poster is made by one hand, in this case Trier Mørch's, and therefore displays a homogeneous outlook. This is not to say that *For en Folkets Kultur* is not imbued

with multiple meanings, for example Trier Mørch's decision to depict a female worker as her representative of the working class can only be seen as a reflection on the increasing role of women in society and specifically within the workforce. At the very end of the poster-story, the 'social-community' image appears as had become RM practice. Usually this type of image appears at the beginning, top left, or at the end, bottom right, of a poster. It depicts the moment of unity in the workers' struggle. In this case the woman has joined the rest of RM in what looks to be a 1 May demonstration. This type of image represents the coming together of different ages and backgrounds. Here, for example, we see the young woman uniting with young and old, and with an immigrant visible behind her a collective picture of the 'people' has been created.

To an extent the poster reflects upon essential ideals central to the workings of RM, and by depicting RM within the image, the development of these ideals have become reality. RM had become part of Danish popular culture and when building workers at Vejle Kunstmuseum had commented on their disinterest in modern art on display to the director: he decided to collaborate with the workers to put on an exhibition of 'everyday' images. RM was selected by the workers to represent contemporary working class culture. The group had of effect fulfilled its purpose as a representative of contemporary proletarian culture. From the outset RM's aim had been to make art accessible for the grassroots – the people – and by their inclusion into an authentic workers-led exhibition within the context of the establishment – the museum – they had overcome the gap between the proletariat and the artist. However, by turning to this new method of individualistic poster production, which had a much more popular and story-telling character, RM moved away from the enigmatic collective spirit that had been so important in its formative years. The discussions and, considering the location of the three artists in Copenhagen (Trier Mørch), Århus (Kruse) and as far away as Canada (Ochiai), the meetings became infrequent too, which eventually lead to the breakup of the graphics group (the rock band continued for a few more years). One might argue that a return to an individual-based art production lead the artists to look to individual projects and new political causes to support independently rather than jointly. The excitement and variation elicited by fitting individual images into the collectively experimental poster was gone.

Chapter 3 – Folkets Ateljé

3.1 The Swedish Art Milieu

Since the Second World War abstract art had become the norm in Swedish art circles, and by the 1950s a sense of elitism prevailed among artists as well as critics, curators and gallery owners. Just as we will see in Norway, young artists had to complete a course of study at the Academy of Fine Arts and then undergo five to ten years of intense artistic creation before they would be granted a solo exhibition, and thereby be ‘allowed’ to be characterised as an established artist. As the former owner of Galleri Karlsson in Stockholm, Bo A. Karlsson, states: “Art at that time was something for a small cluster of experts, connoisseurs, collectors with money, and hardly something for a larger audience. [...] Any unique new Swedish art hardly existed, everything was [...] abstract.”¹ It is true that most of the artists working at the time were established and primarily concerned with abstraction and non-figuration, such as Lennart Rodhe (Fig. 3.1), Olle Bonnier, Karl-Axel Pehrsson (Fig. 3.2) and Olle Baertling. There had been, however, a development after the war around the democratic idea of *konst för alla* (art for all), which spurred the establishment of Folkrörelsernas konstfrämjande (The Popular Movement’s Art Promotion) in 1947, which aspired to offer fine art for everyone.² By ‘art for all,’ the organisation predominantly meant printed works and from the outset organised exhibitions to tour the country as well as working “as a mail order company for prints sold through agents in the workplace and in associations.”³ The idea of art for the people was nothing new however, as at the turn of the twentieth-century figures such as Carl Larsson, Ellen Key and Carl Lauring contributed to popular education through their engagement with concepts of beauty in *folkhemmet* (the people’s home). The aim of these earlier practitioners was to shape better and more beautiful environments which, in turn, would lead to better and happier people. As a result, in Sweden ideas about an art for the people were, and remain, deeply rooted in egalitarian and humanist beliefs which were burgeoning at the turn of the century and again set alight after the Second World War.

¹ Karlsson, Bo A., ‘Den svenska konsten 1964-74’, Ed. Karlsson, Khilander & Astrand, *Hjärtat sitter till vänster*, exhibition catalogue, Göteborgs Konstmuseum/Gothenburg Art Museum, 1998, p6-7

² Strandell, Monica, ‘Konstfrämjandets historia’, *Konst för alla?*, *Konstfrämjandet 40 år* and *Konstfrämjandet 50 år*, exhibition catalogues, Nationalmuseum/National Museum, http://www.konstframjandet.se/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2&Itemid=22, accessed on 30 March 2010

³ Ibid.

Swedish interest in an egalitarian art was linked directly to prosperity. A neutral state during the war, Sweden emerged unharmed and immediately enjoyed a period of economic and social prosperity, with low unemployment and a lack of housing only an issue in urban areas as a consequence of increased urbanisation. The country benefitted greatly from retaining its industrial base intact and having the resources to expand its industry, thereby helping to supply the rebuilding of Europe. Socialdemokraterna (the Swedish Social Democrats, SD) remained in power between 1936 and 1976. Tage Erlander was the first post-war Prime Minister from 1946 until 1969, followed by Olof Palme who was the Education Minister during the infamous Kårhusockupationen (Student Union Occupation) in 1968. SD promoted culture as part of their political vision from the end of the 1930s, and to some extent succeeded in their aims for an egalitarian art world and cultural sphere. As artist and critic Leif Nylén put it in 2007: “The 1920s’ avant-garde was a heroic outsider. It was a marginal culture. The 1960s avant-garde was a lift into the centre. A sort of welfare-modernism.”⁴

What was it, then, that changed the Swedish art scene so dramatically during the 1960s? One major factor was the opening in May 1958 of a brand new contemporary art museum, Moderna Museet, in Stockholm, headed by K.G. Pontus Hultén. Four consecutive exhibitions at Moderna Museet changed the stalemate of Stockholm’s 1950s art scene into a vibrant and democratic art milieu. The first of these was *Rörelse i konsten* (Movements in Art) in 1961, which included work by Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely, Man Ray, Francis Picabia and Alexander Calder, most of whom had not previously been shown in Sweden.⁵ The following year, Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Richard Stankiewicz and Robert Rauschenberg appeared in *Fyra Amerikaner* (Four Americans), and shocked the art milieu to its core. The exhibition, along with Moderna Museet’s acquisition policies, became part of the so-called ‘great art debate’, initiated by Rabbe Enckell in his 1962 Academy appeal, which continued until the mid-1960s.⁶ The debate itself, spurred by Moderna Museet’s innovative methods, focused around the concept of the artwork and, indirectly, the status of the artist, while also posing questions about the role of the critic. The debate centred around the potent and still relevant question of who decides what art is – the critic or the artist. Karlsson believed that the combines shown in the exhibition were to be “the symbol for the new art climate.”⁷ The

⁴ Lykkeberg, Rune, ‘60ernes åbne kunst’, *Information*, 29 May 2007

⁵ The show attracted a record breaking audience of 70,000.

⁶ The main participants in the debate were Rabbe Enckell, Ulf Linde, Pontus Hultén, Torsten Bergmark and Ingmar Hedenius.

⁷ Karlsson, ‘Den svenska konsten 1964-74’, p8

concept of art was definitely expanded as the 1960s saw happenings, installations, mobile sculptures, environments, combines and ready-mades all descend upon an unsuspecting Swedish audience like lightning out of a clear sky. It seemed as if, suddenly, everything was possible in art.

Amerikansk pop-konst. 106 former av kärlek och förtvivlan (American pop art. 106 forms of love and despair, Fig. 3.3-3.4) in 1964 was the first American Pop art exhibition in Scandinavia, if not in all of Europe, and displayed painting and sculpture by Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, George Segal and Tom Wesselman. Moderna hereby earned an international reputation, and through contacts, associates and friends, Hultén continued to bring new and hot trends to the museum, culminating in his donation, on the occasion of his resignation in 1974, of the 'New York Collection for Stockholm' to the museum. The 1966 exhibition project *Hon – en katedral* (She – a cathedral, Fig. 3.5-3.6) was a gigantic sculpted woman painted in bright colours. Leif Nylén contemplates the democratic and motherly emphasis in *Hon* as the sculpture lay on the floor and welcomed the audience to enter the swelling belly through her vagina.⁸ Once inside there was an exhibition of works by Nike de St Phalle, Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt, as well as a bar, cinema and a slide show. *Hon* was the most remarkable and strange exhibition to be staged at Moderna in the sixties, yet by this point amusement and surprising aesthetics had lost much of their potency. The only critique was that the show represented a patriarchal view of women.⁹

The museum had changed and would no longer be merely a space for quiet contemplation. This new type of institution incorporated the audience, and as a consequence the artwork was created in and by the viewer. Moderna would take this idea even further in the experimental *The Model for a Qualitative Society* or *Modellen* (The Model, 1968, Fig. 3.7) by Palle Nielsen, where a room was filled with a mountain of rubber foam for spirited games and physical exercises, thereby making the individual's experience the artwork. It also incorporated a vision for Moderna to include and be in dialogue with the museum's youngest visitors, which it still emphasises today. From the artist's point of view the artwork's ultimate goal was to create a space where children could play freely by themselves within the museum. It thus encouraged freedom and creativity.

⁸ Nylén, Leif, *Den öppna konsten – Happenings, instrumental teater, konkret poesi och andra gränsöverskridningar I det svenska 60-talet*, Borås: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1998, p143

⁹ Ibid.

3.2 International Artistic Approaches

In Malmö, in the South of Sweden, a group of artists who called themselves Imaginisterna (The Imaginists) came together during the war and pursued an art which continued the abstraction found in Surrealism. Their inspiration was found in the work of Paul Klee, Max Ernst and Danish spontaneous abstraction. At the core of the group was C.O. Hultén, Anders Österlin, Gösta Kriland and Max Walter Svanberg, and together they published the journal *Salamander*. Imaginisterna were closely linked to COBRA; Österlin, Svanberg and Hultén took part in collective activities such as coproducing graphics alongside Karel Appel, Constant, Corneille, Pierre Alechinsky and Asger Jorn. Jorn visited Malmö soon after the war and found that their surreal fantasy creatures, made up of birds, fish, insects and sometimes women, were closely linked to Danish spontaneous abstraction which had developed during the German occupation. A pertinent example is Hultén's *Bird Song* (1950, Fig. 3.8), which uses colour and spontaneous brushstrokes to violently portray a bird. The claw-like bird figure exhibits the sort of mysticism which was closely related to Asger Jorn and the Danish COBRA artists. Hultén's bird song is more like a warning than idyllic twitter; in art historian Bengt Olvång's words, "it is clear that there was a critique of society to be found within this art – or more correctly a civilisation critique, because COBRA was anarchist..."¹⁰ One might detect in Hultén's work a sense of the freedom and unconscious spontaneity so favoured by the Danish, particularly Jorn. The colours contrast with each other to create movement and dynamism alongside the use of brushstrokes and simple geometric shapes to make up the birds who scream out from the surface. One can draw a parallel with the Abstract Expressionists in the USA, but interest in American art would only seep into Swedish art when new galleries started opening in the 1960s.

In this context one should also note another inhabitant of Skåne, the Dane Jørgen Nash, who took up residency in Drakabygget in Örkelljunga in 1960. There he and his brother Asger Jorn set up an artist colony under the name Bauhaus Situationist. In 1964 it was renamed 'Drakabygget – frihedens værksted' (Drakabygget – freedom's workshop) and became a hub for happenings and political actions. From here the periodical *Drakabygget — Internordisk tidsskrift for kunst mod atombomber, paver og politikere* (Drakabygget – Inter-Nordic journal of the arts against atomic bombs, popes and politicians) was also published during the 1960s. In 1962 Nash, alongside some German and Nordic members, was expelled from the International Situationists. Nash and his artist friends wanted to abolish the

¹⁰ Olvång, Bengt, *Våga se! Svensk Konst 1945-1980*, Uddevalla: Författarförlaget, 1983, p17

distinction between art and life through active participation in cultural as well as political actions. This was made possible through CO-RITUS, where the gap between the audience and the art was breached through the conversion of the viewer into a participant in actions/happenings of different sorts.¹¹ The group became known as ‘The Scandinavian anti-happening company’ – ‘anti-happening’ because it was felt that these types of expression were still enmeshed in the art establishment and so they therefore created their own collective approach to ritualism, encompassed in the name CO-RITUS.

The painter, printer and sculptor Torsten Renqvist was an artist who early on decided to continue the legacy of Expressionism, and was clearly against the idea that the motif had no meaning. His was a reaction against the success of Concrete abstraction and the belief in the autonomous picture as a freestanding entity, worked out from itself without any process of abstraction from the ‘real’ world. In effect, these Expressionists distanced themselves from the unclear relationship between the artist and the viewer. Renqvist, for example, felt a need for the artist to convey something which could be read in its time, that is, an output through the artist’s hand that conveyed the emotive and political views of current society. The graphic series *Upplopp* (Riot, 1956-7) and *Klot* (Globe, 1959) both express the concerns of a human being living in the political climate of the 1950s, with the Korean War, the crisis in Berlin and the 1956 revolt in Hungary visible on the surface of the prints. In Sweden, Renqvist’s art is sometimes referred to as New Expressionism, and throughout his career he upheld his belief that art was not about following trends or new fashions. The humanist artist saw art as the conveyor of human communications and not of frivolity – art was to be taken seriously. As the 1960s advanced, the instigation of expressive artistic tendencies and communicative imagery was on the rise.

3.3 The Protagonists

In the sixties an exalted optimism arose from happenings and environments where the audience took part actively, and from an interest in pop art aesthetics historicised in Leif Nylén’s book *Den öppna konsten* (The open art). Two Swedish artists consistently mentioned in connection with the emergence of the sixties’ new art scene are Öyvind Fahlström and Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, who in 1959 dressed up as ironic art critics in Sweden’s first

¹¹ The first CO-RITUS action took place in 1962 in Copenhagen, but others would follow in Stockholm, Uppsala and Malmö. “Art exists in the gap between people, art is created in the gap” the CO-RITUS manifesto proclaimed (see Appendix). It took art to the streets rather than the museums, frequently through direct occupation or anarchist demonstrations, which regularly ended in big street parties.

happening.¹² The performance might have been rooted in Fahlström's apparent discontent with art criticism after an art critic and curator of a Tachisme exhibition at the Academy, in which Fahlström was participating, had hung both paintings and the carton packaging that Fahlström had dried his brush on. Fahlström and Reuterswärd, in any case, belong to the pioneers of happenings in Sweden particularly because they both appeared in many of the happenings that took place at Moderna Museet at the beginning of the sixties. Fahlström organised the sequence of happenings that occurred at the Stockholm museum in 1964 called *Fem New York kvällar* (Five New York Evenings). This series of nights hosted mostly American artists, including Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, David Tudor, Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham. In 1961, enabled by a grant from the Swedish-American Foundation, Fahlström moved to New York where he lived for the rest of his life, but spent summers in Sweden, France and Italy. He therefore became a link between the Swedish and American art scenes.

Both Fahlström and Reuterswärd were artists who at the end of the 1950s were outside of the 'establishment,' working in painting, graphics, sculpture, objects and text. Intellectuals and poets, they worked in many techniques and styles without specialising in any particular one, and their subject matter was as wide as their knowledge. Fahlström was even a critic (and journalist) himself writing for the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. He has often been referred to as the first multimedia artist of Sweden and one should add mass media artist, as he was one of the artists of his age who manipulated the media to his advantage, appearing in an enormous number of television debates and reportages, which was not the norm at the time. He was engaged with the world around him and politics, particularly world affairs, interested him a great deal. His curiosity towards the comic strip and board games has produced some startling examples of complex hi/story telling imagery from this period. The images Fahlström produced throughout his life are far from propagandistic or overtly ideological, however he did create puzzle works later in life that present a world view leaning towards the political Left. His board game images are complex mini-universes that can take a very long time to absorb and decipher. At the 1966 Venice Biennale, Fahlström exhibited *Det kalla kriget* (The Cold War, 1964-5, Fig. 3.9), which uses a 'snakes and ladders' type game plan and exemplifies his collage of movable parts. A political model, it is divided into two areas,

¹² Leif Nylén states in his book, *Den öppna konsten*, that the first Swedish 'happening' took place at Moderna Museet in 1962. Organised by Fylkingen, an association for experimental music, theatre and art, the happening involved Knut Wiggen, Lars-Gunnar Bodin and Bo Ullman as the main propagators. (p52) However, in Karlsson's chapter 'Den svenska konsten 1964-74' a picture of Fahlström and Reuterswärd is described thus: "dressed up as art experts at a happening in 1959." (p9)

East and West, with a neutral zone in the middle, however no overtly political language exists, just a relationship between the spaces and the seemingly random elements that occupy the picture plane. Reuterswärd, on the other hand, produced art full of wit and humour, which has been called nonsense-art.¹³ One of his first playful stunts in 1963 was the advertisement he placed in the *Herald Tribune* under the Public Notices section stating ‘CRF Closed for holidays 1963-72.’

Fahlström’s interest in comics and cartoons was shared by the group responsible for the satirical periodical *PUSS*. On 1 January 1968, the first issue was published with articles illustrated or supplemented by pictures by – among others – Karin Frostensson, Lena Svedberg, Carl Johan De Geer, Lars Hillersberg and Ulf Rahmberg among others, all of whom were part of the growing movement of radical artists in the sixties and seventies. In the US, Fahlström came into contact with comic strips by Robert Crumb, and in the spring of 1968 introduced the *PUSS* group to Crumb’s first issue of *Zap*.¹⁴ From here on the periodical would use comic strips to criticise and ridicule structures of power. *PUSS* directly attacked the establishment both in artistic and political terms. As Nylén describes, “it took a shaming approach to politics, pulled down the pants of those in power and portrayed them not only symbolically, but literally, as ass-kissers or ass-fuckers, and often displayed economic exploitation as sexual abuse.”¹⁵ To a varying degree of success the artists presented material in the magazine that took on comical, expressionist, grotesque, surrealist, social realist and caricaturist characteristics depending on the artists involved.¹⁶

3.4 The Great Art Debate

In the autumn of 1962 a public debate broke out on the basis of Rabbe Enckell’s speech at the Academy entitled ‘Ikaros och lindansaren’ (Icarus and the Tightrope-walker), for which he quickly got a response from Pontus Hultén accusing Enckell and the Academy of being reactionary. As Enckell’s speech had been a defence of sorts for the continuation of classical studies, some saw this as both old-fashioned and stalemate, and questioned the openness to new ideas within the teaching at the Academy. This in turn brought attention to the methods at the Academy, which came under attack. The debate was probably initiated by Enckell’s

¹³ Karlsson, ‘Den svenska konsten 1964-74’, p13

¹⁴ Hannerz, Jan, ‘Öyvind Fahlström and PUSS’, *Efter Majrevolten – Det “stökiga” 70-talet*, Ed. Elliot, David, von Holten, Ragnar & Gunnarsson, Annika, exhibition catalogue, Moderna Museet, 1999, p30-31

¹⁵ Nylén, *Den öppna konsten*, p157

¹⁶ As this periodical has been discussed in detail in various publications and shown in most exhibitions of 1960-70s art, further discussion of it seems unnecessary here.

defence, but two books had been published in the early sixties that most likely also gave reason for disputes. These were Ulf Linde's 1960 *Spejare* (Scouts) and Bengt Nerman's 1962 *Demokratins kultursyn* (Democracy's cultural vision). These two did not relate directly to the 'great' debate, but they did make it easier to question what art was and what relationship ordinary people should have with art, or art with them. Linde's argument figured around Duchampian ideas and the birth of artwork in the viewer, the first viewer being the artist. This was often interpreted as "everything can be or become art."¹⁷ Nylén distils *Spejare* down to: "In principle, anything can be appointed by the artist / by the viewer to be seen as art, what matters is not material, technique or style, but the linguistic conventions and the communicative act. It is the viewer who makes the artwork..."¹⁸ The proposal in Nerman's book was to identify a democratic view of art and culture, even though he was accused of Liberalism in his view of culture, one that gave in to capitalist and commercial forces, by the Social Democrats.¹⁹ In general though, the book was conceived as a plea for broad and non-hierarchical concepts of culture, which in effect led to questioning democratisation within the arts in the 1960s.

In a sense the process became incredibly democratic, involving the entire Swedish population as it went nationwide through newspaper articles and television programmes. However, it cut through the art scene like a knife with those supporting Moderna Museet and the new 'open art' on the one side and those that called for a more politically motivated art that distanced themselves from art without meaning as they saw it on the other side.²⁰ By 1965 the debate had ebbed, and as Olvång has put it, "That year – 1965 – the intellectuals were cut into two halves: those who suddenly opened their eyes widely and those who closed them intensively and persistently."²¹ Just as it had calmed the cultural debate got a different focus, the Vietnam War. Invigorated and appalled, the people's movement put American imperialism, ideology and political art on the agenda, and situated the so-called aesthetic avant-garde up against political radicalism.²² During 1965/6 the Swedish art scene politicised and politically themed exhibitions started taking place mostly around Odenplan, the new gallery area of Stockholm. On the question of democratic participation, certain politically

¹⁷ Nylén, *Den öppna konsten*, p111

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p112

²⁰ The two main opposing theoretical forces were Ulf Linde on the one side and Torsten Bergmark on the other.

²¹ Olvång, *Våga se*, p66

²² Nylén, *Den öppna konsten*, p115

motivated artists wanted the audience to engage in the issues presented in the exhibitions on a level where the viewer would not be occupied with abstract or theoretical problems but with the circumstances of the world in which they lived, forcing the audience to take a stance.

Spanien annorlunda (A Different Spain, opened 1 May 1965) was an exhibition at Galerie Observatorium about Franco's Spain put together by the artists Karl Olov Björk, Börje Lindberg and Sigvard Olsson. As a whole it could be characterised as somewhere between an environment, a traditional art exhibition and an informative show. Outside the gallery a typical Spanish scene was set up, a palm and Taverna arrangement, but inside the show the audience was met by documentary photographs, paintings, sculptures, texts about Franco's regime and even a garrotte. The organisers' intention was to show the Swedish tourist the real Spain with all its ugliness and hidden monstrosities. As shocking as this exhibition was to the Stockholm audience, it was the debut of poet and artist Jarl Hammarberg that shocked the art scene.²³ *Vägra döda Vägra värnplikt* (Refuse to Kill Refuse conscription, 1965) at Galleri Karlsson took place in January 1965. Hammarberg, who is a pacifist and conscientious objector, put up a sign on the door advertising the exhibit, which is now seen as Sweden's first installation piece. After a few days the police came and took down the sign, which had been deemed incendiary by the Prosecutor. Hammarberg was later convicted and sentenced to pay a fine for each day the announcement had been up. Understandably this created an uproar amongst cultural workers, which was reported in the press and on television hereby ensuring the general public came to the gallery to see what the fuss was about.²⁴

The police struck against Galleri Karlsson again, two years later in 1967, but this time they removed almost two entire editions of prints. Marie-Louise and Carl Johan De Geer exhibited mixed media at the gallery, which included painting, clothes, textiles, lithographs and photography. The morning after the exhibition opened, the police broke into the gallery and carried out all the copies they could find of two posters made by Carl Johan De Geer, *USA Mördare* (USA Killer, 1967, Fig. 3.10) and *Skända Flaggan Vägra Vapen* (Desecrate the Flag Refuse Weapons, 1967, Fig. 3.11). De Geer was prosecuted for incitement and desecration of the national as well as a foreign national symbol. *Skända Flaggan Vägra Vapen* contains a Swedish flag that is seemingly burning with the word 'kuken' (the cock) written across the middle. Karlsson, the gallery owner, recalls that at the opening the night before the king's aide, Vice Admiral Stig Ericson said upon seeing the poster, "That's what I

²³ *Spanien annorlunda* had a record breaking 5,000 people go through it in 16 days, according to Bo Karlsson normally an exhibition would have approximately 700 visitors.

²⁴ Karlsson, 'Den svenska konsten 1964-74', p24

always said; there is COCK in the Swedish flag.”²⁵ After this last case of ‘illegal’ activity the gallery was always visited by SÄPO (Swedish FBI) an hour after each exhibition opening. Karlsson remembers, “We named them SÄPO’s Art Association...”²⁶

During this period the first protests against the Vietnam War took place by the establishment of groups supporting FNL in South Vietnam and art exhibitions such as *Viet/nam* and *Vi stöder FNL* (We support FNL).²⁷ All the exhibitions mentioned above occurred at small galleries clearly outside the establishment, which treated both artists and activists with animosity and disdain, at least in 1965-6. The discussion of art in the press had turned to more moral and political issues such as the artist’s role in society and art’s potential to influence public opinion.²⁸ The private and the political became blurred at the end of the sixties, and in October 1967 the first anti-Vietnam War demonstrations took place across the country gathering thousands of people. By the end of the year demonstrators were seen as youthful radicals. On the 20 December, police violently clashed with demonstrators in Stockholm, inspiring the young ‘image activist’ Håkan Nyberg to make a commemoration of the day simply titled *20 december 1967* (1967, Fig. 3.12). The drawing is expressive in style, with the frightened and surprised demonstrator on the left awaiting the imminent hit from the riding policeman. Nyberg depicts realistically what happened during the demonstration, the single moment when the policeman’s whip hangs in the air just about to deal the all important blow, the surprise and horror as the demonstrator looks up at the whip and realises what is about to happen. For most Swedes this incident was far removed from their collective national identity, aggressive moves against innocent people were something that happened elsewhere, not in neutral and peaceful Sweden, not in a society that considered itself inclusive of political minorities into decision-making processes. All of the action was of course caught on television and broadcast throughout the country, and the police had, in the public’s mind, no excuse. However, the end of 1967 was only the beginning of years of upheaval against society amongst a generation that had grown up after the war and were radicalised by disbelief in the egalitarianism that seemed to be failing from within. The social democratic state showed its

²⁵ The police burnt all of the posters they confiscated; therefore these are relatively rare today. Karlsson, ‘Den svenska konsten 1964-74’, p25

²⁶ Ibid., p26

²⁷ The first FNL-group was started in Stockholm in 1965, but the movement quickly spread to the rest of the country, and a coalition between the groups came into effect and was named FNL-rörelsen (FNL-movement). The ad hoc movement had no other political agenda than an end to the Vietnam War, although it has been misconceived as a leftist organisation culminating in the revelation of phone tapping and espionage by the Swedish secret agency IB or Information-bureau in the late seventies. Exemplified by the so-called IB-Scandal.

²⁸ Sigvard Olsson encouraged debate and collaboration (or use of) with the mass media in his article ‘Konstnären som opinionbildare’ (The Artists as Opinion Shaper) in *Dagens Nyheter*, 1965

fascist face through the suppression of demonstrations as well as prosecuting artists. Young idealistic students, artists and intellectuals responded with a fighting spirit.

3.5 Graphic Revolt in the Streets – Folkets Ateljé

In addition to the machinery of power, state, police, media etc. the bourgeois society also uses 'culture' as leverage. [...] And how does bourgeois art react to capitalism's oppression? Well, the middle-class artist depicts the suffering, in full compliance with the bourgeoisie's vision of war in general. He 'engages' himself but hardly for the oppressed and struggling, only for humanity. [...] The revolutionary artist must flush away integrity, which is not integrity at all, but, as we have shown, slavery under capital. He must give the picture a content which clearly shows where he stands and what he means, and this content must be appropriated to the situation prevailing within society. [...] Our task is the consciously propagandistic. The artist must leave the galleries. He must change his technique and adapt it to his purpose. Oil Painting is dead, long live the poster!²⁹

This excerpt is taken from the first issue of *Clarté* in 1968, a clearly provocative piece by Håkan Nyberg, Alf Linder, Channah Bankier and Helena Henschen. It speaks of the spirited youths that would rule the streets during this iconic year. The article's effect was tremendous; it incited and inspired artists to produce art for the people and in the streets from 1968 till the late 1970s. Folkets Ateljé (The People's Studio, FA), the namesake of Atelier Populaire in France, never managed to put together a manifesto or publicise its purpose. This article thus provides a great example of the soon to be members' ideas, encapsulating a reason and will for creating such an underground, even secretive, group. The text uses highly revolutionary language and rejected all Modernism in art, even Cubism as Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937, Fig. 3.13) was dismissed as a modernist folly. Håkan Nyberg was one of the founding members of FA, and Bankier would join too, but the loosely organised and, at least to start with, open group has no surviving member lists. This was partly due to its short life, lasting little over a year, starting in the summer of 1968 and dismantling at the end of 1969, and partly because it was an underground collective workshop kept secret for its members' sake.

The language used above is easily recognised as at least Marxist in nature, and the abandonment of all traditional methods of art production for the poster format brings to mind Mao Tse Tong's ideas, too. On this note, many claim that the mid-1960s to mid-1970s could be characterised as a Swedish 'Cultural Revolution'.³⁰ This is far from true and, even though the art scene was highly politicised and radicalised by the widespread interest in Maoist

²⁹ *Clarté*, nr 1, 1968, quoted in Olvång, *Våga se!*, p86

³⁰ Bo A. Karlsson and Leif Nylén are among those who refer to this period as a Cultural Revolution.

approaches, arts' socio-political situation did not change to the extent that this kind of statement would imply. A political and activist art idiom did gain force though, but within society the revolution never happened. The text above does, however, display a deliberate distancing between the artists and the contemporary art scene. As we have seen previously, the avant-garde was politicised by this point, but, as Olvång would surely agree, the art market still had the artist firmly in its palm. Most artists were producing art to be sold within the context of capitalism, FA on the other hand believed that by producing anonymous posters (without signature) it could avoid the market altogether, bringing art to people directly through the street as it became their *gallery*.

To understand the temperament and reasoning behind such a bold move, as denouncing painting indeed was, it is important to understand where these artists had developed their sense of political necessity. In 1965 the establishment of the ad hoc association De förenade FNL-grupperna (The United FNL-groups, DFFG) created a united front against the Vietnam War. This incorporated small groups or cells across the country disregarding political stance, as long as they agreed to the main stance that American troops should exit Vietnam and self-determination should be granted the Vietnamese people. Most of FA's members were actively involved with an FNL-group and developed their network around these groups' activities. This network would prove useful for FA, particularly for the distribution and placement of posters across the country. DFFG published their own periodical, *Vietnambulletin*, commissioned supportive posters from artists and established their own choir. The movement had three main slogans: 'The US out of Vietnam' (later Indochina), 'Support the people of Vietnam on its own terms' and 'Fighting US Imperialism.' Enthusiasm exuded from DFFG, mainly due to its young support base, and up until the end of the Vietnam War (1975) it seemed as if it was everywhere. The streets and parks quickly became their central base, and no poll would be left un-plastered with posters. In 1966 eighty-five artists and intellectuals in Stockholm signed a petition against the war, which had an emotionally charged drawing by illustrator Ewert Karlsson as its pulling power (Fig. 3.14).³¹ This is perhaps the first artist-formulated response to the FNL-movement, as it is more generally known, and the drawing at the top clearly depicts the victimisation of the Vietnamese people, summing up the sort of imagery dismissed by the *Clarté* article as bourgeois. In more general terms, DFFG was a base for solidarity work, and when the

³¹ Pontus Hultén, O.P. Ultvedt, Ulf Linde, Carlo Dekert and Jan Myrdal are amongst those who signed. All were, by this point, significant figures in Swedish cultural life. Remarkably none of the future members of FA have included their names, maybe because they were younger or because the poster's image displays a victim.

radicalisation hit its height in 1968 most of the youth organisations and sectarian political groups would emerge from the organisation.

“To turn into a revolutionary image-maker one has to work for a revolutionary movement [and] those who remain outside are capital’s skilled decorators.”³² It is no wonder that radical artists felt they had to take part in DFFG and ultimately FA. Therefore it is no surprise that both Channa Bankier and Håkan Nyberg have confirmed their participation in one of the most remarkable occurrences of 1968, the protest against the Davis Cup Match between Sweden and Rhodesia on 3 May 1968 in Båstad. There, a crowd broke out of a legal thousand-strong demonstration and sat down in front of the gates, where they were water-hosed by the police, even though, by this point, the match had been cancelled. In May the occupation of the Student Union took place as a protest against the UKAS-reform proposed by the government. Many student organisations saw this reform as an attempt to control the universities from above and ignoring all efforts made in recent years for a more open and democratic model of education. Academics and students alike did not want a university, as they saw it, run by the business world, based on commercialisation and particularly not a system where subjects would receive funding based on their potential employability. Therefore, on 24 May, students occupied the Student Union building, then in the centre of Stockholm. Though the participants were mainly left-wing, there were other liberal and conservative representatives present.³³

Their main goal was to initiate a dialogue with the Minister for Education Olof Palme, who on the second night appeared to speak to the crowd of students. When Palme addressed the assembly he used traditional social democratic rhetoric, emphasising democracy and finding one’s place in society, implying that university reform was a way for everyone to fit in and do their greater duty to society. In his speech it became evident that he was not there to listen to the students, and he alienated the students further by clearly showing his anti-Communist attitudes, as a result coming across as more arrogant than open minded. Later it was reported that Palme had been shocked by the mood of the assembly during the debate, which lasted for two hours, and called the students radicalised Communists.³⁴

³² *Clarté*, nr 1, 1968, reproduced in Olvång, Bengt, *Våga se!*, Författarförlaget, 1983, p86

³³ Word of the occupation quickly spread and students from other institutions, even cities, joined in, such as the young artists from Konstfack and Konsthögskolan. It was a major point of solidarity; however, extremist groups such as the Maoist Rebellerna (The Rebels) also gained access and started gaining power through the assembly.

³⁴ It should be understood that at the time, since the war, SD had been discrediting the Communist elements within the trade unions and in the workplace – a traditional stronghold for Swedish Communists. By 1965, Communists and student radicals were considered a threat to social democracy, and through IB the government secretly (without the knowledge of the parliament) spied on suspected Communists. This included anyone

The occupation lasted barely four days, however a group of extremist Maoists took centre stage by the second day. These were Rebellerna (The Rebels), who were a very indoctrinated group of young people, often dressed up in ‘Mao-outfits,’ who felt they were part of a revolution in Sweden that would follow Mao Tse Tung’s writings and the example of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. With this small group of extremists clear Communist politics entered the midst of the occupation, and so did its rhetoric and slogans. Member of Rebellerna, artist Channah Bankier took part in the occupation and she has recalled producing the banner that adorned the building (Fig. 3.15). Rebellerna gained so much power within the assembly that they managed to make their own Maoist slogan the main student motto: ‘It is right to revolt!’ After four days the food ran out and the police cut the power supply, water supply and communications to the building. The assembly therefore quietly decided, and without great opposition, to leave the building and take to the streets instead. In the aftermath of the occupation, Palme openly blamed the Communists and implied the students were extremists. As a consequence of his party’s unwillingness to listen there was a growing mistrust in democracy and the welfare state within the far left.

It was not during the occupation, however, that FA started their activities, despite the similarities with Atelier populaire des Beaux-Arts (AP) in Paris, including the pamphlets made during the occupation that followed the French example. These pamphlets called for workers to support the students and declared solidarity with the Sorbonne occupation, drawing parallels between Stockholm and Paris, although farfetched.³⁵ It was a Frenchman who eventually prompted the activists to create a workshop that, to some extent, emulated AP. Bengt Albons recalled the birth of FA thus,

...a Frenchman came to Stockholm and knocked on my door, who was a friend of a friend of mine. She is English but she lived in Paris a lot. And he was on the run from police in France. He had been part of the May revolt, and he came and knocked on my door and asked if he could stay with me. And so he could. He had also been involved with, at the French Academy of Fine Arts where they had occupied and made loads [of posters], they called it Atelier Populaire. Then he said, why don’t you do it too, in Sweden - Atelier Populaire.³⁶

associated with DFFG, for example. Clearly in breach with national sentiments and laws, the SD government singled out a group based solely on political views. An elucidating account of events can be found in the radio documentary by P3 (Swedish national broadcaster), *Kårhusockupationen*, produced by Erik Hedtjäm, broadcasted 18 May 2008.

³⁵ Considering the Paris occupation of the Sorbonne lasted a month, the three-four days in Stockholm was far from being radical.

³⁶ Unpublished interview with Group of Swedish artists, 7 April 2008, see Appendix I (The Frenchman has not been identified, as Albons refers to the individual as Fabricio and Håkan Nyberg names him Gerard)

The exact time this happened is unclear, but as the events in Paris occurred in May, one can conclude that it was during the summer of 1968, August by the latest.³⁷ FA set up temporary base at Håkan Nyberg's studio on Lidingö, but meetings took place in various locations throughout the one and a half years it existed. At the time Albons, who is not an artist but a journalist, was seeing the artist Kia Kullander, who attended the College of Arts, Crafts and Design and who was enthusiastic about the idea. The two of them contacted Nyberg, who was already known as an activist artist and poster maker and whom Albons knew through the FNL-group in which they both participated. The three of them then semi-officially started FA.³⁸ Channah Bankier claims to have been part of this initial core group too, which is probable considering her links with Nyberg.³⁹ Nyberg, on the other hand, refers to a public meeting that took place in late summer 1968 where film director Jean-Luc Godard and former participants of Atelier Populaire were among the French delegates, which was Nyberg's main source of inspiration.⁴⁰ Hanns Karlewski, who had been in Paris around the time of the May revolt, may also have been instrumental in linking the French and Swedish workshops. The translated French name, People's Studio, which the Swedes decided to use, is a direct acknowledgment of AP's influence on the group's formation and poster production.

During its short lifespan FA actively pursued the same technique, silkscreen, and at times style as their French predecessor. The communal decision-making type of meetings also emulated Atelier Populaire. Apparently these meetings both inspired and in the end deferred members' creativity. As the group was loosely organised there was no leader or driving force, although most have referred to Håkan Nyberg as both the most organised and at times the dominant figure within the group. He was older than the rest of the group and had the most experience with agitation through prints. It has become clear that because of its loose structure and openness to anyone who wanted to take part, FA had many 'members' that simply showed up for one or two meetings but did nothing beyond discussing political issues. However, it is possible to narrow the collective down to a core group who were the most

³⁷ Kristin Ross expands on the point that the French state arrested and prosecuted radicals that had been involved with the events that took place around May 1968, and this might help explain why the Frenchman came to Sweden. Ross, Kristin, *May'68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 2002, p60-1

³⁸ They did not, obviously, make any sort of announcement or public appearance. Nyberg has stated that the Frenchman took part in the beginning too, probably to show them how to silkscreen.

³⁹ Group of Swedish artists, 7 April 2008; unpublished interview with Channa Bankier, 9 April 2008, see Appendix I

⁴⁰ Unpublished interview with Håkan Nyberg, 10 April 2008, see Appendix I

active on the poster production side as well as responsible for ideological formulations.⁴¹ As previously mentioned, Bengt Albons, Kia Kullander and Håkan Nyberg started the group, then Channah Bankier probably entered quite quickly. Helena Henschen might also have taken part from the beginning as she co-wrote the *Clarté* statement. The couple Cilla Ericson and Hanns Karlewski joined the group probably mid-way. Later Nyberg's brother, Ola Nyberg, and his then partner Marja Ruta took part, and Anneli Jordal also participated by the end. These ten were the artistic backbone of the group, however others came in and quickly exited, and non-professionals took part in the periphery. Both Håkan Nyberg and Marja Ruta have made it clear that people came from across the country to learn how to make posters and to continue the same type of agitation locally – "It was the people's studio, not ours!"⁴²

From the outset the meetings were a space for discussion of political ideas for conception into print, often long and heated debates about current affairs and ideology would take place. The group did not share a common political stance. Members were all ideologically Left-wing but their different approaches, ranging from Socialism to Marxist-Leninism even doctrine Maoism, often created great debates about the clarity of the message and propaganda features. Some have even characterised FA as more of a political organisation rather than strictly artistic "...as the political side of the image took a great deal of precedence."⁴³ These often long meetings with diverse opinions and viewpoints were characteristic of the splintered Swedish Left at the time, during which new parties and groups were established after breaking out of the Swedish Communist Party, which also changed its name around this time, and entirely new movements were created as Maoism rose among radicalised youths. All of these different groups existed within DFFG as well as FA, which in the end led to the artists collective's downfall. Often the wording and precision of political content took up more time than the actual poster production. By the time the discussion was over and an agenda set, there was little time to actually make the poster. The actuality of the poster was important to the group and it therefore, in theory, had to be made quickly. Sometimes this resulted in certain artists working on their own, creating the image and printing it fully by themselves. At other times every small detail was discussed as sketches

⁴¹ In the two major books that refer to FA, Olvång's *Våga se!* and Nylén's *Den öppna konsten*, the group is seen in connection with the parallel running group Grupp 16, probably because many of the artists took part in both. However, the lists presented in 1983 and 1998 are identical, which implies there has been no interest in finding out exactly where the boundaries of the groups lay. Importantly, it is not the case that all members took part in both groups. These two lists also leave out certain key members, such as Bengt Albons.

⁴² Group of Swedish artists, Appendix I

⁴³ Marja Ruta, Group of Swedish artists. Channah Bankier also emphasised the discussions as tiresome, Unpublished interview with Channa Bankier, 9 April 2008, see Appendix I

were produced during meetings and the result was a wholly collective poster. It is hard to distinguish these communal works from the independent ones as nothing has been written down about the individual posters, and artists remember things very differently. In some very distinct cases it has been possible to establish who was responsible for which poster. Each poster, however, represented the group as a whole when it was placed in the street, the individual artist was anonymous. To a certain extent the idealism connected to FA practices made the artists feel that they produced posters that were representative of the Swedish people's opinions too, yet realistically this was not always the case considering the popularity of the social democrats and the minority position of the radical youth movements.

3.6 The Posters by Folkets Ateljé

According to Albons, the first poster produced was made in connection with the elections due to take place on 15 September. Olvång and Nylén support this recollection, yet Albons remembers the first poster as a silkscreen with a spread hand that contained the initials for the different parties that stood for election in 1968. "Five fingers of the same hand", as he put it.⁴⁴ *Valhanden* (The Election-hand, 1968, Fig. 3.16) portrays the notion that all parties taking part in the election were the instruments of a cufflink-wearing, royalist called 'Big Capital', as inscribed on the palm.⁴⁵ The only political party not to appear on the hand was 'new-left' Kommunistiska Förbundet Marxist-Leninisterna (Communist League Marxist-Leninists, KFML), which had broken out of Vänstrepartiet kommunisterna (The Left Party Communists, VPK) in 1967 because of VPK's allegiance to USSR. KFML was distinctly pro-China, yet not as indoctrinated as Rebellererna, and in 1973 it became Sveriges kommunistiska parti (Swedish Communist Party, SKP). The reason for its exclusion is probably due to its links with Clarté, which acted as a youth organisation for the party in its early years. Both Nyberg and Bankier were involved with Clarté and the newly founded party – it might have been seen as the only credible party in the election. Note that the fingers on the hand all have the same hats, big noses and open mouths that poignantly reflect both propagandistic representations of bourgeois appearance and traditional politicians' suit-and-tie.

The poster that drew more attention and perhaps made the public aware of FA is the poster campaign against Högern's (The Conservative Party, H) election posters. *Arbetarmakt*

⁴⁴ Group of Swedish artists, 7 April 2008; However, Håkan Nyberg refers to *Arbetarmakt* as the first poster.

⁴⁵ The parties on the poster are: Kristdemokraterna (Christian Democrats, KDS), Högerpartiet (The Conservative Party, H), Centerpartiet (The Centre Party, C), Folkpartiet (The Liberal Party, Fp), Vänstrepartiet kommunisterna (The Left Party Communists, VPK) and Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party, S). *Storfinans* literally means big business or big finance.

(Worker's Power, 1968, Fig. 3.17-18) was a pastiche of the Conservative Party's poster, where a clean hand and a dirty hand meet in the middle to signify the union of capital and workers. In response, FA made a massive hand whose thumb crushes down on a stereotypically suit-wearing man, which was pasted on top of the election poster.⁴⁶ Nyberg believes this was the first poster as he recalls the Frenchman being present when the poster was physically made, helping the inexperienced Swedes with the 'new' silkscreen technique.⁴⁷ The action feature of the process, attacking the party directly by defacing their poster, would be an important part of their idiom, as they created posters that were to be placed in the streets and never to be sold.⁴⁸

The direct attack and destruction of the Conservative Party posters around the country not only led to the group firmly establishing itself as a left-wing group, but it established the necessity of keeping the individual artists' participation secret. The underlying idea was to create posters that circumvent the idealisation of the individual over the community as well as evading traditional means of display and production to serve the ideological cause, seeing Atelier Populaire in France as their direct predecessor. Avoiding signatures and the individual artist's hand, they used a stamp to distinguish their particular work. As most of the posters that survive do not have the stamp (Fig. 3.25), however, this might have only applied to the posters that actually went out to various groups to be pasted up.⁴⁹ *Arbetarmakt* situated FA on the far-left, but it also insinuates the revolutionary spirit evident within the group. The worker's hand crushes down the bourgeoisie, violently implying a coming dictatorship of the proletariat. It is known that Nyberg was a member of the Maoist KFML and Channa Bankier was a member of Rebellerna. As such, it seems clear that FA's political emphasis was centred on Maoist communism and a somewhat romantic idea of a revolution from below from the outset.

A poster against the Olympics in Mexico was likely the second poster to have been made by the group, as the Olympics took place in mid-October 1968 in Mexico City (Fig. 3.19). The poster protested against the Mexican regime which had opened fire at protesting

⁴⁶ Ulla Wennberg remembers having been part of a group which put up the posters in Uppsala.

⁴⁷ Apparently the paper got caught and the Frenchman cautioned "Careful with the paper" and because of this they called the person holding the paper in place 'careful'. Håkan Nyberg, 10 April 2008

⁴⁸ Except for the last poster made in connection with the collective, Ola Nyberg's poster in support of the striking miners at LKAB, see Fig. 28

⁴⁹ This is why it is difficult, from the collections at Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm and the posters remaining in artists' hands, to identify what posters actually belong to the group. The selection presented in this thesis is therefore a combination of identified examples by the artists through encounters with the author, collections donated by artists to collections and then said to be part of FA, and the author's own judgment when viewing posters in collections.

students, reportedly by turning tanks against them.⁵⁰ Most of FA's former members claim that an Atelier Populaire poster inspired *Mexico 1968*. Bankier and Hanns Karlewski came up with the idea, but Bankier does not remember any direct link with a particular AP poster. The link is made evident by the fact that the horrible event took place in October not May 1968. However, of all FA's output, this poster is probably the closest in form to the Beaux Arts examples. *Votez Librement* (Vote Freely, 1968, Fig. 3.20) is an unmistakable precedent using the same barrel of the tank's canon format.⁵¹ Bankier explained: "...it was totally inspired by the French posters. We did the black and white and it was right, and the lines were connected."⁵² Initially one thinks that the tank has been cleverly made to look as if it has five muzzles, yet on closer inspection another tank appears behind the initial tank. This associates the image with a realistic representation of ideas. FA did mostly produce realistic representations rather than art currents that, as seen earlier in the chapter, had gained immense sway in Sweden. The image had to be explicit. When people passed by the poster it had to be taken in and understood easily and quickly. This quick, flash effect was in part the reason, one would think, for their use of fluorescent colours, but it has been pointed out that the collective also used whatever materials they could procure. Since they financed the production themselves, colours and materials were often provided by friends and contacts. However, utilising colour to help the messages stand out must have been a concern.

At Christmas 1968, a Teenage Fair was to take place in Stockholm after its success the previous year in Gothenburg, but even in 1967 it had been faced with anti-capitalist and anti-commercialist protests. The fair was meant to showcase youth culture, including fashion, cars, magazines and other commercial items. When the fair opened in Stockholm it was seen as a means of exploiting the teenage generation, which was now viewed as a growing market in commercial terms. The fair was modelled on American examples, thus further agitating Swedish youths, as they saw American commercialism as ultimately wicked and unjust. The protesters organised themselves into the groups *Alternativ Jul* (Alternative Christmas), *Jul nu* (Christmas now) and *Stoppa tonårsmässan* (Stop the teenage fair). FA made a poster for the latter, simply stating 'no! to capitalism's teenage fair' (Fig. 3.21). This poster was actually made by one of the non-artists of the group, which might be why it looks so different from the rest of their production. *Hey* was a glossy teenage magazine at the time and the word 'Nej!',

⁵⁰ On 2 October 1968 a demonstration at Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco in Mexico City was attacked by the military, where hundreds were killed and thousands arrested. The demonstration did not only contain students, but academics, children and workers, yet former FA members referred specifically to students.

⁵¹ The comparison between FA and Atelier Populaire will be addressed in the last chapter of this thesis.

⁵² Author's interview with Channa Bankier 9 April 2008

meaning no, was taken directly from that example. Olvång's book presents another poster as FA, *Stoppa Mässan* (Stop the Fair, 1968, Fig. 3.23) by Carl Johan De Geer, but this has been discredited by both Albons and Nyberg as false. If one compares the two, it is obvious why this might have happened: The poster is simple and uses only one colour, and the text, "Not a penny, not a handle to luxury consumption", initially sounds as if it could be FA rhetoric. When compared to the more overtly political, "No! to capitalism's teenage fair", it is rather less striking, and furthermore De Geer's poster is less propagandistic. In the FA poster the viewer is forced to pay attention to the girl with the anti-capitalist umbrella. It is more attention-grabbing and it seems that by this point FA was coming to terms with the direct and simple language they had to use in the streets, whilst De Geer's poster seems to be a glorified announcement. The teenage fair poster by FA also turns the fair's Americanism on its head by displaying an aggressively pointing woman in the same pose as Uncle Sam in the famous 1917 recruitment poster by Flagg (Fig. 3.22). Finally, it echoes the 1964 Pop art exhibition poster by Roy Lichtenstein (Fig. 3.4).

One of the posters most likely to have been made during the first half-year was *LO driver på* (LO push forward, 1968, Fig. 3.24). It was printed in fluorescent pink and shows a hand whipping a row of workers, thereby forcing them to push forward. Their backs turned to the viewer, the seven workers seem to be going in unison, which reflects on the alienation within the increasingly mechanised world of the working class and their toil under Capitalism. The hand that whips them represents their own trade unions, implying that Landsorganisationen (Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO) is in bed with capital. They now exploit their own workers on behalf of the employers. The text is taken directly from LO's 1960s seductive slogans. "LO had a campaign that focused on LO's push for correct work environments, for correct pay and so on. And then we did the three-tailed-whip which is pushing the workers forward [...] we wanted to provoke, it was a provocation. This, LO push forward, was an extreme provocation. They were very pissed, yes."⁵³ The anti-trade union view has to be seen in connection with another poster by the group from around the same time, *§ Kollektivavtal* (§ Collective agreement, 1969 Fig. 3.26), which even more sharply commented on the relationship between LO and their counterpart Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen (Swedish Employers' Confederation, SAF). FA wanted to engage with all sides of popular culture and in this poster they used the comic book figures Donald Duck and Batman as representative of LO and SAF respectively.

⁵³ Group of Swedish artists, 7 April 2008

The poster text, taken from The Concrete Workers' Union agreement, states: "Collective Agreement: In compliance with the overall contract terms the employer owns the right to manage and distribute the work, to freely hire or dismiss workers and to use the workers, whether they are organised or not."⁵⁴ It refers to a much debated clause in the collective agreement between LO and SAF, commonly known as Paragraph 32, which was included in all agreements nationwide. In FA's view, and the far left's too, LO had betrayed the working class by making this formulation part of an agreement which all trade unions across the country was now forced to accept.⁵⁵ In the poster LO is represented as Donald Duck riding on the back of Batman, whose bat symbol has been replaced by SAF. Donald Duck holds on to Batman's mask as if he is holding on to a pair of reins, in order to control the much bigger and muscular superhero who grins while thinking about the paragraph. The Duck's expression appears to be carefree or, considering his crossed eyes, stupid. The image illustrates the concern that LO was cooperating with SAF rather than working for the workers by trying to tame the beast. The clause battle was also seen as an example of the Social Democratic Party's policies to work within capitalism at the expense of the working class. The paragraph number, which is missing, was not included due to the fact that the text was taken from a local agreement where the number was different from the collective agreement.⁵⁶ Stylistically this silkscreen uses the popular form of the comic strip figures, introduced initially by pop art to Sweden. It has been noted that pop art was mostly used for political purposes in Sweden rather than mere comments on the growth of commercialism within society. Here, clearly, the American comic figures have been used for a political purpose and even exploited for their connotations.

The next poster to be produced must have been a seemingly straightforward propaganda poster (Fig. 3.27) followed by the famous *Expressen löpsedel* (Expressen Placard, 1969, Fig. 3.29) and *ASEA lik* (ASEA corps, 1969, Fig. 3.28). The first example simply informs that "Asea supports the racist regimes in southern Africa through the Cabora Bassa Project." There is no image, no artist's hand visible, just the information given. As far as it is known this poster is the only poster that contains a type-set statement. It is purely a declaration of propagandistic facts about the Swedish company ASEA (now ABB) and its bid for a contract to build power conversion stations in South Africa and Mozambique, which

⁵⁴ Translation by A.G., the specification of the trade union was made by Håkan Nyberg

⁵⁵ The Paragraph was later removed from the agreement after much petitioning and not necessarily because of the poster's impact.

⁵⁶ Håkan Nyberg stated that the number was irrelevant as the general public would have known what agreement the poster was referring to.

were to be connected to the proposed hydroelectric project in Portuguese Mozambique, at Cabora Bassa. "...ASEA was world-leading in the cheaper and more efficient technology of converting and transmitting high-voltage direct current."⁵⁷ ASEA's involvement, reported in May 1968, together with the Rhodesia tennis match indirectly showed the Swedish government's support for white minority regimes in southern Africa. In 1969, leading opposition parliamentarians wrote scorching articles about the Swedish Government's inability to stop ASEA from working inside an apartheid state such as South Africa and a colony of Portugal. These southern African regimes were predominantly in clear ideological opposition to the humanitarian beliefs of the Swedish state and people; it was therefore seen as the government's responsibility to put pressure on the company to withdraw its bid.

The issues within the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and the FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) guerrillas was first raised by journalist Anders Johansson at *Dagens Nyheter* in the early sixties, who "...played a prominent role in the Swedish solidarity movement with South and Southern Africa."⁵⁸ Tor Sellström states that Johansson wrote reports from Mozambique in April/May 1968 and was the first international journalist to gain access to liberated FRELIMO areas of the country. Johansson wrote about Sweden's potential financial interests in the Cabora Bassa project in his 'Vi måste befri Afrika' (We must liberate Africa) in *Dagens Nyheter* on 22 April 1968. "At the time, it was [...] not yet publicly known which particular interests they represented," according to Sellström.⁵⁹ By the beginning of 1969 it became clear that the government was not going to take action against ASEA, which led to further criticism by left-wing youth of the Social Democratic Party as the government's refusal to intervene was seen as an alliance between the social democratic government and Swedish export capital. When in February 1969 the President of FRELIMO, Eduardo Mondlane, was assassinated the issue entered public debate fully.⁶⁰ Liberal party member, Per Ahlmark, openly questioned Trade Minister Gunnar Lange in parliament about ASEA, but Lange was very shrewd in his reply.⁶¹ When ASEA workers were told by management that jobs might be lost if the bid did not go through, comments from LO Chairman Arne Geijer were astoundingly not forthcoming.⁶²

⁵⁷ Sellström, Tor, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Volume 1: Formation of a public opinion 1950- 1970*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, Elanders Gotab, 2003, p487

⁵⁸ Ibid., p485

⁵⁹ Ibid., p487

⁶⁰ Ibid, p499

⁶¹ Ibid., p490

⁶² ASEA actually withdrew from the bid on 3 September 1969.

This only sparked more fury and in FA's case, a series of posters, which was the only full poster series the group produced. "We did a whole campaign of different posters that we put up...which culminated in the [fake] advertisement, but this was also the most complex as it had to be put up at three in the afternoon, when the newspapers came in [...] then we could swap them,"⁶³ Håkan Nyberg explains.

FA's main success, at least in terms of the attention it received, was the fake advertisement placard for the tabloid newspaper *Expressen*, which the group managed to send across the country through contacts in KFML and the FNL-groups. This poster was made at Kågelbanan, part of Södra teatern (a theatre and music venue in Stockholm), where someone connected to the group worked. Here the poster was made in one night. Because the poster was put up in the middle of the day, a few people got caught in different places across the country, (Gothenburg, Uppsala and Stockholm) but no one knew where the poster originated and by whom it had been made. The paper with the header came from inside the newspaper itself, and is therefore identical to the actual advertisements by *Expressen*. "Genocide Mozambique, the government agrees, ASEA profits" states the main text. On the right side the advertisement stresses "Support FRELIMO" above a framed notice, which says one should look inside for the middle section. The fake placard could, except for its ideological rhetoric, have been a real advertisement for the tabloid. It uses the same type of short and easily understood language and the set up is similar. The only sign here of the subversive nature of the piece is the cut out letters, obviously done by hand as the letters differ in thickness.⁶⁴ The poster's meaning is clear from the text presented: the killings in Mozambique are seen to have been approved by the Swedish government, and the Swedish company then profits by providing its services. The poster then, does not only point a finger at ASEA and the government on this particular issue, but connects the affair with the wider discontent with the links between big capital and the Social Democratic Party.

Alongside this poster *ASEA lik* focuses on the fact that ASEA indirectly supported the killing of Africans through its involvement in Mozambique and South Africa. It shows a simple skull with the text 'ASEA corpse – Mozambique' inside its open cavities, expressing a direct link between the Swedish company and the killings. By using the contrasting purple and yellow, the image becomes a disturbing hollow thing. This poster was probably made by

⁶³ Håkan Nyberg, 10 April 2008

⁶⁴ Cilla Ericson claims that the first version of this was carefully cut by Karlewski and herself, but for some reason it was lost before the printing stage and ended up being cut by Håkan Nyberg. No one else has mentioned this fact. Unpublished interview with Cilla Ericson, 4 April 2008, see Appendix I

Anneli Jordal as it has appeared in recent exhibitions under her name rather than FA, however in interviews it has been referenced as part of FA several times. This might be due to the fact that there were disputes about the individual over the collective near the end of FA, as certain members wanted to publicly display, even in exhibitions, their connection with the group. However, this directly contradicted the group's purpose.⁶⁵ *ASEA lik* is one of the simplest posters produced within the group, yet its simplicity makes it very effective. The hollow skull is recognisable instantly as a warning sign and with little text it is very effective as a political poster. The company has here become the symbol of death through electricity, as the poster has a voltage symbol inside the mouth of the skull.⁶⁶

The campaign against the ASEA deal was, in effect, the highlight of FA production, as it turned the public's attention to the topic of southern Africa and overturned the machinery of advertising to suit their goals. By replacing the real *Expressen* placard across the country, FA managed to stage a coup d'état on the big business which was the newspaper industry, and particularly that of the tabloids.⁶⁷ By making the tabloid overtly political, they questioned the tabloid's validity and the selling of papers by promoting hollow and superficial events and personal stories as big news for mere profit. The newspaper did report the incident to the police and dearly wanted prosecution, but since the poster was not signed, not even with the usual FA stamp, and the runners had no idea where it came from, nothing came of it. The chief editor stated that the action against the paper was an attack on freedom of speech, and the newspaper board was furious. *Expressen* had, in effect, been linked to anti-capitalist attitudes and a critique against the government, even though it was clear that the placard was indeed fake.

⁶⁵ Hanns Karlewski was accused, by Albons, of having taken *Mexico* to the left leaning newspaper *Aftonbladet*, where it was printed as made by Karlewski in FA. I have not found evidence of this, but Håkan Nyberg has also stated that there was a major dispute between himself and Karlewski on the issue of personal recognition of work produced within the group.

⁶⁶ This image is even more interesting when it is known that ASEA built 9 of 12 of the nuclear power plants in Sweden. If it was not for the text this could be an anti-nuclear poster instead.

⁶⁷ It might have been an accidental incident that the placard was made with *Expressen*'s paper, however it seems unlikely that FA would attack any of the more serious newspapers as they were reporting on the issues already. The tabloid was therefore a more appropriate target for their action. It must be pointed out that the creation of the poster happened very quickly, compared to the other posters that came into being after long discussions, therefore it seems likely that the paper was donated to the group and the poster was there after thought out and produced almost the same night. Every artist interviewed have pointed to this poster as having been done in a rush.

3.7 Unconfirmed Posters

There are posters that stand out because they have been mentioned in interviews, reproduced in books or donated to collections under the assumption they are FA posters. This section will therefore address some of these posters likely to have belonged to the group's production. The first of these, *Skamgrepp* (The Grip of Shame, 1968-9, Fig. 3.30), might have been made by Ola Nyberg, as he recalls making a poster for the American deserters in Sweden.⁶⁸ In 1967, the first American army deserter came to Sweden, probably from West Germany, and more followed throughout the Vietnam War. The deserters applied for political asylum when they arrived in Sweden, however the soldiers had to prove to the Swedish authorities that they would be sent to Vietnam if they had not escaped to Sweden. This was a sore point because of the Swedish government's relationship with the American administration. *Skamgrepp* implies that a deal between Sweden and the US was made to ensure it would be difficult for American deserters to gain sanctuary in Sweden. The dollar-sign in the title further stresses a monetary link between the two countries, and a reason for 'little' Sweden to comply with American demands on this point. Sweden had a longstanding tradition of allowing political refugees refuge within its borders, of which the most notable example is the Danish Jews during the Second World War.⁶⁹ Furthermore, since 1965 Sweden had experienced an influx of immigrants from southern Europe, especially Greece after the military junta had overthrown the government there. Sweden was one of the countries that was most critical of the American intervention in Vietnam, from 1965 onwards criticism from all political sides urged the government to make an official announcement on Sweden's position in relation to the war in Vietnam. On 21 February 1968, Education Minister Palme attended an anti-Vietnam War protest at Sergels Torg in Stockholm, where he made international news and incited controversy by walking next to the North-Vietnamese Ambassador to Moscow, Ngyuen Tho Chan. If the opposition had wanted a clearer Swedish statement it would have been hard to come by.

In May 1967, the Russell Tribunal took place in Stockholm. It was an inquiry into American war crimes in Vietnam organised by Lord Bertrand Russell and other leading European and American intellectuals.⁷⁰ Prime Minister Tage Erlander tried to discourage the meeting, but he could not prevent it from going ahead. It might have been in connection with

⁶⁸ Author's interview with Group of Swedish artists 7 April 2008, see Appendix I

⁶⁹ During one enormous operation in 1943 almost all of the Danish Jewry were saved from Nazi prosecution after Danish government officials learned of the Nazi intent to deport Danish Jews to concentration camps.

⁷⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Stokley Carmichael and Peter Weiss were among the tribunal members that visited Stockholm.

this that *Skamgrepp* was produced. However, though the diplomatic relationship between Sweden and the United States of America was frosty on the outside, the Swedish government still saw it as necessary to cooperate with America on questions of defence against the Soviet Union. When the American soldiers entered Sweden for political asylum, they were not automatically given permission to stay. Stipulations were set up by the Swedish government, whereby the poster was produced. The government was unwilling to approve all deserters directly, for example by 1968 only approximately 100 deserters had been granted asylum on humanitarian grounds and some had even been sent back to the United States.⁷¹

The handshake between Sweden and the US, represented by their national symbols, squeezes the blood out of the anonymous figure that lifelessly hangs between their hands. The symbolism between the dollar-sign and the draining of the figure can be related to American Imperialism that the Vietnam War was seen to represent in earnest. It therefore portrays Sweden as colluding with Imperialism. The image is well thought out and it is clearly produced by a skilled artist. It represents suffering through the collapsed figure and is highly expressive in its conception, particularly in connection with the slogan-like text: “Political asylum for American Vietnam War deserters!” The simple left-wing poster-language of the image combined with its emotive style seems to justify the conclusion that it was made by a FA member, Nyberg for example. However the 1970 image made by Håkan Nyberg is radically different though thematically similar. *Kambodia, Laos, Vietnam* (Fig. 3.31) is much more forceful and uses, as seen before, the American Uncle Sam stereotype to emphasise American imperialist intentions. It is not enigmatic and has less empathy with the suffering man than the humanist *Skamgrepp*.

Another unsigned and unstamped poster that might have been made by FA, which was brought to the author’s attention at Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm, is *EM 69 Aten* (European Championships 69 Athens, 1969, Fig. 3.32).⁷² The simple representation using only two colours seems extremely close to FA’s production. FA was sometimes printed at Apoteket, an old pharmacy made into a café, gallery space and meeting place, which had a makeshift printing workshop in the basement. Apoteket was a gathering place for young activists, and alongside FA other groups operated there, such as Grekiska och Svenska Kommittén för Greklands Demokrati (Greek and Swedish Committee for Greek Democracy).

⁷¹ ‘It’s Not All Coming Up Roses For U.S. Deserters in Sweden’, *Reading Eagle*, 10 November 1968, p55, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1955&dat=19681110&id=FcotAAAIBAJ&sjid=-aAFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6159,5298044>

⁷² Olle Halldin, curator of prints at Kungliga Biblioteket, said this was by Håkan Nyberg; however, it might have been donated by Nyberg in 2007 and therefore assumed to be by him.

The Greek exiles would quickly learn about FA, and Ola Nyberg recalls helping and teaching exiled artists to use the silkscreen technique for their own posters.⁷³ This was spurred by the fact that FA had produced at least one poster criticising the military junta in Greece. Before 21 April 1967, when a group of military Colonels seized power in Greece by staging a coup d'état, tourism had been flourishing in Greece. Therefore it was crucial for pro-democracy and anti-Fascist groups to attempt to prevent Swedes from visiting Greece, as this would only support the acting regime.⁷⁴

This particular poster focuses on the 1969 European Championships in Athletics, which took place in Athens. The poster is mainly in blue and white, the national colours of Greece and represents the tourism-promoting view of the idyllic Greek islands landscape where the houses have blue roofs and white walls. When the military junta took control of the country the image of democracy was shattered and, to most external sources, it was clear that a Fascist dictatorship had taken its place. This pointed to the not too distant European experience of Nazi Germany with the swastika symbolising Fascism. Imposing this symbol over the map of Greece likens the situation to that of German occupied areas during the war. The flag at the top, although lacking the yellow characteristic cross, represents the Swedish delegation to the championships, probably insinuating collusion with the regime if the team competes. *EM 69 Aten* is at first glance seemingly simple, but for a Swedish viewer it would have brought forth memories of the nation's somewhat tarnished reputation after the Second World War when it was accused of having aided the Nazi occupying forces surrounding it. The poster therefore urges the Swedish viewer not to make the same mistake again and to place pressure on athletics organisations not to take part as well as not travel to Greece even if the country appears peaceful from the outside. This last point is further emphasised by the shaded shadow appearance of the swastika.

⁷³ Swedish Group of artists, 7 April 2008

⁷⁴ Sweden, alongside the other Scandinavian countries, dealt harsh criticism to the Colonels' Regime in Greece. Many high-profiled exiles took refuge in Sweden during junta rule (1967-1974) amongst these were the politician and future Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, who set up the Panhellenic Liberation Movement whilst in Sweden. Therefore the radical and political weight of the exiles from Greece cannot be understated in connection with the Swedish youth movements. Amongst the exiled Greeks and the radical Swedish youths there was a common enemy – the Americans – as many Greeks blamed the US for backing the coup and instituting the Fascist regime. There was a tremendous solidarity with the political refugees from Greece as the situation was seen to have crushed the cradle of democracy.

3.8 LKAB – the final people’s poster

“One of the only really right ones, [...] a collective work and still very good, and artistic. Ola made a good conclusion...”⁷⁵ Håkan Nyberg thus complimented his brother Ola with having created the final poster associated with FA, *Stöd Arbetarna vid LKAB* (Support the Workers at LKAB, 1969, Fig. 3.33). Appearing in *Clarté* and having been reprinted several times, the LKAB poster was the only poster made within the collective atmosphere of Folkets Ateljé to be sold. The income, however, did not benefit the artist or the collective, but the cause for which it was made, the striking miners in the north of the country.

The fact that the poster was sold, in itself went beyond the ideas of the group to do immediate works on current issues and themes followed by instant placement in the streets where everyone could benefit from the posters and hopefully be inspired to take action. Yet the LKAB poster, to an extent, proved the competence of FA posters to convey political messages aesthetically to the people. Had the collective managed to continue working together, with their differences set aside, FA may not have been almost forgotten. As Håkan Nyberg points out in his statement above, the collective method had finally reached its height. The result was a print that worked in every way, as a motivational and propagandistic piece as well as a work of art that normal working class people would want to own. It was no longer a mere rushed and quickly produced poster that would be planted on every available lamp post or empty wall, the FA poster had become valuable as something more. Yet this poster is still not signed by an individual or by the collective, it is truly a people’s poster.⁷⁶

Some of the initial members of FA had withdrawn from the group by the end of 1969. Yet there was a major reason and some less vital reasons for the group’s final split and dismantling. The biggest cause was the divergences in ideology that the group withstood for one and a half years. The continuous conflicts within the group had finally managed to exhaust most of the participants, the endless ideological struggles to get to the creative process and the final product was too much for some to handle. Channah Bankier tired quite early in 1969, and left the group to focus on her own artistic creations. Marja Ruta and Ola Nyberg had started a family, and Ruta slowly withdrew from the group’s increasingly clandestine environment. Within FA some of the artists wanted individual acknowledgement and recognition for their work as FA members, and offers had been made to exhibit in a

⁷⁵ Håkan Nyberg, 10 April 2008

⁷⁶ It is probable that it was not signed by Ola Nyberg because it was part of FA and not stamped or signed as FA because it would be sold for a purpose and then it would become publicly known who the FA were. Considering all of their campaigns and illegal poster plastering it would be in their best interest not to be known at this point.

gallery space.⁷⁷ However Håkan Nyberg and others still believed in the initial idea and structure of the group as anti-individualistic. The instantaneous work method did not always lead to art meant for contemplation, but rather art that enticed and inspired, rebelled and provoked. When they received an offer to exhibit FA works Hanns Karlewski and Cilla Ericson were less motivated by the strictness of dogmatic politics than by a wish to enter the art world with art that did not conform, yet spoke to people of the issues that surrounded them. By the end, artistic differences had also become an issue as some of FA members wanted to develop FA into a group that produced images less offensive and more conformist than earlier works. Marja Ruta remembers that at the last meeting she attended, Anneli Jordal presented an idea where the poster was full of flowers, and at that point Ruta decided to leave the group: “It was decorative, and then the whole idea was gone.”⁷⁸

FA’s importance within Swedish art history is probably not huge, but the group has unfortunately fallen into obscurity. The importance of their posters, I hope to have shown, is the social history they portray. It is clear that not all of FA posters were carefully made, but the idea and the currents of the time during which they were made give them historical value. Even though, today the posters are being sold at prices unimaginable – if not, strictly undesirable – to FA artists at the time. Furthermore, the group represented a different poster language from the rest of the Swedish art scene, probably more radical and overtly political, but FA could afford to say whatever they wanted as no one knew who its members were. FA decided to use a realistic and expressive style, one traditionally used in propaganda posters. The interesting thing about the result of FA creativity is the method they used, so akin to AP in France. The collective procedure seems to have been both challenging and exciting, yet only a few went on to join other collectives, such as the previously mentioned Grup 16. In more ways than one FA artists felt, like other disillusioned ‘1968’ activists, that assemblies and collectivist approaches had served their experimental purposes but no great gain had come from it – rather arguments and fighting had drained the ‘revolution’ out of them.

⁷⁷ Cilla Ericson, 2008

⁷⁸ Swedish Group of artists, 7 April 2008

Chapter 4 – GRAS

4.1 Norwegian Late Modernism

After the Second World War Norwegian artists vigorously embraced abstraction and the art scene divided into two competing fields: the continuation of Elementarism and Constructivism, motivated by French *Art Informel*; versus the continuation of Expressionism and Surrealism, seen through an interest in Abstract Expressionism. The experience of the artist was seen by the somewhat limited Norwegian art milieu as *the* single validated form of expression in the arts up until the 1970s. Therefore Abstract Expressionist artists, who were focusing on an intuitive process of painting based on their inner experiences and working in isolation, became very popular in Norway. For these artists, the media in which they were working – painting, sculpture, graphics and so on – was kept separated from one another, which meant that an artist was most likely to work within one medium rather than to experiment across the artistic field.

Nevertheless, a fierce debate took place during the 1950s and 1960s between art historians, art critics and artists about whether or not non-figurative art was applicable to Norwegian sensibilities. The outcome was that non-figuration established a strong foothold in Norway and, by the late 1960s, simultaneous with the formation of the GRAS workshop, non-figuration was considered *good* taste and *good* art by the majority of the establishment. A consequence of the introduction of lyrical abstraction or *Art Informel* in Norway was a more general acceptance of non-figurative painting, even though Formalism had been the preferred style prior to Jakob Weidemann's 1961 *Woodland-floor series* exhibition in Kunstneres Hus (The Artists' House).¹ Weidemann and his followers intertwined a national romanticism of sorts with French lyrical abstraction, which in Norway was named 'nature abstraction' and loosely referred to as the French School after its *Art Informel* origin. This predominantly Norwegian form of abstraction became both popular and dominant after its introduction at Weidemann's 1961 exhibition, but because of this late acceptance of non-figuration Norwegian artists did not have the same experiences as their international contemporaries,

¹ The exhibition is generally seen as the breakthrough of abstract art in Norway, and the series was Weidemann's first exploration of his own non-figurative style, which he arrived at after a period of borrowing from artists such as Norwegians Kaj Fjell and Arne Ekeland, the COBRA group and especially Pablo Picasso. He is therefore often referred to as the moderniser of Norwegian art. With thick paint applied with the palette knife or similarly rough tools he explored the depths of the Norwegian landscape, the dark woodland floors of the Norwegian forests.

who had advanced and experimented with a multitude of styles during the years leading up to 1961.² By the mid 1960s, however, new and exciting styles were slowly making their way into the North. Consequently, Norwegian artists increasingly experimented after encounters with international avant-garde art at exhibitions taking place in Scandinavia, such as the 1966 Nordic Biennale in Copenhagen, and after hearing reports, in 1964, from the Venice Biennale and Documenta in Kassel. Another pivotal exhibition, held firstly at Moderna Museet in Stockholm and later at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art near Copenhagen, was *Amerikansk popkunst. 106 former for kjærlighet og fortvilelse* (American pop art. 106 forms of love and despair, 1964). The exhibition became the main source of inspiration for young Scandinavian artists interested in Pop art. The mid to late 1960s was an exciting time for young artists as the Norwegian art scene was bombarded with the prevailing international movements it had long ignored.

Foreign artistic impulses were experienced mostly through the circulation of journals such as *Paletten* (Swedish) and *Art International*, where the former was closest to Norwegian developments. Traditionally sources had arrived by way of the French School and continental tendencies were predominantly studied. Not until the Venice Biennale and Documenta in Kassel (both in 1968) presented the Norwegians with Op-art, Kinetic art, Pop and post-painterly abstraction did artists take notice of the New York and London art scenes.

4.2 The Manifestation of Serigraphy

The graphic art practices of relief, copperplate (photogravure, rotogravure) and plane printing had been a long-established tradition in continental European art circles before they became a serious part of the Norwegian artist's repertoire. Similar to other veins of graphic reproduction, the silkscreen came into popular use because of the increasing need to quickly and easily reproduce images, especially within the advertising business. Woodcut, copperplate engraving, etching and lithography were all suitable for the artistic reproduction of sketches, watercolours and the like, but the stencilled printing method was exceedingly more applicable to the commercial poster's simple colour language and compositions. The term serigraphy, from the Latin *sericum* meaning silk, was employed by art historian Carl Zigrosser in an attempt to bring the graphic process closer to artistic expression and break the close ties to the

² Bie-Larsen, Bård, *Popkunsten i Norge: Norske kunstnere og kritikeres formidling av amerikansk popkunst på 1960-tallet*, Phd Thesis, Institute for Archaeology, Art History and Conservation, University of Oslo, Spring 2002, p13

commercial world of advertising.³ For decades commercial print shops had dominated the production of silkscreen prints, but when abstraction and Pop art passed *action painting* to become the chief artistic approaches by the beginning of the 1960s, European as well as American artists began to seriously consider the silkscreen's artistic potential.

In creative terms, the American artists connected to the WPA's (Work Progress Administration) Federal Art Project in the 1930s and 1940s were the first to use silkscreening widely, probably because it is substantially more cost-efficient than other more complex methods. Moreover, to distinguish their work from the commercial poster they emphasised individual and handmade qualities by using markers and applying glue directly onto the screen. In the fifteen years directly following the Second World War there was no extensive use of serigraphy by artists in Europe. Although Victor Vasarely and Richard Mortensen did cooperate with the printer Wifredo Arcay in Paris during the early 1950s, for the most part continental European artists, whilst preoccupied with geometric and perceptual abstraction, were using more traditional modes of expression such as painting. In contrast, American and British Pop artists fully accepted and appropriated serigraphy into their artistic vocabulary, thus establishing it as an artistic technique by the beginning of the 1960s.⁴ The American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol and the British artists Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi and Gordon House were the main contributors to this shift. Determining the artist's hand in an artwork, not always as evident in the silkscreen, had been an important factor for the justification of the 'older' printing techniques and had facilitated the general recognition of graphics as an art form. As a consequence of this traditional view of the artwork and in particular art prints, as well as its links with advertisement, the 'new' technique struggled to be accepted as part of the term 'art graphics'.

Although very few Norwegian artists took up serigraphy before the end of the 1960s, there are a few examples from as early as 1941.⁵ Edward Landon's Oslo exhibition and his classes during 1950-1 had an immense influence, in particular on Erling Merton, Finn Christensen and Bjarne Brunsvik, and are generally seen as pioneering the artistic silkscreen in Norway. These early examples were mostly figurative, and when the artists turned their attention towards abstraction and non-figuration (as so many did at the time) they left

³ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Gras og det norske silketrykk', p89

⁴ Ibid., p90

⁵ In her paper 'Silketrykkets seiersgang', *Norsk Grafikk: gjennom 100 år*, Oslo: Aschough, 2000. Helliesen briefly mentions a graphic folder from 1941 by the painters Reidar Auli, Arne Ekeland, Erling Enger and Aage Storstein as a curiosity of their time. For Helliesen, these prints are not interesting in the context of serigraphy's development in Norway, probably because it was never to be repeated by any of them. Interestingly these four artists had strong ties with the working class and most had admitted socialist sympathies – this could also be a reason for their dismissal by Helliesen, as she dismisses the social importance of the silkscreen in Norway.

serigraphy behind in favour of other methods. In fact, only a small number of artists took an interest in graphics after non-figurative tendencies started making serious ground in Norway. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, graphics had not yet become an important factor in the public art arena and secondly, it was seen as a figurative, story-telling language mostly used by the literati, who had become unfashionable by this point.⁶ The non-figurative artist Herman Hebler, on the other hand, utilised serigraphy equally with drawing and painting, and during this early period of the technique in Norway he used its simple two-dimensional expression to formulate stylised abstractions of plants and figures.⁷

Furthermore Gunnar S. Gundersen is worth mentioning within this context, for his role in the manifestation of non-figurative art in Norway from the 1950s onwards. He illustrates the rise in status of the non-figurative artist during this period. Staging his first solo-exhibition in 1950, by the 1960s he had become an artist enjoying great stature, and at the 1968 Venice Biennale he represented Norway. Conversely Gundersen did not incorporate the silkscreen into his vocabulary until the end of the 1960s, even though his style was exceedingly apt for serigraphy.⁸ Earlier in his career he had been using copperplate and woodcuts for a great variety of expressions, ranging from a Surrealism inspired by Paul Klee to simple and robust non-figuration. In all probability Gundersen was taught serigraphy in 1968 by the printer Sven Skaar Olsen.⁹ By this time Gundersen's painting had arrived at a style rooted in French 1950s painting, in which sharply painted colour planes were partly covered by geometric two-dimensional shapes (Fig. 4.1). He was not only admired by his fellow artists, but remarkably the general public responded positively as well. During the late 1960s a city-based generation of young, well-educated and internationally oriented Norwegians started showing an interest in graphic art and this group championed Gundersen.

4.3 A New Style is in the Air

Hugh Adams states in *Art of the Sixties* (1978) that the rise in diversity during the 1950s was unique in the history of art and that this was further elaborated upon throughout the 1960s. Neo-Dada, Op, Pop, Kinetic, Hard Edge and Nouveau Réalisme were, according to Adams, examples of this. The pluralism that arose led to a greater tolerance for what art could be, and the manifold forms of unorthodoxy ended up asking essential questions about the nature of an

⁶ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Silketrykkets seiersgang', p270

⁷ An example of this is *Komposisjon med figurer* (Composition with figures, 1952).

⁸ Gundersen's abstract art is similar to the previously mentioned Danish artist Richard Mortensen, who had been making such geometric prints and paintings since the early 1950s. Mortensen took part in a travelling exhibition that visited Oslo in the beginning of the 1950s, which most likely had an impact on Gundersen.

⁹ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Silketrykkets seiersgang', p272

artwork and by what criteria it could be judged. In late 1950s' London and early 1960s' New York, artists began to show substantial interest in popular culture and consumer society, which became the foundations from which their art would be shaped. Everyday symbols of commercialism such as mass-produced cars, convenience foods, advertisements, cartoons and celebrities were included into the artist's vocabulary. Furthermore, artworks were on occasion exhibited and sold in a constructed commercial context, as for example the shop.¹⁰

Bård Bie-Larsen has examined the development of Norwegian Pop art in his PhD thesis *Popkunsten i Norge: Norske kunstnere og kritikeres formidling av amerikansk popkunst på 1960-tallet* (Pop art in Norway: Norwegian artists' and critics' mediation of American Pop art during the 1960s), in which he employs Christopher Finch's broad definition of Pop art: "Above all [...] it is an art of acceptance – not of rejection. This acceptance is represented by its ability to encompass a range of imagery taken from everyday sources which had previously been excluded from the sphere of fine art."¹¹ Given that genres of 1960s American art were treated as Pop art by Norwegian critics and in part by artists, who simultaneously incorporated a wide range of styles into their work while classifying it as Pop, Bie-Larsen's employment of Finch's definition seems completely warranted.¹² For instance, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Warhol and Tom Wesselmann – artists ranging from neo-Dada to unblemished Pop – were all considered to be American Pop artists in Norway.

Bie-Larsen focuses on the timeline between 1964, the year in which the Norwegian art world had its first significant meeting with Pop art, and 1970. The previously mentioned exhibition *Amerikansk popkunst* alongside the Venice Biennale (both 1964) were passionately discussed in the Norwegian press, and from 1965 onwards Pop influences could be seen in the work of a small group of Norwegian artists. Although most artists did not have the means to visit the exhibition, two established artists, Kjartan Slettemark and Per Kleiva, did see it first hand and were subsequently influenced by the works on display. Other Norwegian artists who were affected by Pop, though to differing degrees, included Inger Sitter, Berit Soot Kløvig, Sidsel Paaske and Bjørn Ransve. Moreover, Bie-Larsen declares Kleiva "...the foremost representative of Norwegian pop..." possibly due to the fact that Slettemark had moved to Sweden by the late 1960s. Probably in reaction to the stagnation and conservatism he felt to

¹⁰ Claes Oldenburg's 'The Store' in December 1961 and Andy Warhol's Campbell works exhibition in the Bianchini Gallery in November 1964 were two monumental events in this environment.

¹¹ Finch, Christopher, *POP ART Object and image*, 1968, p6

¹² Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p2

be prevalent within the Norwegian art milieu.¹³ Pop art's influx into Norway culminated with a Warhol retrospective in 1968 at Kunstneres Hus (The Artists' House) in Oslo.

As soon as it was clear that the American Pop art exhibition was not going to be shown in Norway, widespread discussion arose amongst art critics on the assimilation of new styles.¹⁴ The distribution and showing of new, innovative international art was almost nonexistent at the time. It was therefore appropriate and important that the press addressed the issue, nonetheless, the negative trend did to some extent continue throughout the twentieth-century. The Norwegian curator and art historian Alf Bøe voiced his opinion in the national newspaper *Dagbladet*, experiencing the exhibition as – rather than a show of contemporary art – merely a display of what was going wrong in modern life.¹⁵ He predicted, however, a great potential in Pop art for the critique of society, which would be realised in the late 1960s in the graphic production of the GRAS workshop.

On the other hand, the critic Ole Henrik Moe saw the exhibition as a valuable statement about contemporary society and the individual's place in that society, as well as giving Norwegian artists an indication of what was to come.¹⁶ It puzzled him, however, that the American artists did not include any critical elements or explicit references to politics. Rather, in Moe's view, the artworks were purely aesthetic representations of American society's commercial products and placed in the gallery space – a continuation of Marcel Duchamp's readymades. To a viewer such as Moe, whose preoccupation was the relationship between art and politics, Pop had no meaning. Consequently, Pop art only truly becomes *art* through its potential to change the audience's view of reality, and by Moe's definition this alteration can be an art criterion in its own right. The viewer might then consider the construction of *pop* art as simultaneously looking and changing set ways of thinking about society and the items found within it.¹⁷ Bøe and Moe equally expressed an interest in the critical potential found in the Americans' works, and they indicated that it was this area of the 'new' style that artists should explore further. Norwegian Pop artists would quickly engage the style at the service of politics.

At the Venice Biennale in the same year, Rauschenberg won a disputed Grand Prize, which quickly inspired its renaming as the 'pop art biennale'. Nonetheless, Norwegian art critic J.P. Hodin reported from Venice that the Pop art section, represented by, besides

¹³ Ibid., p7

¹⁴ Norway was the only Scandinavian country not to experience the Pop art exhibition first hand.

¹⁵ Bryn, Erle, 'Hvorfor får ikke Norge se den amerikanske popkunst-utstillingen?', *Dagbladet*, 14.04.1964

¹⁶ Moe, Ole Henrik, 'Pop-kunst – en utstilling til ettertanke', *Aftenposten*, 21.05.1964

¹⁷ Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p21

Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg, received no real attention, and the French and German critics seized the opportunity to ridicule it.¹⁸ Similarly Magne Malmanger, a Norwegian reporter, stated he refused to take the American exhibits seriously.¹⁹ One could argue that these two accounts reflect the prevailing Norwegian conservatism towards the relatively new style, yet the European press and critics were unconvinced too – the French described it as an American ‘cultural colonisation’.²⁰ Furthermore, the Norwegian commentaries demonstrate the continued importance placed upon French art criticism and the French School in Norway.

At the Unge Kunstneres Samfunn’s (The Young Artists’ Society, UKS) spring exhibition in 1964, there was little or no sign that any of the exhibitors had assimilated Pop; hence critics became increasingly impatient with artists.²¹ In comparison to international artists, the Norwegians seemed backwards when they were still vigorously experimenting with non-figuration and ‘nature-abstraction’. For that reason frustration as well as concern was voiced about the stagnation of stylistic experimentation by younger artists. The critics were not satisfied until December 1965 when the travelling exhibition *Fjorten Unge Kunstnere* (Fourteen Young Artists) opened at the Kunsternes Hus in Oslo. Among the exhibits a degree of Pop art interests could finally be found in Norwegian art.²²

4.4 Pop Art in Norway

A younger generation of budding artists, debuting in the mid to late 1960s, wanted to explore an experimental approach to art in reaction to the traditionalist established older generation. As a consequence, there was a great deal of optimism and vigour connected to Pop art, which made it possible to think more freely about art. Artists did not have to work within the constraints of traditional aesthetic frameworks. As a reaction against the jury’s decision in connection with the 1964 *Høstutstillingen* (The Annual National Autumn Exhibition), Willibald Storn instigated an alternative exhibition at Håndverkeren (The Craftsman).²³ The

¹⁸ Hodin, J.P., ‘Moderne kunst på verdensforum I. Venezia-biennalen’, *Kunst og Kultur*, nr 4, 1964, p229

¹⁹ Malmanger, Magne, ‘Amerikanerne’, *Dagbladet*, 15.07.1964

²⁰ <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/history/940/en/3297.html>

²¹ Mæhle, Ole, ‘Vårutstillingen I Kunsternes Hus’, *Dagbladet*, 09.06.1964. The spring exhibition was supposedly more daring than the more established autumn exhibition; both took place at Kunsternes Hus.

²² Moe, Ole Henrik, ‘Kunst og Kunstnere’, *Aftenposten*, 16.12.1965. The exhibition is often referred to as ‘14’, ‘14 Unge’ or ‘De 14’, and also appeared in Stavanger.

²³ *Høstutstillingen* is still an annual event, initiated by amongst others Christian Krohg in 1882. Its intention is to display contemporary art and has since 1930 been held at Kunsternes Hus in Oslo. Håndverkeren is situated on the same street as Kunsternes Hus. The protest exhibition took place in response to the fact that only one debutant artist, Hannah Ryggen, had been chosen that year. Kjartan Slettemark, Storn, Knut Rose, Kleiva and Marius Heyerdahl were among the artists included in the show.

exhibition was aptly named *Noen unge refuserte* (Some rejected youths), in which young artists rejected by the *Høstutstillingen* jury exhibited together. A politicised programme, written by the artist Marius Heyerdahl, argued for an art closer to reality and everyday experiences, without snobbery and commercialism; one which could portray contemporary life. Heyerdahl launched an attack on an elitist, closed and exclusive art scene, and called for a democratisation of art and its institutions. Pop art had the potential to present the audience with a heightened significance and an opportunity for all “...to create a representation of their environment.”²⁴ One could say that it was a Norwegian Pop art manifesto, and can in part be seen as a response to appeals for a politicised Pop. Both Neo-Dada and Pop expressed interest in the banal sides of reality, as well as a less elevated and mystical artist figure, which appealed to the new anti-establishment that was contesting the relevance and contemporaneity of the ‘older’ generation that held a firm grip on art education. However, conservative critics did not hide their contempt towards a democratisation of motifs, the soup can and the aeroplane could not be suitable subjects for art - the traditionalists were in uproar. Contemporary, everyday life and items which materialised in art instantly came to mean radicalism, and harsh, uncompromising criticism was handed out to any artist following the new trend. Nevertheless Heyerdahl’s request for active artistic engagement with society was met with enthusiasm, and works that responded directly to the programme would appear shortly. The Norwegian 1960s Pop art debate culminated in the view that Pop represented a contemporary public analysis.²⁵

The rejected artists’ exhibition had an effect and the following year’s *Vårutstillingen* (The Spring Exhibition) recognised innovation by showing, amongst others, Heyerdahl’s *Homo Cyberneticus I* and *Homo Cyberneticus II* (1965, Fig. 4.2). The two sculptures, which unfortunately have been destroyed, represented the male and female forms made out of scrap metal. The title refers to cybernetics, the science of artificial automatic regulatory systems, and the sculptures rotated while lights continually flashed at the viewer. Made out of household machinery (female) and car parts (male) the two robotic sculptures were clearly a continuation of Heyerdahl’s critique of the way society had become increasingly mechanised and his eagerness to be a commentator as well as destabilising factor in this development. The industry’s drive towards never-ending efficiency and productivity, epitomised by Heyerdahl’s robots, was seen to diminish our humanity. The construction of gendered robotic sculptures

²⁴ Marius Heyerdahl, ‘Kunsten bort fra steril skolastisk estetisme og mot mer vitalitet og mennekelighet’, Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p26

²⁵ Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p28

can be seen as commentary on stereotypical gender roles as the introduction of household machines did enable women a certain degree of freedom, however the emphasis here is more likely to be on consumerism and an overwhelmingly commercialised society.

Berit Soot Kløvig's sculpted landscape *Viet-Nam* (1965) was made of empty bullet-cases and can be seen as a typical Norwegian response to American Pop, where the cruel reality of the sheer amount of ammunition used in the concurrent Vietnam War is exposed. If one compares Kløvig's response to the war with that of Rosenquist's monumental room-scale painting, *F-111* (1964-5, Fig. 4.3), there are no glossy, glaring colours in the Norwegian work, as well as the significant difference in scale.²⁶ The everyday objects, if one can call bullet-cases that, is the material from which the landscape has been constructed, at the same time as the title invests symbolic meaning into the object. Even if bullet-cases are not everyday objects, they are the waste from a weapon of destruction especially made for army or hunting use only, but they are the product of profiting industry. I relate it here to the everyday because of Kløvig's Pop influences and the appropriation of industrial objects as the focus of Pop art in a Norwegian context.²⁷ If it was the Pop artists' role to make the viewer aware of aesthetic qualities within the everyday object, reproduced from reality and representing mass culture, the Norwegian artists often embedded the objects or the use thereof with political sentiment as well, which thereby distinguished them from their international counterparts. For example, Per Kleiva has always been a vigilant critic of society and of the ever more extensive use of manufactured goods in society. He carefully selects everyday objects and brings these together in assemblages that often result in the objects' overwhelming materialism being lost, similar to Kløvig's *Viet-Nam*.²⁸ Through the meeting of objects and the subsequent exposure of mass culture Kleiva offers an alternative, his vision of a better path to the future. Thus the aestheticisation of the banal symbols of commercialism was done specifically to expose the contemporary political situation and convey radical, yet straightforward, messages.

²⁶ *F-111* made Rosenquist internationally renowned, and was generally seen as an anti-war work. It was an exposure of the airplane then being developed for the effort in Vietnam and a comment on the military industry that fostered the economic boom in America mid-century.

²⁷ The understanding of Pop in Norway is a central issue here, more often than not did artists understand the term 'everyday objects' as anything technologically produced. As the artists had no real accounts and encounters with international pop it was for them to come up with their own interpretation of the style.

²⁸ See Per Kleiva's early assemblage works such as *Softly as in the Morning Sunrise* from 1965 exhibited at *14 unge*. Fig. 4.4

4.5 *Vietnambildet* and the Move to Political Pop

In a number of Norwegian publications that deal with the radicalisation of political and artistic currents during the 1960s, two very specific moments are presented as indications of what was to come in the early 1970s, the Norwegian ‘1968’: first, the establishment of a radical publishing house, *Pax*, by pacifist and socialist Tor Bjerkmann in April 1964, which introduced a Norwegian readership to left-wing views on the Cold War, Vietnam War and the Third World, as well as the opening of the music venue *Club 7*, both in Oslo.²⁹ Second, the public display of Kjartan Slettemark’s assemblage, in 1965, outside the parliament in Oslo. According to Bie-Larsen, Kjartan Slettemark was one of the leading representatives of Pop and Neo-Dada in Norway from the mid-1960s onwards.³⁰ Considering the momentous place in art history Slettemark has been given, one has to explore his work in more detail, and as he was one of the earliest exponents of Pop art in Norway it will be fruitful to see how Pop through his initiative would be defined as essentially political. As an artist Slettemark was from the outset surrounded with controversy and particularly his *Av rapport fra Vietnam: ‘Barn overskylles av brennende napalm, deres hud brennes til svarte sår og de dør’* (Off a report from Vietnam: ‘Children are covered by burning napalm, their skin burns into black wounds and they die’, 1965, Fig. 4.5), known as *Vietnambildet* (The Vietnam Picture). The assemblage or ‘material-picture’ epitomises an exciting time in Norwegian art history in which the convergence of art and politics started to occupy a much greater space. It is of even greater interest since it was in fact one of the earliest outright critiques, in artistic terms, of US intervention in Vietnam.

UKS had since 1956 been given permission to exhibit ‘The city’s picture’ – a work by an artist chosen by a UKS jury – for a month at a time in a glass display case outside the parliament on Karl Johans gate. In May 1965, Slettemark was given this opportunity. At first he displayed his *No. 1 1965*, which would prove to be his breakthrough in Norway, nevertheless, the controversy that followed would lead to his final immigration to Sweden, where he had been studying since 1959. After thirteen days on display *No. 1 1965* was destroyed by a gang of students, so-called *rød-russ*, who smashed the display and painted the

²⁹ *Pax* publishing house still exists today as a leftist, radical opposition to the pan-Scandinavian publishing houses that have the majority marketshare. *Club 7* was the meetingplace for the anti-establishment and housed jazz, folk-song, experimental theatre as well as rock. For more information see Førland, Tor Egil, *Club 7*, Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1998

³⁰ Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p31

work red.³¹ *No. 1 1965* and *Vietnambildet* were both part of Slettemark's plastic assemblage period. During the winter of 1964-5 he started looking through rubbish dumps for objects to incorporate into his works, and in *No. 1 1965* a green-painted sheet and some bits of plastic has been packed behind a cross made of white plasticised canvas strips. As Slettemark's biographer, Jan Åke Pettersson explains: "For Kjartan, plastic represented the abolition of norms concerning what a work of art should look like. It moved the boundaries of creativity to realms where nothing was true and everything was permitted..." and the found objects were "...things that appealed to him sensually – 'shapes that saw me'".³²

As the artwork was almost destroyed, Slettemark was given the opportunity to resubmit a piece, which would be shown for seventeen days in late summer the same year. Instead of mending the existing work, however, he decided to make something new. From interviews with the artist, Pettersson makes it clear that Slettemark's art is one of accident as well as meaning, and this is especially true for *Vietnambildet*. Slettemark was drawn to found objects that contained his essence, as he himself described it: "Let the eyes see and let them connect things. Let myself start operating on the basis of me, not any teacher or isms. Attempt to take seriously and try to make contact with one's inner. Look in one's surroundings for an answer to oneself, satisfaction, identity."³³ The day after Slettemark had bought a doll that 'was calling out to him', he read an eye-witness account in the Swedish newspaper *Expressen* of one of the first American napalm bombings in Vietnam, to which Slettemark could only react.³⁴ He started working by building a pair of lips that occupy most of the picture plane, within which he made a hole where he placed the damaged and mutilated doll and a small American paper flag, over these he poured red paint to represent the bloodshed. He then cut out letters to make the word VIETNAM, which together with the barely visible JESUS appear within the wide open mouth. The doll blatantly symbolised the suffering Vietnamese children depicted in the article – burnt beyond recognition. Although Slettemark claims the picture was not political, just "...my reply to the information around me", both Slettemark and Pettersson refer to *Vietnambildet* as a humanist-political picture. A protest against the atrocities afflicted on Vietnamese people by the American government.³⁵ The open mouth was simultaneously the expression of shock, instantaneous disgust and his outcry against the war, as well as a

³¹ *No 1* was probably painted red by the 18/19-year-olds as a prank, as every year the outgoing high-school students do similar acts of defacing to 'prove' themselves. In respect to Slettemark's assemblage, it was challenging because it represented an unknown method and therefore might not have been considered art.

³² Pettersson, Jan Åke at <http://www.kjartan.st/>

³³ Pettersson, Jan Åke, *Tillintetgørelsen av det rationalistiska universet – Kjartan Slettemarks konst 1964-1967*, Magister Thesis, Institute for Archaeology, Art History and Conservation, University of Oslo, Autumn 1984, p39

³⁴ *Expressen*, 11.7.1965 as referred to in Pettersson, *Tillintetgørelsen av det rationalistiska universet*, p40

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p44

representation of Vietnamese children's screams of agony. For any Norwegian the work would instantly be connected to Edward Munch's *Skrik* (The Scream, 1893/1910, Fig. 4.6), even though *Vietnambildet* was an accusation more than an expression of the agonised self.³⁶

Whatever aesthetic value one attributes to the picture, the fact that it was openly critical of the American presence in Vietnam immediately outraged the Norwegian public. After the Second World War, American efforts during the war and invaluable economic help thereafter had created an image of the nation as a liberator and saviour.³⁷ *Vietnambildet* was therefore seen to be anti-American, in addition to being far from aesthetically pleasing.³⁸ Several attempts to destroy the work followed its unveiling, the most brutal of which happened on the 3 August when Sigurd Ragnvald Borgen attacked the work with an axe. Throughout the period *Vietnambildet* was on display, Slettemark was given extensive coverage in local and national media. In particular the two conservative newspapers *Morgenbladet* and *Verdens Gang* dismissed the artistic value of the picture and its maker, as well as UKS. The main focus of their critique was directed at the inescapable public display of what they saw as anti-Americanism and consequently the intrusion of politics into art. The conservative press, one might say, called for public censorship, which may have led to the continuous attempts to destroy it.³⁹ The artist Morten Krohg puts the strong reactions by the Norwegian spectator down to unfamiliarity with Pop art and particularly the use of plastic as material for art.⁴⁰ However, the political sentiments submerged within the picture ended up being the start of a discussion about the Vietnam War that would carry on until 1975, a debate which made a clear-cut divide in the Norwegian public.

Slettemark's untraditional, expressive language and *Vietnambildet*'s proposal for a transformation of the artist's role in society inspired many young artists.⁴¹ Pettersson has indicated that the composition has common features with a variety of sources, such as Pop, Neo-Dada and Nouveau Réalisme, but one has to agree when he states that Slettemark did not belong to any of these movements specifically. The link may be made in connection with his relentless experimentation with unusual materials, but not in the attempt to express an

³⁶ Ibid., p47

³⁷ I am referring here to the Marshall Plan and the rebuilding of Norway after the war, as well as the view that America saved Europe from both the Germans and after World War II - the Soviet Union.

³⁸ Pettersson recounts several newspapers from the Oslo area, *Aftenposten*, *Morgenbladet*, *Verdens Gang*, *Dagbladet*, *Friheten* and *Arbeiderbladet*, that covered the public outrage over *Vietnambildet* on 26 July 1965.

³⁹ Erik Egeland states in *Morgenbladet* on 28.07.65 that attacks on the work must be expected since it was blatantly political; he goes on to say that it is anyone's right to make their opinion known by attacking the work. One might see this as a call for action against the work, UKS and Slettemark.

⁴⁰ Rostad, Bernhard, 'Vi har ingen beskyttelse av ytringsfriheten', *Dagbladet*, 21.09.1965

⁴¹ Per Kleiva expressed this in a statement found in Blekstad, Ingrid, *1960-årene i norsk maleri*, exhibition catalogue, Lillehammer Kunstmuseum, 1996

identity, his own, through art.⁴² Bie-Larsen explains: “An abstract expressive language combined with the use of objects places *Vietnambildet* in relation to 1950s and 1960s new realistic and neo-dada tendencies... [and] the red mouth and lettering give associations to both American and British Pop art.”⁴³ To Bie-Larsen an emphasis on contemporaneity in Pop was the defining criterion for its production in Norway. The fact that Slettemark chose the objects and the title referring directly to a newspaper article, as well as the word VIETNAM, concretely situates the picture in time and fixes it to the year of its construction. “Slettemark signals that the work is not meant to enter into any sort of eternal art sphere, but should be understood as ‘reality’ and contemporaneous.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, instead of presenting the mass-produced as simply an object Slettemark, along with other Norwegian artists, often used the commercial artefact as a symbol of a contemporary topic. As an example, the American flag, in conjunction with the plastic doll, becomes a symbol of the superpower’s use of force against another nation and the sufferings caused by war. In public opinion it was exactly the use of the flag in *Vietnambildet* that angered the most. To differing degrees both Slettemark’s picture and Rosenquist’s *F111*, also from 1965, could be argued to posit a critique of the American government’s involvement in the Vietnam War. However, the glossy, smooth character of Rosenquist’s painting is far removed from the gritty, tactile nature of the plastic painting, and its political sentiment disappears in the advertisement technique that he employs. In view of this comparison one would like to draw attention to the previously discussed debate where there was a clear call for critical meaning in Pop art; without it most saw no place for the movement in art history. *Vietnambildet* assimilated many different references, but most of all it was an example of a critical Pop art. Even if the public was shocked by the picture’s accusations, it managed to rally a debate over Vietnam War and as accounts of the war rolled over the television screens the horror made the Norwegian public change its position over Vietnam. One might therefore, as Tor Egil Frøland does, argue that *Vietnambildet* was the beginning of the popular movement against the war.

⁴² An example of this is Slettemark’s *Nixon Visions* (started in the late sixties and continued into the seventies), which culminated in a passport he had legally made where he appeared as Nixon and his own photograph was merged with that of Nixon. He travelled around Europe using this passport, thereby becoming the art piece himself. Slettemark moves on the fine line between performance and ‘traditional’ art because he lives as the artwork while being the artist, expanding beyond performance because he considers his own life, situations that occur in his reality, the basis of his work and therefore his identity as an artist move into the sphere of art. Exhibiting himself as Nixon or a poodle, both within the museum and the public, everyday sphere, at the same time transforms Slettemark into a walking talking artwork.

⁴³ Bie-Larsen, Bård, ‘Vietnambildet og visuell kultur’, *Kunst og kultur*, no. 2, 2005, p112

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Similar to other late 1960s artworks, *Vietnambildet* moved into areas of high tension which had traditionally been separate spheres. According to Bie-Larsen, “it was a work of art, but closely linked to contemporary mass media, it combined “real” objects with artistic creativity and it was placed amongst people, yet within an art institutional frame.”⁴⁵ The placement of the work, outside of parliament, was a major reason for its vigorous discussion and was seen as a provocation at the time. Seen in the context of ‘1968’ the public location can be seen as a move away from the museum and gallery to a more ‘democratic’ setting such as outdoor public spaces, which would culminate in happenings, performance and the poster of the 1970s. The ‘democratisation’ of the art piece or object by UKS must be seen as an art-political statement, as the display case was a way in which to give a younger generation of artists the opportunity to show their work outside of the so-called *point* system.⁴⁶ Erik Egeland’s conservative critique of *Vietnambildet* responded directly to the positioning of the work, and in his opinion the work was of such low artistic quality that it would not have been shown anywhere else.⁴⁷ According to Egeland, radical agitational art should be kept within a culture-specific space where an interested audience can seek it out if they so want. Thus the wider public was spared the confrontation of such potent works outside of the museum or gallery. Ironically Egeland saw himself as a champion of avant-garde art. Institutional attitudes toward exhibiting art, and subsequently a negativity towards any attempt to overturn established norms, was widespread in Norway far into the 1970s.

Very few critics came to Slettemark’s defence, however Jan Erik Vold wrote sympathetically about *Vietnambildet* in the newspaper *Dagbladet*. Of an opinion that art was elitist and exclusive, Vold asked why art could not represent something on a more elementary level. The distance between artist and grassroots was tragically out of proportion, “...it is *our common* reality that the artist processes.”⁴⁸ In direct opposition to Egeland, Vold found legitimacy in art when it engages with society and conveys the ‘reality’ of contemporary lives, which in turn has the potential to produce stronger and more powerful impressions of the world than could be made in any other media. *Vietnambildet* expressed an impression through

⁴⁵ Ibid., p114

⁴⁶ At this time the success of an artist was defined by how many times he/she had been accepted to exhibit at *Høstutstillingen*, to become an ‘accepted’ artist one would have to be included at least 4-6 times. The *point* system refers to how many times an artist had been on display, particularly how many times an artist had taken part in *Høstutstillingen*. With this hierarchy came profit too, and a young artist could struggle financially for years as the style he/she was concerned with was not deemed appropriate for display at Kunsternes Hus.

⁴⁷ Erik Egeland wrote several comments in *Morgenbladet* during July and August 1965, in which he is highly critical of both UKS and Slettemark. In his article on 28 of July in the same newspaper he refers to the placement as well as politics when he says that the relentless attacks on Slettemark’s work by the public must have been expected since the choice of placing it in front of the parliament was made.

⁴⁸ Vold, Jan Erik, ‘Kunst og Vietnam’, *Dagbladet*, 12.08.1965

an ‘ugly’ language of a gruesome world, which was hard for the public to accept. Bie-Larsen states:

One of the reasons why Vold found Vietnambildet important might have been because a parallel break with convention was necessary for the one who wanted to spot the problems the world was faced with. That can mean that the unison between art and reality, between “Vietnambildet” and the 60s’ political situation, for the viewers like Vold not only arose through the picture’s political content, but also because Slettemark’s radical practice worked as an analogy for the necessary practice in other ranges of society.⁴⁹

The political essence in the arts, be it theatre, music, painting or sculpture, has to be evident for the work to have meaning to us within a society ingrained with political choices. The idea that art should or can be set apart from politics and contains no meaning is impossible; even if artists distance themselves directly from politics the distance becomes an action and thereby a conscious choice to be apolitical. In this respect when critics felt that Slettemark’s political subject matter was too strong or direct, and that ideological sentiments (here pacifist) had no place in the art arena, their critique becomes illogical. The anti-political approach to art was, as elsewhere in the world, deeply rooted in formalist art criticism. This would be questioned by a group of Norwegian artists that would thrive through collectivism manifesting from the late 1950s onwards. The controversy that faced Slettemark would deter many from following in his footsteps and constrain the use of overt ideology in their art, until the establishment of collective open fora where artists were not isolated, as Slettemark had been in 1965.⁵⁰

4.6 The Cooperative way Forward – *Together we are stronger*

From the end of the 1950s a small group of artists began a personal crusade to change the art scene and these were mainly to be found in perpetual communes or collective workshops which started taking shape during the 1960s. One of these communes was founded in Skippergata where Pål Kvevik, Ole Rinnan and Storn took up residence from 1959, and where they were joined from 1961 by Kleiva, Jan Radlgruber, Arne Sørensen, John A Risan, Ørnulf

⁴⁹ Bie-Larsen, *Popkunsten i Norge*, p40

⁵⁰ Through August and September Slettemark showed his work in London after which the critic Charles S. Spencer wrote a review in *The New York Times*, which was published in extenso in *Arbeiderbladet* and *Dagbladet* (6.10.1965). In his review Spencer compares Slettemark to Munch, Ensor and Dubuffet, and champions him as of the same calibre as Ibsen, Strindberg and Bergman. The review was published in its entirety to argue, from reliable sources, that Slettemark actually had artistic talent, which had been one of the problems of his defenders – they did not have the knowledge or vocabulary to make substantial arguments for the aesthetic qualities in contemporary art.

Opdahl, Håkon Sande and Brit Fuglevaag.⁵¹ A number of these would be very important for the transformation of the Norwegian establishment, stylistically as well as socio-politically. Started by the aforementioned debate about Slettemark, a public discussion on the artist's role in society and society's (represented by the state) responsibilities in relation to the artist and the arts arose, and the collectively minded artists were at the foreground of this debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1963 preliminary discussions emerged out of Skippergata's aspiring climate concerning what many artists saw as an inefficient system at the root of Norwegian artists' organisations. Out of passionate group debates a need for restructuring surfaced as a clear art-political perspective. It was in this climate that Kleiva, in 1964, launched his ideas on artist remuneration, that when exhibiting in galleries and museums that received public funding the artist should receive compensation appropriate to the work produced for display.⁵² He would also be the first artist to receive remuneration for his exhibit at Kongsberg Kunstforening (Kongsberg Art Society), as Morten Krohg recalls: "They were pressured into giving compensation to Kleiva. We threatened to boycott Kongsberg Kunstforening through Grafiker Forbundet – we hadn't asked Grafiker Forbundet about it though. No wonder they said no at first, but wise enough they eventually said 'yes, okay we will arrange it'."⁵³ Then in 1965 Rolf Rude, the chairman of Bildende Kunstneres Styre (Pictorial Artists' Board, BKS), put forward the first set of plans for an artists' union structure for BKS, which were not fully realised until ten years later.

To protest against the outdated voting system at *Høstutstillingen* a group of artists exhibited together at the 1966 show under the name of Gruppen A/S Sørensen's Venner (The Group Ltd. Sørensen's Friends). Amongst them were the GRAS members-to-be Kleiva, Storn, Radlgruber, Jan Sture Jarlum and Siri Aurdal.⁵⁴ The mid-1960s opposition to the art establishment was made up of contradictory views on artistic expression and disagreement over how the artists' associations would be organised and work. By March 1968, Radlgruber, Krohg and Kleiva were fed up with the system in place for the selection of works for *Høstutstillingen*, through which a jury was voted in by BKS artists (the majority of whom

⁵¹ Rådhusgata 5, Oslo

⁵² *Gras – 10 år etter*, exhibition catalogue, Hammerlunds A/S, Oslo, 1983, p10

⁵³ Unpublished interview with Morten Krohg, 10 January 2007, see Appendix I. Grafiker Forbundet refers to the current organisation named Norske Grafikere (Norwegian Graphic Artists). The author has been unable to find information on how much compensation was given to Kleiva, but it is unlikely that it was a substantial amount.

⁵⁴ Kleiva and Aurdal exhibited earlier in the year at Oslo Kunstforening where an extract from an interview with Rosenquist about *F111* was used to make a link with American Pop as well as reflect on Rosenquist's thoughts about weaponry as economic instruments. Krohg was chairman of Kunstneres Hus at this point and Asle Raaen chairman of UKS.

were 40 or above), and they initiated a boycott of the exhibition.⁵⁵ The boycott was continued the following year when leaflets and posters were produced. As previously touched upon, to be selected was seen as a status symbol, a ticket to fame, so the exhibition was an example of the capitalist view of art as commodity and therefore inhibited new artists, styles and public appreciation thereof. According to the 1969 leaflets, *Høstutstillingen*

[...] represent a system of “purchase and sale” which is making the artist into a device of capital interests’ taste.

[...] is a sales institution for Norwegian artists, camouflaged as the year’s art event and over advertised as a cultural duty to see for the audience.

[...] works in such a way that art is seen as a symbol of status and security. This creates not only a tied up situation for artists in relation to the existing state of society, but also maintains the public’s preserving attitude to art and give a false picture of contemporary art and the current problems it is tackling.

[...] does not stimulate artists to work with new artistic assertions to reach diverse layers of society. Instead high culture and genius worshiping is maintained as positive concepts.

[...] cannot with the space it has available do justice to those who today express themselves visually. On the contrary this classification of artists’ quality creates a chain of unfortunate circumstances. Because the exhibition is guidance for many, it retains a disproportionately great significance in for example sales, awarding of artist assignments, exhibition rights, artists’ position in the local environment, etc.

[...] does not work in a social and cultural context with the rest of society.⁵⁶

The two demonstrations against the publicly funded exhibition were attacks on cultural policies with the aim of initiating open debate on art policymaking processes and expenditure. They marked the beginning of a long campaign for change, which would go on until the mid 1970s. The leaflet excerpted above is an early example of the radicalisation of artists, who would eventually be involved in GRAS, and exemplifies the position these artists held within the artistic opposition from an early stage.

1969 was a significant year for radical art in Norway and with all of its actions and demonstrations it was indeed part of Norwegian ‘1968’. The newly opened Art Centre at Høvikodden outside Oslo would come under attack by radicals several times during the course of the year. Firstly, in February a public art seminar was interrupted by a spontaneous happening by Kleiva, Storn and Lasse Grundt.⁵⁷ Just as the opposing critic Egeland took to the lectern to speak, Kleiva started barking as if the ‘bourgeoisie’s dog’ and Storn dropped his trousers in protest, showing the audience the ‘naked truth’, for which he was fined 500

⁵⁵ The system of voting was known as ‘the artist vote’. 18 artists had joined the boycott by autumn.

⁵⁶ Translated from Norwegian by the author from a leaflet donated by Morten Krohg, which is signed *Aksjonsgruppa for boikott av Høstutstillingen 1969* (The Action Group for the boycott of Høstutstillingen 1969)

⁵⁷ Born Lars Grundt, known today as Laurie Grundt.

NOK.⁵⁸ Another momentous event took place in February on national television during the cultural programme *Epoke*. Following the incident at Høvikodden a panel, made up of Astris Eidsbø, an art history student, Tore Haaland, an artist from the non-figurative grouping, and Kleiva, Krohg and Radlgruber, discussed the event. This was the perfect opportunity for the artists to have their say and who better, they thought, to express their beliefs than the Futurists. Krohg therefore cited Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* from 1909 and finished by exclaiming, "Burn the Museums!"⁵⁹ Krohg had been part of the board at Kunsternes Hus since 1966, and as chairman he had liberalised the exhibition policies by showing contemporary art, both national and international. During the programme Krohg defended his colleagues' and friends' right to demonstrate their dismay with the establishment. Unfortunately his art historical reference was misunderstood and the following day the press accused him of wanting to burn down the National Gallery, "...[they had] suspicion[s] that we walked around with matches in our pockets..."⁶⁰ Public upheaval led to the dismissal of the whole board at Kunsternes Hus, although UKS was strongly set against it. "They wouldn't say that they threw me out so everyone had to go. And the government representative refused to be thrown out at all and therefore they had a problem to be accountable, for [...] what happened after that was that changes were made in the exhibition policies' Francophile profiling."⁶¹

The second action at Høvikodden happened in August 1969, when future GRAS members Kleiva, Anders Kjær, Krohg, Storn and Radlgruber among others demanded to be let into the 10th *International Congress of Critics*. Naming the action *Aksjon Kritiker '69* (Action Critic '69), they contested the critic's isolation from society. Kjær had authored a decree, *The Critic and Society*, which they demanded to present to the congress and after much discussion one representative was permitted to enter.⁶² The tract contained ten points written both in Norwegian and English formulating the critic's responsibilities towards society, the public and artists. In brief, the English version states:

⁵⁸ Krohg has commented that "...Storn peed in an ashtray and showed his ass." In an interview with Ulf Renberg Storn said "...I showed my dick and peed in an ashtray." Renberg, Ulf & Sørensen, Gunnar, *Willibald Storn*, Labyrinth Press: Oslo, 1989, p37

⁵⁹ *Gras – 10 år etter*, p11 Krohg was referring to the futurist slogan, and most likely read out "We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice." F.T. Marinetti, 'First Futurist Manifesto', *Le Figaro*, 1909

⁶⁰ Krohg, 10 January 2007

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² I have been told that all of them were eventually allowed into the congress, as they refused to isolate one over the others. It was the collective approach of artists, the solidarity among them, that would prove to be the fall of the establishment.

The international art scene is controlled by the private art trade which transforms works of art into objects of financial speculation [...] The art critic helps to preserve this situation [...] He has become authorized connoisseur to the capital and supports the belief in art as an economical value [...] and] isolate[s] art from the general public. Art becomes a matter of social class, addressed to the intellectual or economical motivated groups in society [...]

[...the critic] is the advocate of an accepted, status quo aesthetic which is the result of the selection of art products the international art trade is willing to promote. [...] and the critic] lead the views of the public in certain directions – away from individual engagement.

[...] Contrary to fostering communication, the critic is one of the main causes which enlarges the schism between the art world and the public.

The art critic is [...] partly responsible for the preservation of the myth of art as fetish. By constantly exposing art as a purely aesthetic, political neutral value, he actually diverts attention from more important social problems and helps camouflage social shortcomings and political injustice.

The critic participates in preserving the myth of genius [...] The reviews become part of the cult of worship.

[...] The reactions of the public are directed into sanctioned paths that serve to confirm the structure of the cultural establishment.

The critic is an obstacle to the unity of the cultural milieu by constantly emphasising the art product's importance and value as a unique work of art.

The critic sums up the complex artistic problems to an aesthetic quasi-ideology [...] aided by a language that is addressed to an initiated minority.

The reviews contain little real information which can serve helpful to the individual reactions of the public, and they are usually written in a manner which presupposes familiarity with the subject.

The critic takes part in the preservation of an obsolete cultural situation with art as privilege [...] and] supporting the view on art as a thing, i.e. an object to be placed and experienced in the museum, art gallery or private environment. [...] the time has come to promote an art that can be part of the general milieu. The critic does next to nothing in activating a more social attitude in art institutions and never touches on the subject of art's function in society. The critic is therefore an advocate of the established structure and supporter of reactionary art institutions founded on the economic abilities of a minority.[sic]⁶³

The increasing dissatisfaction with critics' relationship to the establishment can be extracted from the text, as well as clearly socialist suggestions as to what the future critic's role should be. An insight is offered here, into the stance of the group-to-be, which emphasised a shift away from institutional rule and towards a new art structure: one that is built collaboratively by artists for the people – that is the grassroots.

Ulf Hamran responded to the critique through his article 'Protestkunst kontra det borgerlige kunst-ideal' (Protest art challenging the bourgeois art ideal). Corresponding to

⁶³ Kjær, Anders, *The Critic and Society*, Oslo, August 1969 (a Norwegian version exists)

Aksjon Kritiker '69, Hamran explained that in reality art cannot be stagnant and therefore has to develop in symbiosis with society, and if artists' view of contemporary life is bleak then so must their art be. The article states: "When the artwork no longer angers, when its ideas and shape has been accepted by all and especially..." by the privileged classes. When it has been "...read out and a decision made that it is Art with a capital A – then it is passé, it has become art history, cultural history, political history depending on circumstance."⁶⁴ His article clearly set out to clarify the relationship a critic should have to contemporary art, which is not necessarily to decide upon a work's or an artist's place in history, but to engage critically with art on behalf of the public and always to be up to date in one's critique.

The ideas culminating in *Aksjon Kritiker* '69 came out of the stirring environment around the group Sosialistisk Kulturfront (Socialist Culture Front) founded by Bjørn Nilsen and Krohg, amongst others, in spring 1969 at 'Et sted å være' (A place to be) in Oslo. However by autumn, the loose grouping had dissolved. 'Et sted å være' was GRAS's immediate predecessor and within it Storn and Kleiva started experimenting with serigraphy and exploring the idea of a collective workshop. Initiated in the spring of 1969 at Vaterland School, it objected to the commercial 'Teenagefair' and plans for future redevelopment of the Vaterland area by one of Norway's largest banks, Creditbanken. It grew into a socialist workshop for radicals occupying the school and its surrounding buildings, which were empty awaiting demolition. Late in 1969, after political disagreements had caused internal turmoil, Kleiva and Storn relocated to the 'alternative' commune in Hjelms gate 3 "...from which emanated the anarchist monthly *Gateavisa* (the Street Paper, 1970-) and several alternative presses such as Futurum Forlag..."⁶⁵ Here, the artists were joined by Kjær and, by May 1970, Krohg and Victor Lind.

As Lind has recalled, he actively took part in 'Et sted å være': "It was in '69. So there was something going on, you see, for a long time. '69 was the first time I was hit in the face by a police whip, and I made a picture called *Nattrytter* (Nightrider, 1972, Fig. 4.7) and that was in response to that."⁶⁶ The authoritarian police officer in *Nattrytter* is sitting high on his horse with his whip in hand in a dark blue night and the moon, which sparkles in his buttons, is the only source of light.

[It] was a more general thing where they were going to break us up, and then they wanted to arrest someone like you [...] so I wanted to come along. It was Asle Raaen's girlfriend by the way [...] It was unwarranted that she was going to be

⁶⁴ Hamran, Ulf, 'Protestkunst kontra det borgerlige kunst-ideal', *Fedrelands vennen*, 27.10.1969

⁶⁵ Førland, Tor Egil, "'1968' in Norway: Piecemeal, Peaceful and Postmodern', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p385

⁶⁶ Unpublished interview with Victor Lind, 8 January 2007, see Appendix I

arrested. And then he [the policeman] said ‘Spread’em!’ ‘No’ I said ‘I will not spread’.⁶⁷

The depiction of the militaristic ‘nightrider’ has an air of Fascism to it – the arrogant stare – and this tension is intensified by the sharp colour contrast. One gets a sense of the spite with which Lind arranged this image, with the equestrian tradition apparently emphasised by the view from below. Still the viewpoint makes the image contemporary, and would have made many an activist recollect various demonstrations. The GRAS silkscreen creates a space for both aesthetics and political contemplation. Even though Lind recalls a violent clash, it has to be remembered that in Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, encounters between protesters and police were relatively peaceful, which is in sharp contrast to 1960s American and French experiences.⁶⁸

4.7 Precursory Exhibitions

Ahead of the formation of GRAS, a handful of exhibitions were important in establishing a framework for GRAS’ output. Two of these were ‘environments’ or happenings, installation pieces staged in 1969 by GRAS members-to-be: first Egil Storeide, Storn and journalist Per Bjerrefjord’s *Ett minutt stillhet* (A minute of silence) at Telemarksmessen (the Telemark fair); second Storn’s solo installation *Coca-Donald Samfund – Ikke ta meg* (Coca-Donald Society – Don’t touch me, Fig. 4.8) at UKS. *Ett minutt stillhet* is widely considered to be the first installation in Norway and was made up of black plastic bags, soil and randomly picked waste surrounding a car wreck. Moreover, a group of young musicians played improvised music as part of the ‘environment’. The installation commented on the increasing amount of waste society produces, most of which cannot be broken back down into nature. It was a trial run for Storn’s *Coca-Donald Samfund*, which took place in August and September.

Coca-Donald Samfund had a great impact on the art scene, particularly because of its innovativeness. In comparison to the former, the impact was also due to its location as it took place in Oslo rather than a provincial city. As Gunnar Sørensen puts it, “...consumer- and supply-society was exposed through a mixture of advertising material and litter remains set against a background of black plastic bags.”⁶⁹ Storn has told Renberg:

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Kristin Ross attributes Gaullist use of power through a fascist riot police (CRS) to the extreme amounts of violence during both ‘May ’68’ and the precursory protests against the war in Algeria (1954-1962). Ross, Kristin, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, The University of Chicago Press Ltd.: Chicago; London, 2002

⁶⁹ Sørensen, Gunnar, ‘Willi Storn’, Renberg & Sørensen (ed.), *Willibald Storn*, Labyrinth Press: Oslo, 1989, p100

I wanted to say something about the overrun individual and the consumer mentality that disturbed many, me included. I was very engaged in this concept of alienation. The riots in Paris, the Vietnam war and Biafra, the Berlin Wall, refuse-dumping and imperialism whose ugly head was peeking out again – it was as if all the old artistic ideals almost asked to be put aside.⁷⁰

Storn transformed UKS completely. Floors were covered with grass, flowers and peat, and walls with Norwegian and international newspaper clippings and advertising posters. On a screen pictures and films of war and destruction appeared in the company of an advertisement stating “The world is beautiful, and you can buy it!” At the same time a recording of Storn’s own texts was relentlessly playing in the background. A figure of Christ was hanging over an ‘altar’, a box with a pink fur hole shaped as a vagina. Another sexual reference was the giant condoms filled with sperm-like liquid; when a member of the audience pulled a string these squirted liquid. Two entire lorry loads of rubbish were emptied onto the grass making the installation complete as a metaphor for the wastefulness of contemporary society.

Few art critics saw the installation as innovative experimentation; rather they dismissed its aesthetic value altogether. There are three main reasons for this: first, the mixture of garbage and art was found to be extremely provocative; second, the aforementioned objection to the ‘subjective’ approach to art and expression; third, Storn’s use of religious symbols alongside pornographic objects, which seemed to endow them with equal importance. Furthermore, Storn had received a sum of money from Norsk Kulturråd (Arts Council Norway) in connection with *Coca-Donald Samfund*, which angered the conservative press substantially. However, the exhibition was visited by scores of people, and it was hugely influential in the sense that it offered artists the possibility of expressive experimentation in different materials and the marriage of art and politics. Storn, though, positioned himself firmly as a troublemaker and radical art activist in public opinion, whether he wanted to or not.

The controversial *En Utstilling* (An Exhibition) at Christiansand Kunstforening (Kristiansand Art Society) in October 1969 was a collective show by artists that would eventually join GRAS. Organised by Bjørn Krogstad, who also exhibited, the exhibition contained contributions from Øivind Brune, Kjær, Kleiva, Krohg, Asle Raaen, Storeide, Arne Sørensen and Storn. As Storn put it, “I only remember a whirlwind of FNL flags, installations, sculptures, posters. [...] We wanted to demonstrate the expanded conception of art.”⁷¹ An occupation of Kristiansand Cathedral was wrongly associated, by the press, with

⁷⁰ Renberg, ‘Litt av en forestilling’, *Willibald Storn*, p33

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p43

the exhibition and by implication the artists involved. Morten Krohg recalls: “Large uprisings, youth revolt and everything! [...] That wasn’t the goal though, but we wanted to break down – besides the modern art that we ourselves represented – the heraldic social lethargy in a way.”⁷² On the entrance door the audience was met by a pair of blue tracksuit bottoms inscribed with Claes Oldenburg’s words, “I am for an art which does something else than sit on its ass in a museum”, which echoes Krohg’s televised proclamation. Storn’s inclusion of pornographic objects, probably similar in content to what had appeared in *Coca-Donald Samfund*, and Krohg’s assemblage, the main feature of which was a golden exhaust pipe intruding 40cm into the room, were both reported to the police. Having been independent, the artists were clearly staging a revolt against the art establishment in particular, and the society in general. But that was all about to change.

4.8 The Collectively grown Serigraphy – GRAS

At the turn of the year 1969-70, Storn took the initiative of establishing a collaborative artists’ workshop at Hjelms gate that would be known as GRAS.⁷³ GRAS, as an idea, derived from the many communes and workshops that Storn had been affiliated with during the 1960s. These had laid down the radical stepping stones for GRAS artists both artistically and politically, and GRAS would be a continuation of the relentless opposition to the capital driven establishment. According to Harald Flor, the idea of a graphics collective emerged after a discussion about how to continue the fellowship and community that had developed in the course of the 1960s.⁷⁴ The hardliners within the group would participate in the critique of ‘art as institution’ as well as doctrinal Marxist-Leninist ‘advertisement’ throughout its lifespan.⁷⁵ In this respect, GRAS was in fact “...both time specific and a result of particular presuppositions in the Norwegian art life.”⁷⁶

Kleiva was the originator of the multifaceted name, which was meant as a preliminary working title. To Norwegians the name in New Norwegian associates it with real and true Norwegianness, thus affiliating the group directly with the grassroots and specifically the

⁷² Morten Krohg, 10 January 2007

⁷³ Storn wanted to publish a periodical, which never materialised, and invited the 1960s ‘protest’ artists to join him. The periodical was dropped in part because of the issues Storn, Kleiva, Radlgruber, Raaen and Krohg had experienced when contributing to *Kunst – for mennesket eller museet?*, Gyldendal: Oslo, 1969

⁷⁴ Flor, Harald, ‘Politisk grobunn for billedmessig mangfold’, *Gras – 10 år etter*, p4

⁷⁵ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1984; Nerdrum, Nora Ceciliedatter, ‘Et reklamebyrå for ml-bevegelsen?’, *Arbeiderhistorie – Årbok for Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, Oslo: Forlaget Aktuell AS, 2008

⁷⁶ Flor, ‘Politisk grobunn for billedmessig mangfold’, p3

periphery – not traditionally associated with art.⁷⁷ Playing on a broad range of associations – such as lively and powerful, growth and aspiration – the name reflects a wish to be considered truthful, genuine and unpretentious. An alternative interpretation would be that the name reveals the yearning for a new direction in Norwegian art and artists’ potential to grow and stand together. Artists saw GRAS as a natural collective step in the continuation of their oppositional work. Furthermore, it was clearly economically beneficial for artists to work together in a workshop. Before joining GRAS most of the artists had been known for their radical positions and experimental contributions to the arts, be it painting or sculpture. Nevertheless, many had not been associated with graphic art before joining the workshop, and the majority had never worked in serigraphy. For instance, at the 1970 UKS spring exhibition Kjær exhibited his ‘cube painting’, a large cube made of clapboard with stripes painted diagonally that increased in width and colour towards the ceiling “...so as to give the impression of a gradual ascension from earth to heaven.”⁷⁸ Krogstad showed the Rauschenberg inspired *Skjorta mi* (My shirt, 1969), an assemblage made by pinning a simple white collar shirt accompanied by a tie to a painted canvas. Moreover, Storn’s satirical installation *Revolusjonært stilleben tilegnet Anders Lange & Co* (Revolutionary still life dedicated to Anders Land & Co) pointed to Lange’s continuous attacks on Storn and his art.⁷⁹

From the moment Krohg entered the group, he organised more suitable premises for a graphic workshop in Christian Krohgs gate 28, and in May 1970 the GRAS collective was officially born there, when Kleiva, Kjær, Krohg, Lind, Storn and Bjørn Melbye Gulliksen received grants collectively from the Oslo City Council and Arts Council Norway. As a professional vacuum table was acquired, the initiative was taken to set up an open collective workshop for artists especially interested in serigraphy. The workshop was systematic in practice, with communal equipment and expenses, as well as practical tasks, shared between the members. This in turn led to economic and personal freedom for all involved. The artists discussed theoretical viewpoints and politics while helping each other with the practicalities of printing. The artistic and social diversity within the group thus stimulated members’ creativity. Though the cooperative grew to having nearly thirty artists affiliated with it, core

⁷⁷ New Norwegian is one of the two official written languages in Norway, the other being ‘book language’. Gras means the same as the English grass, but is spelt differently in ‘book language’, *gress*.

⁷⁸ The work might be *Soft landing on the Moon* from 1970. Flor, ‘Politisk grobunn for billedmessig mangfold’, p5

⁷⁹ Anders Lange was a right-wing politician, the founder of Anders Langes parti later known as Framskrittspartiet (Norwegian Progress Party, FRP), who reported Storn and Krohg to the police for pornography and indecent behaviour (nudity at Høvikodden and art works), even though he had never seen the events in person.

members numbered less than ten, the hardliners must be said to be Lind, Storn, Krohg, Kleiva and Kjær.⁸⁰

GRAS members generally held that art had to portray meaning rather than mere form. They took a stance against the idea of art for the few, and purposely made art for the people. One of the advantages of working with silkscreen was the low cost, especially when they did the printing themselves. Another was the relative ease with which it could be produced. Previously it had been customary to outsource printing to commercial printers since a press was too expensive for any individual artist to purchase. Consequently the printer's fee drove up the price of an original print. Evidently other factors influenced the price too, such as private galleries, art dealers and the status of the artist. GRAS attempted to distance itself from what it saw as instruments of capitalism and kept the prints at an affordable level throughout its existence, which angered many established artists.⁸¹ For GRAS, though, pricing and attainability were core issues to the production of art. GRAS was made up of artists between 25 and 37 years old who wanted – rather idealistically – to overturn the art market. Art, in their view, should be a public gift, one that is shared by all and open to all. At no point did GRAS members explicitly refuse to exhibit in private galleries, though they avoided representation both nationally and internationally. The most ardent members, such as Lind and Krohg, disputed the value of a capital-driven art business, which they understood galleries to stand for. The assimilation of art and its message was far more important than profit. This is admirable considering that very few artists at the time could depend financially on their art for an income. The unfair system that had developed within the newly discovered oil state was letting galleries and museums make money off struggling, sometimes even starving, artists. This is what led GRAS to be instrumental in securing a universal fee for exhibiting artists, and GRAS's contributions would eventually lead to the realisation of a minimum wage for artists, which will be discussed later.

GRAS-associated artists turned their attention to political engagement and attempted to facilitate a shift away from the middle class towards the 'people'. The group found a need to awaken the masses through art: "[...] with 'art' [we] mean representations of something that concern us, if the representation is such that it gets that which concerns us to concern us even

⁸⁰ For membership list see Appendix II

⁸¹ At Blomquist Kunsthandel's 2008 autumn auction Per Kleiva's GRAS print *Amerikanske Sommerfuglar* (1971) was sold for 65,000 NOK, a substantial increase from the 15-20 NOK in the 1970s.

more.”⁸² However, ideological convictions are not always clearly visible in GRAS artists’ imagery. To decipher the image’s underlying political connotations the viewer is often guided by its title, such as in Kjær’s *Lay Lady Lay* (1970, Fig. 4.9). The title tells us the artist was interested in Bob Dylan’s music and the sexual freedom that the lyrics of Dylan’s song of the same name seem to proclaim. The image continues Kjær’s pursuits in Hard-Edge and is a seemingly straightforward stripe representation. The use of an increasing saturation of colour in the bands towards the middle of the picture gives the illusion of depth, and the fleshy pink to red nuances create a warmth at the centre, which could be interpreted as a female vulva opening up to the viewer. In his song, Bob Dylan sings about an encounter between a man and a woman, “...the best thing that he’s ever seen”, and Kjær seems to have picked out the celebration of the sexual encounter from a distinctly male perspective. Kjær’s stripe painting welcomes the viewer into the depths of the ‘lady’ as she lies “...across my big brass bed.”⁸³ Kjær continued his painterly ambitions of strict Hard-Edge for a while, until as a consequence of GRAS he turned to figuration.

As previously mentioned, the group only made silkscreen prints collectively; nonetheless, the artists continued their respective artistic outputs outside GRAS.⁸⁴ Often when invited to exhibit there was a mix of GRAS-made serigraphy with painting, sculpture, assemblage and installation pieces made by the individual artists. By invitation from Trygve Nergaard, GRAS organised in September 1970 *Miljø ’70* (Environment ’70) for Trondheim Kunstforening’s (Trondheim Art Society) jubilee. The exhibition was eventually renamed *Kulturpakken 70 – en gave til Trondheim by* (The Culture-package 70 – a gift to the city of Trondheim) for the reason that Trondheim City Council had refused to subsidise the event. As the initial name bears witness, the exhibition contained ‘environments’ entirely built up on-site, and was both the first GRAS exhibition and the largest to be put together.⁸⁵ For GRAS the exhibition was a means to express their politics, several of the installations were highly critical of American involvement in Vietnam. Storn described its conception thus: “We got on the train without any ideas and almost without a picture. Kulturrådet had given us some money, but it wasn’t a particularly large sum, and maybe we wanted to avenge ourselves a little. What we put together did in any case produce an immense ruckus. Kristiansand all over

⁸² Statement from the *Miljø-70*, exhibition in Trondheim, consisting of mainly GRAS artists, excerpt from Urnes, Johan Fredrik, ‘Et glimt av GRAS’, *Amerikanske sommerfugler: GRAS, politikk og pop*, exhibition catalogue, Rogaland Kunstmuseum: Stavanger, 2003, p10

⁸³ Dylan, Bob, *Lay, Lady, Lay*, 1969, Big Sky Music, <http://www.bobdylan.com/#/songs/lay-lady-lay>

⁸⁴ The group also had an Intaglio printing-press, which was borrowed from 1971 onwards.

⁸⁵ Non-GRAS artists Tor Esaiassen and Liv Trygstad also contributed to the exhibition.

again.”⁸⁶ Clearly the exhibition was an impromptu event and the installations’ contemporaneity bore testimony to the spontaneity of the artists involved.

Brune and Krogstad’s dinner party interior, in which four figures, whose outlines were stencilled on to the wall, were sitting at a table with a white tablecloth and napkins, as well as a large candelabrum, gave the impression of a celebration. From the top of the table the female figure stated “you’re among friends now, captain!” (Fig. 4.10) Behind the supposed Captain, identified by the officer’s cap, two American flags mark him out as the returned hero. The installation presented the audience with the fictional welcome of Captain E. Medina, who had become notorious for his involvement in the massacre at My Lai in Vietnam.⁸⁷ Other political ‘environments’ included Raaen’s shooting range where American President Lyndon B. Johnson was one of the targets, amongst other, more or less, authoritarian types such as the policeman and the banker in a bowler hat. Flanking the mass of human targets was an elk on a black plastic background, which had the text “Do not shoot the elk” just above it. However, it too had a target, marked by a square containing a heart. Storn had yet again brought out his large condoms with sperm-like fluid, squirting by the pull of a rope. At the entrance he also made a playpen where he, together with children, built what could be called a ‘play-sculpture’; a sculpture made by children and adults through playing. Tremendous controversy followed the opening and attempts were made to shut down the exhibition, although in vain since the publicity doubled the number of visitors. Unfortunately the popularity of the show did not prevent the conservative art society’s board from firing the curator, Trygve Nergaard.

4.9 A Silkscreen Manifesto – the *GRAS Graphic Folder*

So far, GRAS had participated in themed exhibitions, which had included a range of artists and artworks. These shows had sometimes been organised by GRAS artists, but none purely showcased the workshop. Surrounded by controversy, the fourteen-strong collective felt it particularly vital to have their collective pictures shown separately, therefore, in December 1971 a series of simultaneous exhibitions across southern Norway showed a communal portfolio of fourteen prints. Exhibited in Oslo, Bergen, Hamar and Skien the graphic folder was to be the only example of a complete piece made by the group. The fourteen artists and

⁸⁶ Renberg, *Willibald Storn*, p45

⁸⁷ On 16 March 1968 the My Lai hamlet of Son My village in the Quang Ngai Province of South Vietnam was attacked by a US light-infantry brigade of 150 soldiers, who killed approximately 500 civilians (unarmed women, children and old men) in four hours. It was the massacre, and the subsequent attempted cover-up, that would haunt the Americans’ war in Vietnam until its end. Out of the soldiers involved only one, Lt. William Calley, was convicted of murder at a court-martial in November 1970.

their works were: Siri Aurdal, *Uten Tittel* (Untitled); Øyvind Brune, *Grønn rytme* (Green rhythm); Bjørn Krogstad, *Uten Tittel* (Untitled); Anders Kjær, *Requiem*; Per Kleiva, *Frigjering* (Liberation); Morten Krohg, *Do you know how to reach the influential Californian market?*; Eva Lange, *Frø* (Seed); Victor Lind, *Fest* (Party); Bjørn Melbye Gulliksen, *Treet* (The Tree); Olav Orud, *Kimmen* (The Source); Asle Raaen, *Karusell* (Carousel); Jan Radlgruber, *Uten Tittel* (Untitled); Egil Storeide, *Vi blir flere* (Our Numbers are Increasing); Willibald Storn, *Fredselskeren* (The Peace Lover).

The exhibition poster alongside each artist's single contribution made up a varied and exciting fifteen print assortment, which was sold for a meagre 1500kr to finance the costs associated with the workshop. While the exhibition was given substantial media attention, not least that at Kunsternes Hus, only a few of the 100 folder editions were sold to ordinary people for which it was meant. This indicates partly that the styles portrayed were far removed from working class life and in part that GRAS' radicalism might have alienated the layer of society for which they were working – the grassroots. Ironically, following the shows the folder was acquired by the public sector and national art institutions. The exhibition poster made by Kleiva (Fig. 4.11) pertinently expressed the name, unity and socio-political stance of the collective group. Through the grass at the bottom the members of GRAS emerge, and they seem to be one with the grass – even growing with it. The familiar faces are at the same time cast in shadow and could therefore be identifiable as the masses. By placing GRAS at the level of the growing grass, Kleiva has situated the group at the lowest level of society, yet it is standing proud and straight as the proletariat should. Here an analogy is being established between grass and the working class. The poster is in fact literalising the metaphor 'grassroots'. It is a very telling introduction to the graphic folder, one that outlines the purpose not only for the folder but the group as a collective. The photograph's greenish tint was contrasted sharply with the attention grabbing red text detailing the place and time of the exhibition, as seen in the photograph of four of the artists holding up the poster for the press.⁸⁸ The colouration is not merely a marketing tool; the use of red and green was intentional. Red represents the broadly socialist views of the collective and ties all the individual artists' ideologies together. Green corresponded with the workshop's name and its connection with the grassroots, as well as it emphasised individual 'free' artists' growth within GRAS. The poster thereby represented the purpose of the folder *and* the workshop. The image renders an image of the group as close to nature and at the same time retains associations that are

⁸⁸ The text on the poster in the photograph reads: "GRAS, graphic folder 1971. Kunsternes Hus, Wergelandsveien 17. 4-18 December"

primitive in essence, such as folk-music.⁸⁹ A link was established with a particular social group which was believed to embody a certain ideological outlook.

Art historian Sidsel Helliesen has suggested that Brune, Kjær, Krohg, Storeide and Storn's contributions to the folder were the most characteristic examples.⁹⁰ However, the almost encyclopaedic folder unfolded greater variety than would have been expected from such a close practical and ideological cooperation – it purposefully showed the breadth of influences within GRAS. Indeed the titles were as varied as the prints themselves, referencing abstract ideals of life and growth as much as class-specific follies and political critique. Since the portfolio illustrates the breadth of GRAS' output – geometric patterns, abstraction, stripes, symbolic emblems, simple poster figurations, combinations of pure colour planes with figuration, as well as compositions of stylised and representational elements – it is appropriate to investigate the silkscreens more closely than Helliesen would suggest. The folder prints do not seem to have appeared in a predominant order, I will therefore be dealing with the images in three main sections where the emphasis is on pictorial approach: First abstraction and non-figuration, second figuration and third Pop or Neo-Dada strategies. Moreover, the prints can only loosely be defined to pertain to these broad categories and must be viewed as a collective effort.

4.9.1 Stylisation, Abstraction and non-figuration

Aurdal, Brune, Krogstad, Radlgruber and Raaen can clearly be associated with abstraction or non-figuration in their contributions to the exhibited folder. To a lesser degree Lange and Orud utilise abstracted elements in their works and will therefore be discussed as abstractionists here. These artists can to a certain degree be seen as the modernists within the portfolio and the group overall. For Aurdal and Lange the folder prints were their single experimentation with serigraphy, others consistently produced silkscreens and took an active part in the socio-political aspects associated with GRAS. These modernist works reveal the openness of the workshop and art's potential to be 'free' *and* a political tool, even if ideology cannot be read directly from the image. By example, the non-figurative *Uten tittel* by sculptor Siri Aurdal (Fig. 4.13) is the only black and white serigraphy included in the portfolio. Repetitive wavy lines, some of which relate to each other in such a manner as to create bands of concave and convex forms, make up Aurdal's image.

⁸⁹ Even today contemporary folk and country bands use grass to reflect their association with the land and the people working on the land.

⁹⁰ Helliesen, 'Silketrykkets seiersgang', p278

As an apprentice Aurdal was resident in *Villa Moderne* in Paris for a short period in the late sixties. This is where she encountered Constantine Brancusi's monumental sculpture and she was immediately inspired by his work. His works, in particular his series the *Endless Column* (1937-8 Fig. 4.14), seemed to her to exemplify the combination and interrelationship between sculpture and public purpose and space, a place occupied not by architecture or sculpture alone, but a unification of the two. *Uten tittel* seems closely related to Brancusi's column through its 'sculptural' structures, which emerge from the image following the same rhombus pattern. The organic outlines might relate to her own sculptural work, *Havbølger* (Ocean Waves, 1971-2), which she was simultaneously working on. On the left side four circles have been placed so that simple bird-like designs materialize from the surface. These remind one of stylised creatures found in decorative textile designs. Aurdal's mother was in fact the textile artist Synnøve Anker Aurdal, who introduced abstraction and non-figuration to modern tapestry in Norway. *Uten tittel* is strikingly close to the tapestry piece by Anker Aurdal entitled *Black and White* (1970). The two artworks have many similarities beyond the lack of colour: *Black and White* is also divided into two fields, one black and one black and white section with masks and figures peeking out from the pattern. Anker Aurdal's influence can further be seen in her monumental textile pieces such as *Gallionsfigur I* (Figurehead I, 1970-75, Fig. 4.15), or even the much later *Drøm om hav* (Dream of Ocean, 1990, Fig. 4.16). *Gallionsfigur I* is essentially referencing a Nordic inheritance, particularly the Vikings, yet the repetition and flatness connects Anker Aurdal's textile art to her daughter's silkscreen. Even the emerging birds' totemic nature corresponds to the spirituality of the tapestry's Viking figurehead. Produced around the same time, it is possible that the bird-like figures in Aurdal's serigraphy were influenced by her mother's textiles, just as the repetitive elements were informed by Brancusi. Aurdal's non-figurative style can therefore be closely related to her artistic inheritance.⁹¹ Based on the close relationship between mother and daughter, it could be argued that an art-political meaning might be found in the unequal relationship between the arts. Contemporary textile art was still marginalised in relation to the more traditional fields and was rarely seen exhibited. Equally, serigraphy, and printmaking generally, was seen to be a less desirable art form.

⁹¹ Siri (Anker) Aurdal's father was Leon Anker, a painter who trained under André L'hôte and Georg Jacobsen in Paris in the 1920s, and came to be part of the *l'art pour l'art* group of artists when he returned to Norway. The geometric and abstracted landscape was essential to his work, yet he never completely lost the essence of Norwegian nature. Synnøve later remarried the younger artist Ludvig Eikaas. Siri therefore grew up in an environment that encouraged artistic exchange and criticism, one which would have helped shape her own style.

In *Karusell* (Carousel, Fig. 4.17), Raaen created a sense of movement from solely abstract picture elements and its title is the only reference to the 'real' world, yet it reinforces the momentum of movement within the piece. Art historian Gerd Hennum has described *Karusell* as non-figurative and "...an example of concrete art with pure colours and clearly separated shapes that created space and movement on the surface – without communicating anything else."⁹² In that case, the print emphasises colours, forms, lines and planes without any aim to reproduce from reality. *The Basis of Concrete Art* signed among others by Theo van Doesburg in 1930, states that "...painting should be constructed entirely from purely plastic elements, that is to say planes and colours. A pictorial element has no other significance than itself and consequently the painting possesses no other significance than itself."⁹³ It seems that theoretically Raaen is following in van Doesburg's footsteps, and *Karusell* cannot be said to be rooted in reality or have any meaning other than pure abstraction. Raaen spent time during 1962-3 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and studied at Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17, both in Paris, and it is likely that he developed his interest in concrete art while studying there. For Raaen Atelier 17 initiated a lifelong interest in collectivism as a source of inspiration. Hayter's studio was an international melting pot in which informal dissemination of ideas and technical as well as stylistic discoveries were highly encouraged – a direct link to the GRAS workshop can be made in this regard. Hayter himself can be seen as a father figure to the Norwegian workshop, not only because of his experimentation with print media but his devotion to ideological causes, such as organising a portfolio against Fascism in support of the Spanish Civil War.⁹⁴ The freedom and commitment Raaen experienced in Paris would have been in stark contrast to the Norwegian hierarchical academic system's idealisation of the artist genius isolated from society.

Art education was an important issue for Raaen as seen from his contribution to *Kunst – for mennesket eller museet?* (Art – for man or museum?).⁹⁵ In his essay on education, Raaen attacks academy professors and in particular their refusal to accept that the artist cannot be permitted to "...sit in the ivory tower any longer."⁹⁶ His main point concerns the academy's unrealistic approach to the graduate artist's professional life, which has to be the responsibility of both the academy and society – that is the state. If there is, as Raaen asserts,

⁹² Hennum, Gerd, *Med kunst som våpen*, p180

⁹³ 'Concrete art', *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T018994>

⁹⁴ David Cohen, 'Hayter, S. W.', *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T037072>, accessed 23March, 2010

⁹⁵ Raaen, Asle, 'Behovet for kunstutdanning', *Kunst – for mennesket eller museet?*, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1969, p52-61

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p54

a need for art and art-education then the syllabus has to conform to a modern way of thinking that includes experimentation and prepare artists for what it in financial terms means to be a working artist. Raaen proposes a democratisation of the academy where the experience of decision-making will prepare young artists for the independence of their future lives, and by extension this will lead to a truly contemporary art. In France during 1968, art students had called for similar measures of reform when they occupied their institutions. As Rebecca J. DeRoo points out, art students objected to an academy that emulated national tradition over experimental and artistic freedom. In a manner close to Raaen's writing these French students also wanted the academies to take responsibility for artists' afterlives.⁹⁷ In his conclusion Raaen suggests placing more art in primary and secondary schools, not decorative necessarily, but small exhibitions that would be touring schools to result in, as he puts it, "happier people."⁹⁸ Today this is a reality, through the exhibition society Kunst i Skolen (Art in School).

Clarity and symmetry are important elements in Brune's work and the composition of lines and figures that create associations beyond the image itself feature in his work to this day. Brune's *Grønn rytmi* (Green Rhythm, Fig. 4.18) is clearly an image related to Op-art with its optical illusion created by a series of differing width turquoise, red and purple bands, running horizontally across the picture plane, and broken up in the middle by a vertically running band of shortened vertical stripes of the same colours. As *Grønn rytmi* is wholly made up of vertical lines it could easily be a variation on Hard Edge stripe painting.⁹⁹ On the other hand Krogstad's contribution to the folder, *Uten tittel* (Untitled, Fig. 4.19), with its simple configuration of red, green and blue, has more in common with the American Hard-Edge and Colour-field painters. There is a clear linear division of pure colours, which links the work directly with that aesthetic. If one compares Krogstad's print to the Americans Frank Stella or Barnett Newman (see Fig. 4.20-4.21) they appear closely related. *Grønn rytmi* is

⁹⁷ DeRoo, Rebecca J., *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p25-26

⁹⁸ Raaen, 'Behovet for kunstutdanning', p61

⁹⁹ Hard-edge was a term coined by art critic Jules Langsner in 1958 to describe a specific Californian style emerging from Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction. It was "applied to a type of painting (mainly abstract) in which areas of colour are defined by hard edges, in contrast to the free mix of colours and shapes in Abstract Expressionism. In the 1960s the term was used generally to include a wide range of artists such as Elsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland." 'Hard Edge painting', In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, Oxford Art Online, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e852> (accessed February 25, 2010) "Generally, however, it is used in a more specific sense: whereas geometric abstraction can be used to describe works with large numbers of separate, possibly modelled, elements creating a spatial effect, hard-edge painting refers only to works comprised of a small number of large, flat forms, generally avoiding the use of pictorial depth." 'Hard-edge painting', In *Grove Art Online*, Oxford Art Online, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T036613> (accessed February 25, 2010)

not Hard Edge however, since the illusionary effects complicate the image to such a degree that the image is not solely a representation of stripes. The middle section appears to the eye as on top of the continuing bands ‘underneath’, which gives the impression that two different paths are overlapping each other within the image. Arguably *Grønn rytmikk* is a progression from the earlier *Rytmisk bilde nr 1* (Rhythmic Picture nr 1, 1970, Fig. 4.22) that Brune seems to have stylised until simply the essence of the rhythm is left, yet the association to the earlier work has not been lost. While the structure would seem to relate the image to stripe painting, the title in itself indicates something more: green rhythm. It might be that Brune is referring to the interaction between the colours, the red and purple breaking up the rhythm of the green, changing the rhythm of the bands by simple alteration. As in so many Op-art works, the artist is playing with our perception by using limited colours within a simple repetitive construction.

Kleiva also experimented with the effects of optical illusions, an example being his painting *Flo og Fjøre* (High and low tide, 1973, Fig. 4.23). Here Kleiva used the monochrome blue-scale to produce an illusion of water moving in and out to sea. A white hourglass has been created in the middle of the image between two identical, though reversed, repeating patterns of curving lines, which are converging towards each other, from dark blue at the painting’s edge to light blue and eventually white. There is a pulling force between the lines that emphasise the tidal cycle and Kleiva has utilised the title to make the viewer associate with the natural element of water, in true Vasarely fashion. In Brune’s print however, the title alludes to several aspects at once: the repetition of lines as well as the rhythmic nature of music. The creation of a serigraphy – the application of the differing colours in separate stages of production – could be compared to a piece of music as the different parts work together to create the whole. Kjær has indicated that a stereo was acquired for the workshop, and it is likely that Jazz music was continuously playing in the background.¹⁰⁰ Another connotation to the title would be the resonance of the word *green*, as a reference to environmental issues. As previously stated, GRAS artists were concerned about the continuing pollution of the planet and disregard for our natural resources.

The representation of emerging life is evident in Eva Lange’s *Frø* (Seed, Fig. 4.24). She presents the silkscreen as if an abstract scientific segment of a seed in soil, the seed itself a human baby. The earth has opened up for the seed’s little leafs, represented by the continuation of the mustard colour, to surface from its earthly womb. At first impression the

¹⁰⁰ It is at least the case for Kjær that music played, and still plays, a role in his creative process. Author’s interview with Anders Kjær November 2004, see Appendix I.

image seems to convey positivity to the commencement of life, the budding of a growing organism. However, the foetus has his/her eyes covered as if afraid of being removed from the safety of the womb. Until now writers such as Gerd Hennum and Ellen Sæthre have agreed that this print is apolitical. Hennum, for example, refers to the print as an image of budding life and validates this by Lange's own statement in 1996: "...professionally I felt a little outside of the political trend that prevailed in GRAS [...] and found it very unnatural to work for political slogans."¹⁰¹ Even though Lange distances herself from the slogans, probably referring to the doctrinaire attitudes of her male colleagues, *Frø* suggests a social reading. It suggests that the contemporary world is not a welcoming and safe place to be brought into. It is hard not to connect the foetus with the female artist herself or the concurrent political debate concerning the question of legal abortions, which was one of the main topics for Feminists during the 1970s. During Lange's involvement with GRAS, she focused mainly on glass and material pictures, which were mostly abstract, and this can be seen in the composition here. However, in her more recent work she focuses in on solitary figures (mostly women) that express an isolation and abandonment akin to Munch. Radlgruber's print, *Uten tittel* (Untitled, Fig. 4.25), is very simple abstraction. As if painted by brushstroke, the very few elements come together in a stylised, flat manner and follows almost exclusively aesthetic concerns.¹⁰² Even though *Frø* naturally references other branches of Lange's artistic production, this silkscreen is not merely geometrical abstraction. The implication of the use of the photographic representation of the baby instantly gives it a different meaning. *Frø* might not connect directly with the highly politicised and radical Marxist-Leninists of the workshop, but it can be interpreted as a critical view of the environment into which a child is born, especially if one deems the foetus to be female.

The foetus itself references ideas of gender and poses questions about the way one views such a subject. It would be difficult to imagine a male artist producing this print, as it so clearly concerns motherhood and pregnancy, the pending question of self-determined abortion and the female role in 1970s-society. The foetus could even be representative of the artist herself and her struggle to make it in an overwhelmingly male-dominated art world. Even if no political sentiments are to be read from her print, using a subject bursting with symbolic meaning, such as the foetus, instantly contradicts her anti-political stance. As one of only three women that participated in the workshop and one of only two to take part in the folder

¹⁰¹ Hennum, Gerd, *Med kunst som våpen: unge kunstnere i opprør 1960-1975*, Oslo: Schibsted Forlagene, 2007, p181, from interview in Danbolt, Gunnar, *Grafikergruppen GRAS*, Søgne Kunstlag, 1996, p7

¹⁰² In his paintings Radlgruber uses an abstract language where he employs the dripping and running of paints across the canvases, which implies the image might be related to a gestural form of abstraction.

exhibition, Lange has chosen a figurative style, even if it is stylised and abstract, which suggests her intention to communicate with the viewer. As I discussed earlier Siri Aurdal chose a completely abstract motif for her contribution following the same formula as in her sculptures, whilst Lange has moved away from the abstraction in glass. This implies that she did in fact want to align herself with the socio-political momentum within the workshop, but as a consequence of her female identity the print is self-exploring and questioning in relation to feminist attitudes.

Another sculptor, Olav Orud, contributed *Kimen* (The Source, Fig. 4.26) to the GRAS folder. On the same theme as Eva Lange's *Frø*, *Kimen* represents both in title and presentation a plant embryo developing into a sprout. However unlike *frø*, the Norwegian word for seed, *kimen* can both mean the embryonic state of a plant and the source of an idea. Orud has depicted the red flag as the flower of a growing organism thereby using the ambiguity of the word to complete the image's meaning. Orud's representation is stylised and contains geometric elements, at the same time as it leaves no doubt as to its associations. The seed from which the flag grows is curiously shaped like a human head. The shape is similar to Brancusi's sculptures *Sleeping Muse* (1909-10, Fig. 4.27) and *Beginning of the World* (1920, Fig. 4.28). When one knows that Orud is a sculptor and his later work, *Anax Imperator* (1990, Fig. 4.29), which witnesses Brancusi's influence (Fig. 4.30), these are not unlikely sources of inspiration. Of course the silkscreen references Brancusi as it utilises the same ovoid form to represent the beginning of life, but it is full of positivity and hope. The living, growing red flag verifies this clearly. By displaying the roots and the growing 'flower' Orud is rooting the human seed to growth in an even more symbolic way, which reminds the viewer that change begins with only one seed – one idea. By emphasising nature as the earth from which things grow, at the bottom of the print, the human seed in the middle and the red flag at the top Orud is showing the viewer that by living in conjunction with nature a socialist outcome can be met. The *chime* here is clearly the grassroots, symbolising the lower sections of society, and by placing the roots below, in effect, where the seed is actually growing he is alluding to how the grassroots are the answer to the socialist future, corresponding to Marxist-Leninist rhetoric.

The depiction of the growing flag also references the growth and maturity of the workshop itself. From one seed, one idea and one person the collective has managed to develop roots and socially flourish. The workshop provided a model for other artists to come together and collaborate, such as in Bergen where Lyn was started in 1971. The red flag then functions as a signifier of their common allegiance to a socially engaged art, and the seed

represents the individual's artistic freedom as achievable under socialism/communism. In a sense GRAS artists were at an advantage when producing art as they were less at risk from exploitation and market uncertainty. The aspiring hope that the growing workshop could maintain openness both stylistically and politically is very much imbedded in *Kimen*.

4.9.2 Figuration

Figuration in its broadest definition was predominant in GRAS' output. If one is to judge by the portfolio alone, figurative styles dominate and is indicative of the different artists' personal styles outside the workshop. As we have seen Lange and Orud used both abstract and figurative measures for creation, in the following section I will look closer at the silkscreens that use purely figurative means in their expression. "Realist works can disturb or please or educate us by showing reality as not what we think we know, by showing realities we have never seen or dreamed, or by making speakable realities that might previously have seemed only idiosyncratic or incommunicable."¹⁰³ To an extent Rachel Bowlby's words ring true of the figurative works presented below, in multiple ways these prints present us with a reality truer than most to that of '1968'. Kjær, Kleiva, Krohg, Lind, Melbye Gulliksen, Storeide and Storn display figurative elements in their folder prints, yet these have very different origins. Predominantly this group was figurative outside the workshop and most can be characterised by a preference for political art production. One could argue that there are two different 'schools' within the figurative part of the folder. On the one hand, Storeide, Kleiva and Kjær display explicit references to ideology; on the other hand, Storn, Melbye Gulliksen, Lind and Krohg are less obviously ideological and use a pictorial language in which the meaning is often concealed. This strict division is hazy and elements are often borrowed from across art history, significant to what one would call post-modernism. However, this definition does not pertain to all of the figurative works in the folder. Storeide's print owes more to a traditional poster language than the others and Lind's simplicity in *Fest* seemingly circumscribes any political significance. The following section, therefore, focuses on the two separate dimensions of figuration that I have chosen to characterise as *representative* figuration and *ambiguous* figuration.

***Representative* Figuration**

¹⁰³ Bowlby, Rachel, 'Foreword', Beaumont, Matthew (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Realism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010, pxxi

Out of the whole GRAS portfolio none can be said to illustrate more traditional poster-making elements than Egil Storeide's *Vi blir flere* (Our Numbers are Increasing, Fig. 4.31). It is a reworking of an already existing work into graphics, namely his painting *VIM* (1969, Fig. 4.32). The original painting is painted on what looks to be a wooden fence, as if the outdoor art piece has been brought into the gallery space accidentally. The print is representational in that it depicts a demonstration either coming or going and the red banners, which stand out from the blue and black uniformity of the urban landscape, tells us the group are of working class origin. So similar are the figures in the painting and the print that one might assume stencilling has been used to recreate the exact crowd. The homogenous appearance and repetition of 'cut-out' figures give the impression of the true notion of communism – the masses. The title further stresses the point of a growing workers' movement, yet the five rows of figures give the group a marginal impact as they travel through the empty cityscape. On one of the two light blue buildings on the horizon one can read "the patient."¹⁰⁴ This leads the viewer to assume that the diligent demonstration has been going on for decades as they wait for their 'numbers to increase'. Storeide then portrays the perseverance of the workers' movement over centuries. Norwegian Reidar Aulie's social realist pictures of the working class from the beginning to mid twentieth-century come close to Storeide here, perhaps not in stylistic terms but in essence. From 1958 onwards Aulie was first professor, then rector of the Academy in Oslo. Aulie is considered a great painter of social street scenes starting with his breakthrough painting, *Tendens* (Tendency, 1931, Fig. 4.33). However, there is a big gap between Aulie's overcrowded street view overpopulated by red flags and Storeide's almost empty picture. As Storeide uses almost de-humanised cut-outs to represent his workers it makes the scene more static and tableaux-like in spirit. Even if the poster seems melancholic, the title demands a positive view – the working class who have struggled for years are increasingly supported.

The symbolic red flag sways in the wind over Kleiva's green field in *Frigjering* (Liberation, Fig. 4.34), overcrowded with white daffodils signifying the budding spring. The landscape underlines the Spring of Utopia, the Socialist emblem breaking free from the web of lines that has encased it. These lines create a grid, which displays kinship to Piet Mondrian when compared to *Composition No 10 (Pier and Ocean)* (1915, Fig. 4.35). The red flag has appeared in many forms throughout the history of art, and in printmaking it is particularly poignant for its simple yet highly symbolic meaning. A nineteenth century example that

¹⁰⁴ *de tålmodige*

should be mentioned here, not only for its resemblance, but for its political affiliation is the 1892 Les XX catalogue cover by Georges Lemmen (Fig. 4.36). The Les XX banner is unfurled vigorously across a fruit bearing tree “...whose roots reveal not only the force of its artistic mission but also its diversity.”¹⁰⁵ Edmond Picard, a fellow member of Les XX, defended in his writings *social art* and urged artists to transform society by getting involved with it through their art production.¹⁰⁶ “...The hour has arrived to dip one’s pen into red ink” Picard wrote in 1886 and ninety years later Kleiva and GRAS certainly followed suit.¹⁰⁷ It is interesting how both images depict a centrally placed flag and relate to passionate belief sets that connect to the roots of society – workers.

The red flag is mostly associated with social realism in art, more specifically socialist realism as it appeared in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. However, the first red flags appear to have developed as a flag of defiance, a sign that villages or castles would not surrender under siege. Historically the red flag was raised to convey the blood that had been or would be shed, either in remembrance or as an omen. It is speculated, that it first appeared during the 1791 Revolution in France and was used as national emblem by the Jacobins during the *Reign of Terror* (1793-1794). However, Frederick Engels stated in his survey of the German peasant revolt that “...the peasants in Ried, above the Ulm, rose on February 9 [1525], assembled in a camp near Baltringen, [...] hoisted the *red flag*, and formed the *Baltringen Troop*...”.¹⁰⁸ Engels’ statement associated the red flag with the peasantry and their struggle long before the French adopted it. Represented in Romantic form in the nineteenth-century work by Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux, *Lamartine, before the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, rejects the Red Flag, 25 February 1848* (Fig. 4.37), in which the red flag is rejected in preference for the Tricolore. During 1848 the flag was honoured by Socialists and Radical Republicans and the Paris Commune raised a red banner when it seized power in 1871. In his *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, Prosper Olivier Lissagaray recalls “the electors of the

¹⁰⁵ Block, Jane, ‘Les XX and La Libre Esthétique: Belgium’s laboratories for new ideas’, Stevens, MaryAnne & Hoozee, Robert (ed.), *Impressionism to Symbolism: The Belgian Avant-Garde 1880-1900*, London: Royal Academy of Arts; Ghent: Ludion Press, 1994, p48

¹⁰⁶ The group raised everyday objects to the status of Fine Art in their exhibitions. Rugs, furniture, wallpaper, glass, ceramics, books, iron work and paintings were all exhibited together, as a complete environment could improve one’s daily life. It bestowed on the artist a social role, one that was instrumental in the reform of turn of the twentieth century society, and making available pieces of art to not only the wealthy but democratically to all classes of society. Les XX has much in common with the British Arts and Crafts Movement.

¹⁰⁷ Picard, Edmond, ‘L’Art et la Révolution’, *L’Art moderne*, 18 July 1886, quoted in Block, ‘Les XX and La Libre Esthétique’, *Impressionism to Symbolism*, p48

¹⁰⁸ Engels, Frederick, *The Peasant War in Germany*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House; London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1957, p107 (my italics)

St. Antoine quarter formed in long columns [...] headed by a red flag...”¹⁰⁹ Illustrations produced in 1871 confirm this (Fig. 4.38), and it must therefore be assumed that an ideological connection with socialism and communism arose from this moment in history.

Russian artists celebrated the Bolshevik Revolution before socialist realism became doctrine by representing the red flag as synonymous with the workers’ victory over the ruling classes. It often appears in the worker’s hand, as in the poster for women’s emancipation by Adolf Strakhov (Fig. 4.39), while in other examples, such as Filonov’s *Petrograd Proletariat Formula* (1920-1, Fig. 4.40), the flag’s essence is portrayed in abstract terms by way of its colour. Furthermore, *Lenin on the Tribune* (1929-30, Fig. 4.41) by Gerasimov illustrates how the flag itself adds movement and drama to a strictly speaking socialist realist picture. Even though, there are examples where the red flag is centrally placed, as in John Heartfield’s cover for *Illustrierte Geschichte der Russischen Revolution 1917* (Illustrated History of the Russian Revolution 1917, 1929 Fig. 4.42), it is commonly held by a worker’s hand.¹¹⁰ In Kleiva’s silkscreen, however, the flag stands alone and no human hand is holding it. Rather than utilising a socialist realist pictorial language, Kleiva is removing the flag from its propagandistic past and reconfiguring its symbolism to a post-modern context. By using the flag alone, it becomes representative of the ideology rather than the class, and it becomes truly an icon of the left. At the same time the landscape connects the flag directly with Norway. However, this might not have been Kleiva’s intention, even if it is topical with birch-trees in the background.¹¹¹ Intentional or not, the link between national identity and political belonging has been firmly rooted in the Norwegian worker’s movement since the mid nineteenth-century, and egalitarianism was synonymous with the struggle for independence in the early twentieth-century.

Frigjering’s landscape reappears in the triptych *Blad frå Imperialistens Dagbok I-III* (Leafs from the Imperialist’s Diary I-III, 1971, Fig. 4.43) as well as the facsimile, where the

¹⁰⁹ Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, in French 1876: English 1886, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/archive/lissagaray/ch08.htm> (accessed on 9 March 2010)

¹¹⁰ The photomontage appeared in *Social Kunst* 8, which was published in Norway and Denmark in 1932. Kleiva might therefore have seen it and considering his interest in assemblage and the use of the photo emulsion technique, Heartfield and Dada must have been of interest to him. Particularly as Heartfield produced politically charged, yet artistically experimental, posters that strike a cord with GRAS production and ideology.

¹¹¹ One of the most famous Norwegian songs, often played and sung on the Norwegian constitutional day, 17th May, *Norge i Rødt, Hvitt og Blått* (Norway in Red, White and Blue), and written during the occupation in 1941 by Finn Bø, Bias Bernhoft and Arild Feldborg, recalls a similar scene to Kleiva’s print. Although the song was written during the German occupation it refers to something significantly and specifically Norwegian in the landscape. See Appendix II

Se en hvitstammet bjerk oppi lien
rammer stripen av blåklokker inn
mot den rødmalte stuen ved stien
det er flagget som vaier i vind.

See a white trunked birch on the hill
framing the row of bluebells
against the red painted cottage by the path
that is the flag that sways in the wind.

Mondrianesque grid has disappeared, *Ein vakker morgon* (A beautiful morning, 1972, Fig. 4.44).¹¹² The flag was important to Kleiva as his earliest known political poster, *Revolusjonen er i gang* (The revolution is happening, 1969, Fig. 4.45) produced at Hjelmsgate, shows a simple flag with the political slogan across it - "The revolution is happening. Take part!" However, *Frigjering* is a much more refined poetic statement. The text has completely disappeared and the straightforward simplicity been replaced by a complex construction of very different elements. All of these elements are related to one specific and well-known worker's movement song, *Når jeg ser et rødt flag smælde* (When I see a red flag flying, 1923) by Oscar Hansen. The first and last verses relate directly to Kleiva's image, in which Kleiva has depicted the flag breaking through its lattice prison "on a crisp and fresh spring day".¹¹³ The square format of the print could be related to Malevich's *Red Square. Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* (1915, Fig. 4.46), part of Malevich's initial theorising of Suprematism, who was recorded saying "Paint a red square in your studios as a sign of the world revolution in art."¹¹⁴ More in line with Malevich's writings on Suprematism than with *Red Square* specifically, Kleiva uses geometric simplicity to portray an 'icon of the time'. *Frigjering* is, however, manifested in a realistic form where the viewer is still viewing a representation of the world, even if the political is unconcealed and the image obviously artificial. In the use of framing here, Kleiva gives prominence to the print by relating it to painting and in effect Fine Art, as a result Kleiva plays with our preconceptions by blurring high and low, art and popular. *Frigjering* must be seen as an analogy to the budding optimism on the left for a socialist future, so indicative of the aspirations of '1968'. Art politically the image might also represent breaking down bourgeois modernism by way of an innovative

¹¹² The latter was used as a frontispiece to the literary journal *Profil* and, according to Krohg, became GRAS's most popular 1st of May poster. Krohg, Morten, 'Kronologisk Oversikt', *Gras – 10 år etter*, p14

¹¹³ See Appendix II for full Danish text. As is evident in the translation below, the text and Kleiva's print seem to follow the same poetic principals. The song has been sung by the Scandinavian Left since its conception, and would definitively been known to Kleiva. The important references here is the first lines of the first and the last verse of the song:

Når jeg ser et rødt flag smælde
på en blank og vårfrisk dag,
kan jeg høre det sælsomt fortælle
om min verden, mit folk og min sag.
[...]

When I see a red flag flying
on a crisp and fresh Spring day,
I can hear it strangely tell the story
of my world, my people and my cause.

Det er sliddets slægters fane
over fronten vid og bred.
Den skal ungdommen ildne og mane,
den skal knuse hvert grænsenes led.

It is the hardship kin's standard
across the wide and broad Front.
It will alight and conjure the youth,
it will crush any constructs of limitation.

¹¹⁴ Malevich, Kazimir, 'Pamphlet of the Vitebsk Creative Committee – 1', 1920, quoted in Tokareva & Maximenko (Ed.), *From Russia: French and Russian Master Paintings 1870-1925 from Moscow and St Petersburg*, London: Palace Editions Europe, Royal Academy of Arts, 2008, p296

neo-avant-garde art.¹¹⁵ Compared to his triptych, which juxtaposes the idyllic landscape with devices of war, such as the army boots, the helicopter squadron and the mushroom cloud, the opening up towards the red flag here represents a positive attitude – a Socialist Garden of Eden. The title, *Liberation*, delivers an idea that society will be liberated by communism/socialism and that the limitations (bourgeoisie), represented by the network of lines, will be crushed. The print can be viewed as a development of his earlier flag prints and the underlying message is the same – the revolution is underway.

Requiem by Kjær (Fig. 4.47) is a commemoration of the deceased communist revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, who had been assassinated in Bolivia four years earlier. The image consists of a very simple structure and figuration, where a barren landscape is interrupted only by a monolith with a photograph featured in the worldwide press of Che Guevara taken after his death in 1967.¹¹⁶ Through the use of the photograph Kjær breaks up the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. The setting sun in the background, made up of simple circles of orange hues towards a white centre, draws upon the stripe paintings of Kjær's Hard-Edge phase, a period of his career that would come to an end during his involvement with GRAS. The sun itself is the only sign of hope in this image, where the dark blue sky and black monument with its dark blue shadow appears to lament Che Guevara's fate. The lifeless stare from the dead revolutionary's head, amputated from its body and placed so close to the ground, is haunting; together with the sombre feel it makes a silent, yet dignified monument to the fallen *hero*. Kjær's placement of the head appears to emphasise Che Guevara's connection to the people for whom he fought and lost his life, the lower classes. Che Guevara theorised that a revolutionary guerrilla war could only be won when it had the support of the lower classes, the farmers and workers. The image pays tribute both to Hard-Edge and Pop, the latter most likely the influence of Kleiva, two very different styles. However, the mixing of abstraction and figuration in Kjær's work was to be a major feature throughout GRAS' existence and not until what has been called the final image produced in the workshop, *Sør-Amerikansk interiør* (South American Interior, 1973-6, Fig. 4.72), did Kjær move away from this hybrid stripe-pop style. Although, *Requiem* clearly bridges, for Kjær, the difficulty of portraying a political subject with a non-figurative style, it has been

¹¹⁵ I refer here to neo as in 'new' avant-garde as explored by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry*, Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 2003; rather than the more negatively tinged concept in Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*

¹¹⁶ Ernesto Che Guevara was reported dead by the Bolivian Army in mid-October 1967. The photograph in question here is not the famous and heavily reproduced image by Alberto Korda from 1960, published in 1967. It is one of the Associated Press photographs taken in Bolivia when his body was displayed after he was shot. See Chapter 5

hailed as Kjær's first figurative picture. It might be that it was a natural step in the early development of an untrained artist.¹¹⁷ It is clear, however, that there was shift in style at this point, and the influence of Kjær's growing interest in radical politics in conjunction with the circle of artists around him had a great part to play in that. Nonetheless, this picture must have been strongly influenced by another source, namely Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. When compared to the 'Dawn of Man' sequence at the beginning of the movie, the resemblance is striking. Kjær's monolith is clearly the same as the extraterrestrial monolith in Kubrick's film (Fig. 4.48-4.51). Michel Chion's breakdown of the scene 'The Apes and the Monolith' reveals an unexpected connection to the movie's soundscape: "Sound: ape cries; the Ligeti *Requiem* gradually fades up over their cries. Music is suddenly cut off simultaneously with the image of the monolith..."¹¹⁸ György Ligeti's *Requiem* works in conjunction with the movie to harvest a variety of emotions from the viewer such as collective grief, fear, anticipation, the waiting for an imminent attack or threat, or more obscurely waiting for a sacred event, and the music accompanies the monolith whenever it appears. It is not simply a coincidence considering Kjær's interest in music, particularly contemporary jazz and classical music, the experimental and multi-layered nature of the piece, the influence becomes even more evident. Kjær's print is experimental by utilizing two very different styles and multi-layered with meaning once we know of his most obscure source, *2001*.¹¹⁹

If a meaning can be drawn from the film – albeit Chion warns against it – the monolith can be seen as an extraterrestrial artefact that four billion years ago brought intellectual knowledge to the apes.¹²⁰ The ape-men then started to use tools and later developed into *Homo sapiens* with even greater tools, tools that no longer need their 'masters'. If this is the distilled idea of the movie's stone, then what can Che Guevara's memory have to do with it? It might be the case that the dawning of the idea of tools, which also spurred the idea of killing, as it happens in the film, which in turn reflects back on the killing of Che Guevara and

¹¹⁷ All other members of GRAS had either attended Statens Kunstakademi (SKA, National Academy of Fine Arts) or Statens Håndværks- og Kunstindustriskole (SHKS, National Academy of Craft and Art Industry), whilst Anders Kjær is a self-trained artist. In the late sixties he was attending lectures at the University of Oslo, studying Philosophy and Art History for his degree. Sørensen and Helliesen are examples of authors who point to the change in style happening in this picture.

¹¹⁸ Chion, Michel, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, translated by Gorbman, Claudia, London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2001 (1999), scene A2, p174

¹¹⁹ *2001: A Space Odyssey* was released in Norway in February 1969 according to The Internet Movie Database. It is thereby possible that Kjær would have seen the movie. In connection to the importance of the music for both the movie and Kjær it must be added that the movie originally had an intermission during which Ligeti's *Atmospheres* would be played throughout the cinema.

¹²⁰ Chion, Michel, *Kubrick's cinema odyssey*, p138

his ideals in Bolivia. Even though *Requiem* is a monument to the man and ideologist, it is also a reflection on something more than this: It is a memorial not only to the man, but to the actions taken against him. The execution itself and in effect his martyrdom.

The print's long shadow represents a dark side to knowledge and the actions that come with knowledge, such as murder in the name of freedom.¹²¹ Che Guevara was assumed to pose a threat to capitalism and he inspired revolutionaries in the developing world to take up arms against their colonial oppressors. In the Cold War climate a race between USA and USSR began, one that would to an extent do more harm than good in the development of these poorer countries, and considering Kubrick's early cinematic opus the Cold War was most certainly a recurring theme. GRAS was preoccupied with the power structures that appeared during the Cold War, particularly due to Norway's close proximity to the USSR. In the 1970s Kubrick's influence must have been more evident than it has been since, as the analogy between the two works has been omitted from previous analysis. At the same time as this image is a salutation to the figure, Che Guevara, it is also a comment on the cold psychological landscape of capitalist society where egalitarian beliefs are subdued for the benefit of profit. By isolating the 'gravestone' Kjær emphasises alienation within society, thereby relating the composition directly to communist theory.

Ambiguous Figuration

The painterly effect in Lind's *Fest* (Party, Fig. 4.52) aligns him with the American Tom Wesselmann, at the same time as the dismembering of the anonymous figure references Pop art examples such as Rosenquist's *Silver Skies* (1962, Fig. 4.53). The silkscreen that is probably most influenced by 1950s-1960s American art is Krohg's *Do you know how to reach the influential California market?* (Fig. 4.54). Here American culture and consumerism is juxtaposed with human suffering and disaster. The meeting happens most obviously in the pin-up legs morphed with the figure of Christ on the cross (Fig. 4.55) topped by a globe, all of which is found across the artist's interpretation of the American flag. Nevertheless, the pink and blue background reveals a myriad of images that question the values of American society and its outcomes. Models show off their perfect figures, whilst Nixon is hugging women and children. A portrait of a toasting businessman or a politician (one of the Rockefellers perhaps) placed just above a car wreck, next to which a row of riot police appear. Queue upon queue of

¹²¹ In Norwegian 'skyggeside' can mean dark side as well as shadow, implying something evil. In *2001* the ape-man that understands to use the tool also understands to use it as a way of killing prey, and as a result, in a subsequent scene, kills another ape in defence of the tribe's territory represented by a waterhole.

cars line up above and below coca-cola bottles that encase the head of a dead Vietnamese soldier. Meanwhile, an airplane is taking off at the top. The Coca-Cola bottles reflect simultaneously American consumerism and Warhol's influence. The print is a reworking of the large (200 x 300cm) Rauschenberg inspired assemblage of the same name (1971, Fig. 4.56). According to Harald Flor, Krohg had been dealing with impulses from Rauschenberg as well as the French *Nouveaux Realistes* in his material pictures since 1967.¹²² The assemblage contained more images though, which are superimposed, and although some of these appear in the print, the compilation is different. At the bottom of the assemblage, peering out from either side of the actual mannequin's legs, an army attacking, weapons ready, threatens the viewer. While the printed version questions the American way of life and the prevalent commercialism within its society, the assemblage emphasises the military superpower, United States of America. It interrogates the forces that maintain US hegemony and in that way keep free market capitalism on top. Military power is predominant within the assemblage, although Jesus takes centre stage, which might be to highlight the illusion that the American army is Christ's army. The title, *Do you know how to reach the influential California market?*, suggests commercialism and advertising. Significantly has Krohg explained, "...I tried to learn something from advertisement. I think many did, but I did it completely openly. [...] I was of the opinion that one could learn something from it because it was an agitational form, and then the title is important."¹²³ The process is evident in the print and Krohg exploits marketing strategies to create his own anti-advertisement for the American way of life.

The figure of Christ appears in another of Krohg's prints, *US INRI* (1971, Fig. 4.57), where the crucifixion scene has become part of the American flag. I will return to this print in Chapter 5, for now, the inclusion of the crucifix in the silkscreen has to be discussed as an elementary part of the exposure of the American discrepancy between ideals and policies. What role does Jesus have in this print? Mounted between a pair of female legs and a rectangle, all of which is placed under a globe-like sphere, the figure of Christ becomes part of a modern column. The column is of course phallic in form, particularly considering Krohg's earlier gold-painted sculpture for the Trondheim exhibition, which ejaculated on the American flag. Even though, the compilation of images is strikingly male, pin-ups everywhere, the montage can also be read as the letter 'i' as in Information. If we are to understand it as this then the silkscreen is our information point, pregnant with images that

¹²² Flor, Harald, 'Politisk grobunn for billedmessig mangfold', *GRAS – ti år etter*, p1

¹²³ Krohg, 10 January 2007

might help answer the question posed in its very title. The concept of information as it filters through the media industry, the selection made in the editorial room, for example, might therefore also be under scrutiny.

It is clear that the national symbol of the United States, one might claim any nation state's strongest symbol, was repeatedly under attack by Krohg.¹²⁴ A contemporary of Krohg, although living in the very country that Krohg was attacking, Jasper Johns made use of the 'Stars and Stripes' even more extensively in his flags series. Jasper Johns first started painting the American flag in 1954 (*Flag*, 1954-5, Fig. 4.58), in a Cold War climate particularly on edge due to the rampant MacCarthyism and the commotion that followed the communist 'witch-trials'. By painting the flag in black and white or greyscales and hanging it in the gallery space he made the viewer scrutinise the meaning of the flag and those that use it for political gain, in so doing neutralising the flag. Yet "Johns in effect took a national symbol and transformed it into a personalized commodity."¹²⁵ Rosalind Krauss commented in 1976:

The mundane object was used as an attack on the conventions of picture-making, of what could be represented and how and where. Yet the object was always absorbed by that voice, buried under the repeated inflections of pigment suspended in wax with which Johns built the surface of his argument. Those works were no more 'about' presenting the object as a picture than they were 'about' the objective conditions of the surface. It is more accurate to say they were utterly absorbed by the performance of irony.¹²⁶

The flag paintings, as well as his targets, maps and numbers, altered the way the viewer perceived everyday iconography and exposed these subjects' underlying connotations. Johns was seeking to prompt his audience to experience these afresh, challenging a response and questioning in their meeting with the artworks. Kirk Varnedoe explains Johns' intentions with *Flag* thus:

...Johns stressed the paintings' physical presence as objects. This emphasis combined with the intellectual and perceptual dilemma posed by the coidentity of the depictions and the things depicted to produce a sensually compelling and mentally jarring experience. Some of the flags and targets showed the expected primary colors, but others were monochrome green, gray, or white, increasing the degree of abstraction and the sense of an elusive, embedded image.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Another example is *Welcome home soldier I-II* (1971).

¹²⁵ Boime, Albert, 'Waving the Red Flag and Reconstituting Old Glory', in *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring, 1990), p16

¹²⁶ Krauss, Rosalind, 'Jasper Johns: The Functions of Irony', in *October*, Vol. 2, Summer, The MIT Press, 1976, p94

¹²⁷ Varnedoe, Kirk, *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art; London: Thames and Hudson, 1996, p117

Krohg wanted to incite a reaction in the viewer too, however, the reaction he sought was not an aesthetic re-evaluation but a critical response. Parallel with Johns, Krohg was creating art in a milieu where championing of gestural abstraction was predominant, yet Krohg was not trying to simply alter the view of the everyday. He was using everyday subjects to reflect on a highly politicised reality, one that does not correspond with the contemporaneous perception of reality and idealisation of the American ‘saviour’. In a way it could be said of Krohg’s work, as of Johns’ early work, that it was “...showing common things in unexpected ways – taking the familiar and ‘making it strange,’ or ‘making it new’ – was one way for art to effect...”¹²⁸ However, Krohg did not want to merely enhance or affect the experience of life (or art), he wanted to make people act, and to reconsider the American dream as false.

The most colourful and for that reason labour intensive silkscreen was Melbye Gulliksen’s *Treet* (The Tree, Fig. 4.59), containing eleven different colours. The multi-hued purple tree is psychedelically unrealistic contrasted by an orange and yellow sky, in the middle of which the globe has replaced a more logical moon or sun. The grey, dull Earth is juxtaposed to the dreamscape, which is impregnated with clear and saturated colours. In December 1968, the first photograph of Earth from space was taken from the Apollo 8 spaceship, now colloquially referred to as *Earthrise* (Fig. 4.60).¹²⁹ The photograph had an immense effect on the way the planet and humans’ relationship to it was perceived. Melbye Gulliksen’s Earth appears to be half a representation of the planet’s atmosphere, which links it closely to *Earthrise*. The psychological effect of seeing Earth hanging in ‘empty’ space could be that human beings view each other, irregardless of colour of skin, religion or location, as equally responsible for its protection, and this idealism might have been at the forefront of Melbye Gulliksen’s thinking. There are at least two art historical sources that should be mentioned here, first Gauguin’s *The Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1888, Fig. 4.61) and second Japanese woodblock prints, such as Hiroshige’s famous *The Plum Orchard at Kameido* (1856-58, Fig. 4.62) and Hokusai’s *The Plum and the Moon* (18th-19th Century, Fig. 4.63).¹³⁰ Gauguin wrote to Schuffenecker in August 1888 that “art is an

¹²⁸ Ibid., p17

¹²⁹ In 1972, Apollo 17 would come back from space with the first image of the whole Earth, called *The Blue Marble* from the astronauts’ perception of the Earth as a big blue marble. One could consider Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalogue* (1968-72) and other American journals that started off the Environmental use of the ‘whole earth’ image as a powerful icon. Of course there is relevance in a comparison between Melbye Gulliksen and the first image of the earth from space, however, I think it is unlikely that Melbye Gulliksen would have known about the environmental movement in the US at the time of making the image. Of course environmentalist concerns are at the heart of the image, but from a more local perspective.

¹³⁰ Hiroshige’s print was copied in oil by Vincent van Gogh, and is therefore more likely to be known to the artist than any other piece of Japanese art.

abstraction; extract it from nature while dreaming in front of it and pay more attention to the act of creation than to the result.”¹³¹ Gauguin’s words seem to apply perfectly to Melbye Gulliksen’s tree. Furthermore, Gauguin wrote to van Gogh of his painting: “An apple tree cuts across the canvas, dark purple with its foliage drawn in masses like emerald green clouds with greenish yellow chinks of sunlight.”¹³² It can be assumed thus, that Melbye Gulliksen was aware of Gauguin and that *Treet* reflect his direct influence.

Even though the silkscreen’s composition is similar to Gauguin’s painting too, the simplicity and serenity is closely related to Japanese woodcuts, particularly Hokusai’s *The Plum and the Moon*, which seems almost structurally identical. Whether or not Melbye Gulliksen had indeed seen Japanese prints before creating the image is unclear, however, Gauguin was inspired by them and this would have been known to the Norwegian artist. In formalist terms the pictures are related, but the subject matter seems juxtaposed. The dreamscape cannot be said to portray submission of man under God – could it be that it is a humanist struggle to preserve the natural resources on Earth? Melbye Gulliksen might be making a comment about pollution – that we need to take care of the planet – and considering the active role GRAS had in installations, environments and political demonstrations, not to mention poster production, this is more than likely. Of course artificial, fantastical colours appear in works that are not necessarily psychedelic, which means this might not be the effect Gulliksen was aiming for. He made another print entitled *Treet* (Fig. 4.64), which is a picture of a triangular fish-drying-rack probably from northern Norway. The wooden frame of the device makes a shape similar to a cut-out Christmas tree, and the title refers simultaneously to its shape and the material from which it is made. If we assume that the folder print is a commentary on the environment, the black and white ‘tree’ is a reflection on an alternative way of life, more harmonious with nature and its resources. The print’s primitivism is linked to a dying occupation in the peripheries of Norway, the fishing communities where inhabitants are still living off the sea and therefore remain closely connected to it.¹³³ Even though, *Treet*, which appears in the 1971 folder, is clearly the most inspired by hippie ‘counterculture’ out of the collection, due to its psychedelic colouring and un-naturalistic landscape, it is more probable that it was meant as a thought provoking commentary than a representation of a trip induced by psychedelic drugs.

¹³¹ Letter to Emile Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888, from Thomson, Belinda, *Gauguin’s Vision*, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2005, p42

¹³² Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh, c. 25-7 September 1888, from Thomson, Belinda, *Gauguin’s Vision*, p53

¹³³ There is a link to Norwegian Maoism here, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

Storn's portfolio print, *Fredselskeren* (The Peace Lover, Fig. 4.65), is the only print produced by a combination of two techniques, silkscreen and lithography. Inger M. Renberg discusses the image briefly in her essay *GRAS og den politiske virkeligheten*:

In *Fredselskeren* (1971) Willibald Storn comments on contemporary political reality by depicting a representative of capitalism. In the photo in the collage a man is sitting at a set table with a horde of waiters in the background. One of the versions of this silkscreen contains a sequence of text about the capitalist who eats their own hand. The image thus becomes an ironic comment in which an American millionaire stands in glaring contrast to [...] the war-torn population of Vietnam.¹³⁴

Renberg's description is not quite accurate, the contrast with Vietnam does not take place exactly as she states. Focusing on the millionaire's role only, Renberg avoids the complexity and intricacy of the collage. Gunnar Sørensen stated that "...the many inscriptions express contempt towards this so-called peace lover," and knowing Storn's wish to communicate clearly it makes perfect sense that the text at the bottom, probably a later addition, references the image's intent (Fig. 4.66-4.67).¹³⁵ Sørensen further wrote of Storn that "his attitudes could be characterised as anti-authoritarian yearnings for freedom, as anarchist flavoured socialism, and as a tribute to sensuality and eroticism."¹³⁶ This describes fittingly the complexity of Storn's printed works, and emphasise the immense ideological as well as stylistic variety of his work, which seems to be pulling him in all directions at once.

Most of Storn's GRAS works are far from simple and a voice seems to shout from within them – arguing with itself. This might be explained by the multitude of influences on Storn's work in more general terms, such as a Pop art attitude mixed with a naïve and primitive depiction traditionally linked with religious representations, political pamphlets and popular art. Storn's vocabulary has no limitations, taking in and exploiting any of the European artistic styles of the twentieth-century. Particularly movements that question a traditionalist European art view, such as Fluxus, Surrealism and Dada. Post-war movements, such as *l'art brut* and abstract spontaneity found inspiration in children's drawings, primitive cultures and mental patients' drawings, as well as dealing with the psychological impacts of a devastating war, all had an impact on Storn's work. One could argue, as Sørensen does, that the influence of Abstract Expressionists Pollock and Jorn can be seen in a varying degree in Storn's work. Particularly the artists' interests in regional primitivism as seen in the case of Pollock's totem poles and Jorn's exploration of pre-historic artefacts. In Storn's printed work, however, Jorn seems to have had a greater impact than Pollock. The use of different primitive

¹³⁴ Renberg, Inger 'GRAS og den politiske virkeligheten', p25

¹³⁵ Sørensen, Gunnar, 'Willi Storn', Renberg & Sørensen, *Willibald Storn*, Oslo: Labyrinth Press, 1989, p102

¹³⁶ Ibid., p97

and even pre-historic symbols in his GRAS silkscreens verifies Jorn's prominence. Even though many critics have identified connections between Storn's paintings and canonical works by Marc Chagall and Pablo Picasso, in the late 1960s early 1970s prints there is less evidence of this.

Featuring at the top of *Fredselskeren* are two primitive symbols, a hand with an eye and a bird, which signify protection and freedom simultaneously. The eyed hand is a mainly Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and North African symbol representing a defence against 'the evil eye.'¹³⁷ Here used as a symbol of primitive imagery, as well as in juxtaposition with the capitalist and his flock below, as it reflects beliefs that cannot be bought by capital. The black bird is probably meant to signify a dove – the representative of peace and love – which may be seen as a messenger. As Storn has a great need for self-expression and sees art as a means to actively take part in society, the bird could be Storn and the message simultaneously. The two symbols reference folk or decorative art, as do the red flowers that appear seemingly sporadically across the picture plane. The floral design instantly echoes turn-of-the-twentieth-century works from Storn's home country, Austria, such as Gustav Klimt, and other works by Storn, such as *Ofring* (Sacrifice, 1971, Fig. 4.68), make the comparison and likeness obvious. Storn probably identifies with Klimt's eroticism and defiant spirit, which *Nuda Veritas* (1899, Fig. 4.69) testifies to. Storn's production often exhibits erotic, sometimes pornographic, currents. The rose that appears in *Fredselskeren* is a photographic reproduction, yet it brings to mind another contemporary of Klimt, Margaret Macdonald. *The white rose and the red rose* (1902, Fig. 4.70) merges the stylised rose with the human form and creates a rather flat picture surface. To a certain extent Storn's roses flatten the picture too, but this is not to suggest that Storn drew inspiration directly from the Scottish example. However, there is a similarity that appears in Storn's use of curved lines, decorative organic elements and a centrally placed figure that associate him with Art Nouveau examples. The impact of the rose, it must be added, is also the awareness that one is looking at a print, an art object, as the rose is gigantic in proportion to the millionaire. The uncertainty in the relationship between the different parts of the print, created by the difference in size, is of course a strategy frequently used by both Dada and Surrealism.

The flowers are interlaced with the even more decorative and folk art related component, the frame which is made up of journalistic photographs. A few of these are

¹³⁷ The hand of Fatima or Miriam, as it is sometimes called, is an amulet or talisman present in many Eastern cultures and possibly stem from before monotheistic faiths. The symbol is known as *Khamsa* in its local context, and is not a symbol of religion but a signifier of a pagan culture prefixing itself on the 'new' one.

recognisable, such as the Vietnamese freedom fighter, Janis Joplin singing, two figures in spacesuits, FBI's chief J. Edgar Hoover, a pig and several individual portraits. As pointed out earlier there is no contrast between the capitalist, as an image of happiness and wealth, and the people of Vietnam, as an image of suffering and poverty. The presence of the freedom fighter conceptualises a heroic Vietnam rather than a victim, yet it is a female Vietcong which makes a gendered contrast. This contrast carries with it an array of allegations. The male millionaire is passively sitting at the table while posing for the photograph, by contrast the female fighter is shown in profile, shouting aggressively. Storn thereby questions contemporary gender roles by overturning the viewer's expectations of male and female. The frame further emphasises opposites by placing on the left side the figures who were ideologically opposed to the 'peace lover,' and on the right J. Edgar Hoover above a priest-like figure and a sophisticated lady, as if they represent the establishment. This intellectual and ideological contrast makes the irony of the title even more apparent.

If one were to define Neo-Dada as "...performative absurdity [and] political subversion – true Dada spirits that blossomed in [American] art of the late 1950s and early 1960s..." this might be true for Storn.¹³⁸ Elements of rebellion and farcical theatricality do take up a huge amount of space in his combination colour-lithography and silkscreen prints, and furthermore it seems to be in his character to rebel. Storn has always tried to find his own artistic style, and at the height of his youth he was exploring artistic features that no one in Norway had seen before. Chagall's influence is evident through the seemingly never ending use of roses and doves, as well as a very naïve style of drawing and pure use of colour. However, Storn's greatest influence in his printed works must have been Dada and Surrealism, but giving these sources his own particular twist and presenting quite explicit political meanings as seen here. The influence of Dada collage and photomontage, particularly Heartfield's work (Fig. 4.71), is without question, but the irony, pun and play brings Surrealism to mind. Storn is a post modern style-sponge who utilises whatever he has at hand to create art that is both different and new as well as seeking to reach a section of society that is far-removed from the traditional art-knowing establishment.

Can it then be said that *GRAS Grafikkmappe* was *collectively grown grass on silkscreen*?¹³⁹ What conclusions then can one draw from such a wide ranging collection of prints, and how successful was the portfolio in showcasing GRAS? The attention the exhibition received from the press, conservative and left alike was mainly positive. If the

¹³⁸ Varnedoe, *Jasper Johns*, p97

¹³⁹ Gjerset, Kjell, 'Kollektivt dyrket Gras på silketrykk', *Dagbladet*, nr 284, 7 December 1971

Norwegian population was not aware of their antics, by 1971 the public was at least made aware of their intentions. Stylistically the folder displayed an artistic freedom never before seen in a collective workshop, and the extreme nature of disparity between the prints was obvious to all that viewed it. In a sense the range of the folder both enticed and left the audience confused as to what exactly was the purpose of the workshop. By exhibiting the folder at Kunsternes Hus, the traditional centre of art, it in and of itself placed GRAS firmly within the establishment. At the same time GRAS questioned the purist view of art as sculpture or oil painting by exhibiting the fourteen silkscreens in that very location. The relatively affordable price of the folder further overturned the ideas advanced by an art establishment that hailed the exclusivity of art, where only a few could afford to own an *original* artwork. *GRAS Grafikkmappe* was in principle affordable, even a bargain one could say, but it did not sell as well as the group had hoped and even then mostly to institutions. If the idea was to bring art-prints to the ordinary man or woman off the street then it had failed miserably. However, what it did manage to do was to bring the silkscreen triumphantly (to use Helliesen's discourse) in from the cold. One would argue that after this extraordinary display of artistic diversity and ability the silkscreen was fundamentally accepted as part of the 'high art' idiom, even if this was almost contrary to their goals.

In its essence the folder of prints displayed both new styles made possible through a new technique and older more familiar ones, in all it was a reflection of the young art scene at the time. Pop, Op, Hard Edge, Colour-field, figuration, abstraction, Concrete art and Dadaist play all mixed together in the melting pot that was GRAS and the portfolio was the prime example of that. Anyone that had not believed in the possibilities of artistic freedom within a workshop was proved wrong by means of a simple collective effort. However, it did remain the only fully collective GRAS endeavour. *GRAS Grafikkmappe* alone represents the workshop's initial optimism and was the only direct and visible result of the workshop's collectivism. From the outset it was not GRAS' purpose to limit or set out rules for its members, it was after all foremost an open silkscreen workshop for likeminded artists. Selecting prints from such a large number of different artists with such different aesthetic approaches to represent a united group must have been hard. Ideologically the folder was never instrumental, as we have seen above it did not in any sense have a particularly *red* thread running through it. Even though Kleiva, Kjær, Krohg, Orud, Storeide and Storn could not have been mistaken for anything but Socialist in their images, the other half of the prints cannot easily be identified as political. This to some extent created a dichotomy between the political and the purely aesthetic, however the group came together under the underlying

notion that it was concerned with social issues. Therefore any member of GRAS would at any given time have known that the workshop was firmly situated on the left, and correspondingly the fourteen artists included made a conscious political decision to be part of the communal folder.

4.10 The End is Near

In collaboration with Norsk Forfattersentrum (Norwegian Author Centre) GRAS produced a series of black and white offset prints in which image and poetry were combined, which was shown jointly with the graphic folder. However, this was never repeated after the 1971 exhibition.¹⁴⁰ The year however, would prove the defining political year for GRAS, as it began its political involvement in several different radical leftist groups, organised a seminar at Krøderen (Kjær's schoolhouse living quarters) on political art, and took part in different political poster and leaflet campaigns. Although in interview I have been told that GRAS had no political manifesto or precise standpoint, the chronology that appears in *Gras – 10 år etter* (Gras – 10 years later) states otherwise in connection with 1971: "Political study circle is started within Gras, directed by Bjørn M. Gulliksen. The group is autonomous but uses MLG's [Marxist-Leninist Groups] material. Gras gets a political platform. Gras shall be an independent, socialist community."¹⁴¹ This statement implies that there was, probably mostly through association with groups and study circles meeting in the workshop space, a political underpinning to art production within GRAS. The chronology further states that a meeting took place in November 1971 where art-political issues were discussed, which led to restrictions of activities without the group, and a more planned art-political use of GRAS forces.¹⁴² Both these statements imply that in fact GRAS was connected to a more specific political stance than is usually recognised in accounts of the group. One factor is probably that the histories of the group usually only take into account their artistic imagery and not their political statements and alliances, viewing these as irrelevant to GRAS' art history.¹⁴³ The discussion will be taken up later in this chapter.

By 1973 GRAS had moved into a bigger space in the shutdown Nora-factory in Maridalsveien 3, and was extended to include over twenty members. In the autumn of 1973 GRAS was replaced by a co-op and a new workshop called NORA-GRAS, which was not

¹⁴⁰ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Gras og det norske silketrykk', p100

¹⁴¹ Krohg, Morten, 'Kronologisk oversikt', *Gras – 10 år etter*, p13

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ This is not to say that the still uncertain relationship between party politics and GRAS has not been touched upon, the only example being Nerdrum, Nora Ceciliedatter, 'Et reklamebyrå for ml-bevegelsen?', *Arbeiderhistorie – Årbok for Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, Oslo: Forlaget Aktuell AS, 2008

solely occupied with serigraphy, and the collective was no longer determined by common political beliefs. The reason for the disbandment could be that the time for collective art-making seemed over, seeing that they, as most artists, were individuals when it came down to it.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless Kleiva has commented that the leftist radicalism of certain artists, such as Victor Lind and Morten Krogh, was disillusioning for some of the members and led to the split up. By this time many of their chosen causes had either been solved or were no longer current or pressing. Another reason for GRAS' disbandment was due to departure of key figures such as Kjær, who moved to his summerhouse at Krøderen, and Krohg, who moved to Bergen to take up at a position at the Academy there, around this time. By 1974 the Vietnam and EC protests were over and Salvador Allende in Chile, the socialist radicals' last hope, had been overthrown in September 1973. In this connection Helliesen connects Kjær's *Sør-amerikansk interiør* (South-American interior, 1974, Fig. 4.72) to the end of GRAS's political propaganda as well as Kjær's involvement with the group.¹⁴⁵ When the group had dissolved Kjær moved to the country, and thereafter concentrated on landscapes. Per Kleiva also moved out of the city, but he continued working with NORA-GRAS. In contrast to Kjær, Kleiva's art has never lost its awakening social and humanist engagement, although not in a propaganda-like sense. His concentration on clarity compels him to shape simple cut-outs from reality into "...poetic speaking metaphors..."¹⁴⁶ as seen in *Vi som intet eide* (We who owned nothing, 1975).

GRAS had been greatly instrumental in the reformation of the Norwegian artists' organisations, and in securing allowances for artists and the guaranteed income for artists. After the *Kunstneraksjonen '74* (The artists' action 1974) the artist's union was established on an equal level with trade unions. Members of GRAS were elected to positions in both new and old institutions because of their involvement in the improvement of artists' organisations and the restructuring of BKS as well as the foundation of Norske Billedkunstneres Fagorganisasjon (Norwegian Visual Artists' Union, NBK), which in 1989 became Norske Billedkunstnere (Norwegian Visual Artists Association, also NBK).¹⁴⁷ This in turn contributed to the end of GRAS when artists devoted themselves to work from within

¹⁴⁴ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Silketrykkets seiersgang', p281

¹⁴⁵ Helliesen, Sidsel, 'Gras og det norske silketrykk', p101

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p102

¹⁴⁷ BKS became Billedkunstfaglig sentralorganisasjon, which joined NBK to become Norske Billedkunstnere. This is an umbrella organisation for 20 national and regional organisations. The national are: Landsforeningen Norske Malere (The Painters Association, LNM), Norsk Billedhoggerforening (The Sculptors Association, NBF), Tegnerforbundet (The Drawing Artists Association, TF), Norske Grafikere (The Printmakers Association, NG), Norske Tekstilkunstnere (The Textile Artists Association, NT) and UKS.

mainstream organisations rather than the oppositional work method carried out throughout its existence.

4.11 GRAS and the Political Poster

At the end of the 1960s critique and rebellion were on the agenda and protest movements sprang up throughout Europe, Norway was no exception. Ideologies in Europe were far from dead and Western systems and conventions were still contested.¹⁴⁸ As Sidsel Helliesen has observed: “The articulated Left opposition gathered for discussions about capitalism, consumer society, authoritarian indoctrination and repressive tolerance, imperialism, exploitation and the Third World, class consciousness, worker power and people fronts.”¹⁴⁹ By the 1970s environmental issues and the atomic threat were put on the agenda as well. It was the age of mass demonstrations, first and foremost against American involvement in the Vietnam War, but in other contexts as well the Left came together to take action, which *Et sted å være* was symptomatic of. Fully fledged Socialist idealists took part in the actions and demonstrations that flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were seen to put theoretical ideas into everyday practice.¹⁵⁰

GRAS had no regulation stating members had to be on the Left politically, but seeing they participated through their work and action in the social debate at the time, there was an underlying understanding that GRAS was a Socialist workshop. More to the point, in connection with the 1971 folio exhibition GRAS stated, “Except for the unions we are not connected to any organisation. Furthermore, we are not an aesthetic grouping. But we are all Socialists – without any commitments to making propaganda art for anyone.”¹⁵¹ Additionally Morten Krohg has stated that there was an ideological meeting once and that from this meeting a manifesto of sorts was written, although this has yet to be uncovered. Moreover, other members remember only theoretical discussions taking place rather than an actual political statements being formulated. GRAS’ political agenda was based mostly on the extreme Left of Socialist ideology, but the group was far from doctrinaire, as can be registered from the membership of some artists in Norges Kommunistiske Parti (The Norwegian Communist Party, NKP) and later Arbeidernes Kommunistparti (marxist-leninistene)

¹⁴⁸ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Gras og det norske silketrykk’, p93

¹⁴⁹ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Silketrykkets seiersgang’, p278

¹⁵⁰ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Gras og det norske silketrykk’, p94

¹⁵¹ Renberg, Ulf, ‘GRAS – kollektivet som virker’ (GRAS – the commune that works), *Arbeiderbladet*, nr 299, 1971

(Worker's Communist Party (the Marxist-Leninists), AKP m-l), as well as, from their involvement with Arbeidernes 1 Mai tog (The workers' 1 May parade). Kleiva and Storeide, for example, made posters for the artists' section of the parade, and *Revolusjonen er i gang* (The revolution has started, 1969, Fig. 4.45) was the first of many to be carried by young idealist students on May 1st.¹⁵² In addition Kleiva produced the previously mentioned *Ein vakker morgon* (A beautiful morning, 1971, Fig. 4.44) for Rød Arbeiderfront's (Red Worker Front, RA) May parade, which afterwards figured in RA's periodical *Profil*. Storeide made a poster for the artists' section of the RA's annual parade (Fig. 4.73).

During the early 1970s the proposed Norwegian EEC membership was much discussed, and the debate quickly divided the political arena. GRAS showed its support for the opposing side in the form of partly poetic remarks, such as Kleiva's photo-based *Hausten 1972* (The Autumn 1972, 1972) in which the image's main focus is an rundown outhouse with the slogan "Nei til salg av Norge" (No to the sale of Norway) painted on the side. Furthermore, GRAS organised seminars, conferences and poster- and postcard workshops to influence the poll. The collective produced alongside graphic prints a large number of posters, flyers and postcards themselves, where Egil Storeide's simple formulations, following conventional poster art traditions were the most striking and propagandistic. Most of the posters that were used in connection with specific causes were hung up at night, as it was illegal at the time and consequently the 'runners' risked being arrested. Straight after the ballot had been decided Storn triumphantly printed a response comprising of birds and flowers, which corresponded to the print he had exhibited earlier in the year called *Spør folket – folket svarer nei!* (Ask the people – the people answers no!, 1972). The EEC campaign material will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Radical artists were not only interested in stylistic choices and genre-crossing in the early 1970s, but in art's function in society and the artist's own role within that society. In 1974 the fundamentally socialist artistic ideas that had developed since the beginning of the decade culminated on June 12 1974 when *Kunstneraksjonen '74* was initiated, in which the major artists, designers, authors, composers and filmmakers organisations took part. *Kunstneraksjonen '74*'s main purpose was to work collectively across artistic fields towards the improvement of their common social as well as economic situation. Their key points were: "1. Allowances for the use [at government funded exhibitions and the like] of artists' works; 2. Increase in the use of artists' works; 3. A guaranteed minimum wage for all working artists

¹⁵² Krohg 10 January 2007

who are not covered sufficiently by point 1 and 2.”¹⁵³ These were goals that GRAS had been working towards throughout its existence, and several of the artists central to *Kunstneraksjonen* '74 were former collective members.

For the most part GRAS political poster types displayed a combination of photograph and text. The trait is exemplified particularly well in Storn's 1971 series of individual photographs combined with slogans. The most distinctive of these are two prints that focus on the birth of a new generation and maybe a new hope. In the first the text “Kamp gir seier” (Fight gives victory) accompanies the image of a mother and child, and in the second Storn asks “Hvem eier morgendagen, hvem eier denne jord?” (Who owns tomorrow, who owns this earth?), which has been put together with the picture of a naked pregnant woman. GRAS' political contribution was determined by contemporary socialist and communist ideologies and the group's keyword became solidarity, correspondingly communist heroes, such as Ernesto Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse Tung, were illustrated to show the group's solidarity with their struggle against oppression. Harald Flor accurately points out Che Guevara's text ‘Socialism and the man in Cuba’ as an appropriate source for GRAS ideology and opinions about what Socialist art should be:

But why try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counter pose “freedom” to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. We must not, from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs, condemn all art forms since the first half of the 19th century, for we would then fall into the Proudhonian mistake of going back to the past, of putting a strait-jacket on the artistic expression of the people who are being born and are in the process of making themselves. What is needed is the development of an ideological-cultural mechanism that permits both free inquiry and the uprooting of the weeds that multiply so easily in the fertilized soil of state subsidies.¹⁵⁴

Through Che Guevara's writings GRAS had an ideological base for their freedom of expression. Serigraphy was consciously chosen by GRAS, particularly for its immense abilities to reproduce photographs, as a challenge to accepted graphic norms. Even though serigraphy was not the only graphic technique made use of by the collective workshop it was nonetheless the printing process that provided the group with a method that suited its socio-political ideas best. The process has an anti-elitist character, which was fitting for both the artists and their politically engaging inheritances. Serigraphy in GRAS was hence not only a

¹⁵³ Haugen, Halvor, ‘Kunstneraksjonen -74 – friket, likhet og vederlag’, *Billedkunst*, nr 7, 3.12.2004, <http://billedkunstmag.no/Content.aspx?contentId=637>

¹⁵⁴ Che Guevara, ‘Socialism and the man in Cuba’, March 12 1965, ‘From Algiers, for *Marcha* . The Cuban Revolution Today’, *The Che Reader*, Ocean Press, 2005, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm>

manifestation of international stylistic tendencies, but a conscious protest against the traditionalists and the graphic establishment, who placed great weight on the authenticity of expression and production, rareness and therefore exclusivity which would always, according to GRAS, lead to high prices. Hard-Edge and the application of photographic components were both seen as opposed to these traditional and elitist ideals. “The graphic artists in GRAS did not only try out the medium’s artistic possibilities for expression and moved unconventional elements into their pictures, but also tried other picture shapes from that which conventionally hangs in glass and frame on private and official walls.”¹⁵⁵

In addition, silkscreens are easily made in large numbers and they are almost identical, the production costs do not necessarily have to be high, which in turn keeps the price per print low and it can therefore in principal reach a large portion of the population. One might say that it was in fashion to protest against these set ‘rules’, yet in the case of GRAS the protest was set out in their socialist socio-political ideals. For that reason GRAS serigraphy when utilised in connection with specific causes was often unnumbered and unsigned, although, the so-called art prints were always signed and numbered according to traditional graphical procedure. The idea of the collective workshop in itself broke with established artistic norms, and it was not only for selfish reasons the artists wanted to take part in the collective, they wanted to make the artworks accessible for grass-root buyers. The group wanted to cut out the expensive distributors, who often favoured certain types of artists, mostly established and conventional artists over experimental and oppositional ones.

GRAS’s revolutionary spirit was their belief in modern art’s ability to communicate to the masses, and although many of the prints were made up of more or less manipulated photographs easily recognisable to a contemporary audience from television and newspapers, like most avant-garde movements, they unfortunately had less appeal to grass-root layers of society than they wanted to admit. Their sympathisers were mainly young and urban based likeminded people, however, as long as the collective was producing prints there was optimism towards “...art’s potential as a generic form of communication.”¹⁵⁶ GRAS’ broad range of experimentation is different from the artist collectives that had appeared since May 1968, such as Atelier Populaire in France, Rote Nelke in Germany, Røde Mor in Denmark and Folkets Ateljé in Sweden. GRAS consisted of artists from different backgrounds, who individually had adopted different forms of expression, which therefore made it impossible to formulate a manifesto of pictorial style. However, GRAS organised study circles on various

¹⁵⁵ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Gras og det norske silketrykk’, p100

¹⁵⁶ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Silketrykkets seiersgang’, p281

subjects and decided early on that they would share a common political platform that stated “Gras will be an independent socialist collective.”¹⁵⁷ The group also hosted a small conference at Kjær’s school house at Krøderen where the main focus was ‘Folkets Kultur’ (The People’s Culture).

GRAS was a determining factor in the silkscreen’s first thoroughly artistic development and growth in Norway overall. However, the importance of the collective does not depend completely on its graphic explorations alone, but it followed passionately on all levels the radicalisation of the sixties and seventies that lead to a combined arts- and socio-political program. Despite the fact that GRAS was involved in doctrinal debates the workshop was not as politically dogmatic as other similar groups abroad, as will be seen in the case of Red Mother in Denmark. There was a distinct difference between GRAS and the more commonly known artist cooperatives that had mainly been a collection of friends working together or artists coming together through exhibition projects, as in the case for *Fjorten unge kunstnere* or *14 unge* as it was called, in Kunstnernes Hus in December 1965.¹⁵⁸

Many of the artists associated with GRAS are today considered central figures in Norwegian art history and in the wider art milieu, and many of the GRAS prints have become highly-valued. GRAS’ themes, such as the environment and the security of the welfare state, are in many cases just as important today as they were thirty years ago. One might consider their art timeless and important still, without forgetting the contemporary situation in the 1970s. For the Norwegian artists the importance placed upon art with political meaning was a consequence of the decision to move away from the idealised artist position so frequently sought by the generation before them. It was a reaction against the establishment and time specific in the sense that the youth and protest movements were in full bloom all over Europe, and however short-lived the group was its members continued working with the issues raised during its lifetime. GRAS widened equally the concept of graphic art in Norway and the concept of political engaged art and artists. Despite that, at no point did the ideology and societal criticisms overshadow the craftsmanship.

¹⁵⁷ Flor, Harald, ‘Politisk grobunn for billedmessig mangfold’, p7

¹⁵⁸ Helliesen, Sidsel, ‘Silketrykkets seiersgang’, p277

Chapter 5 – The world is awake, and so is Scandinavia

5.1 Introduction to comparative study

The previous chapters have shown how the simultaneous emergence of all three groups is part of a broader rebellion of the post-war generation of artists against the established norms and practices of previous generations. In this chapter, I will analyse their prints in order to compare and contrast their respective understanding (and practices) of ‘revolts/revolutions’. In an attempt to contextualise their art, this chapter also considers how the groups fit into the wider European (and, indeed, global) context of socio-political and artistic participation in the ‘long 1968’, and intrinsic to this is a concern to determine the extent to which they can be identified with their international counterparts.¹ Røde Mor (RM) alone produced hundreds of posters and flyers, one might argue that they are not all unique as they reused many single images over and over, yet the sheer quantity of production surpasses that of the other two Scandinavian groups. For that reason it has been necessary to limit the comparison to a few themes that stand out from the three groups’ oeuvres, which will make a comparison more feasible. As Folkets Ateljé (FA) was the short-lived endeavour of student-artists and one which produced posters that went up on walls around Sweden as quickly as they disappeared it is no surprise that the posters that survive are scarce and far between. Consequently FA’s preliminary sketches as well as finished posters will be equally considered enabling a broader assessment of concerns in relation to the two ‘bigger’ groups. Since the scale of production varies between the groups, mainly due to their lifespan, there might appear to be a bias towards the Danish and Norwegian groups.

The comparison between the collectives is made on the basis of political struggles supported by the collectives’ poster production. These have been divided into two main areas – national and international. However, these are not clear cut and often international issues were portrayed with a distinctly national flavour. In this chapter I will show that these groups were closely related, yet specific national elements, which were closely linked to nation-specific political debates, do set the groups apart. In an international context many of the images will be close to their international counterparts, however to strengthen the arguments concerning a particular Scandinavian experience of ‘1968’ and limitations of space here, it

¹Since the focus here is on the Scandinavian workshops and not their international contemporaries, in depth material on the following groups have been left to a minimum, and the focus remained with the images produced to utilise a comprehensive comparison.

has been necessary to interweave an international ‘experience’ while remaining primarily focused on the transnational comparison between the Scandinavian groups. As far as possible, collectives that appeared abroad in the ‘long 1960s’ are used as comparative parts, yet individual international examples are also addressed. Within the section that I have named ‘local protest’ four themes are touched upon, these include depictions based on theoretical communism, solidarity with workers, clashes with authorities and, finally, the Danish and Norwegian European Economic Community membership referenda. The last part of this comparative chapter will thus be considering the impact of so-called international themes, which include Anti-Americanism and Imperialism, the Vietnam War and solidarity with the Third World and its freedom fighters. It will become apparent that many of these themes – both national and international – are interlinked, but for the purpose of this thesis it has been necessary to define some boundaries.

5.2 A Scandinavian 1968 – Local Protest

Theoretical discussion was, as we have seen, an integral part of the vigour with which RM, FA and GRAS produced posters in their collectives. In Denmark, it has been pointed out the radical left was dominated by students and intellectuals, which flavoured the political parties approach to Marxism. To an extent the manifestoes produced by RM show this interest in theories, however as we have seen the group turned away from theoretical discussions because of the effects the study of the different theoretical approaches had on their actual art production. The Swedish group might have continued, maybe even increased, its silkscreen production were it not for the often heated ideological debates preceding every poster’s conception. Described by Nora Nerdrum as an advertisement agency for the embryonic AKP(m-l) (and it is true that Marxist-Leninist study-circles did take place in the workshop space), nevertheless GRAS had no set ideology or strict party allegiance. However, the artists that took part in the serigraphy workshop were mostly politically active artists, who rallied around the concept of a socialist, in its widest sense, collective – similar in this respect to FA.

For all of the groups, ‘1968’ seemed to be the time to build a new society – “socialism in our time” as the Norwegian Maoist Sigurd Allern put it in 1972.² The foundation for their illustrations of ideology was of course Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, and RM’s Dea Trier Mørch illustrated the Danish translation in 1970. FA made a poster illustrating the

² Allern was the soon-to-be leader of the Maoist party Arbeidernes Kommunistiske Parti (Marxist-leninistene) (Worker’s Communist Party (marxist-leninists), AKP(m-l)), which was formed in 1973. Quoted in Sjøli, Hans Petter, ‘Maoism in Norway’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p385

stirring statement, ‘Proletarians of all countries, unite!’, however it is quite different from Trier Mørch’s illustration (Fig. 5.1-2). Their idea of revolution, as depicted, is one of peaceful demonstration, literalising the moment of unification in Trier Mørch, and one of the violence of the revolution that would follow in FA’s poster (Fig. 5.3). The Swedish poster further emphasises the role of the worker by the use of the word *arbetare*, rather than proletariat, and the different fists punching out at a soldier’s uniform and weapons. Here the pacifist sentiments so deeply rooted in Swedish neutrality are displayed by the anti-war symbolic, at the same time as the thrust of the giant black fists could be interpreted as the violent revolution from below that the Lenin called for. Trier Mørch’s image of a flowering field and a mass of faceless demonstrators insinuates a different ideological influence that of Mao, and specifically the artistic influence of Chinese cultural revolutionary posters, where landscapes form an integral part of the poster’s composition. On the one hand, FA’s poster expresses an aggressive language of revolt through a clearly propagandistic style, while Trier Mørch’s illustration, on the other hand, is picturesque and optimistic akin to socialist realism. Of course the purpose of the two images was different too, in that one was meant for instant provocation in the street and the other an illustration befitting the overall message in form of the book’s text.

GRAS artists Storn and Lind depicted their personal relationships with communist/socialist dogmas in the two prints *Ta selv makta* (Seize the Power Yourself, Fig. 5.4) and *Socialismen fører til frihet* (Socialism leads to Freedom, Fig. 5.5). Storn’s silkscreen encourages revolution in his text: “Workers join the common struggle against imperialism and capitalism. Seize independent power over production. Never surrender, the revolution is coming. “To battle, workers!” The cubist-inspired portrait and peace dove, inside which one can just make out a copy of Munch’s *Kyss* (The Kiss, Fig. 5.16), give associations that are more aesthetic than agitational, and there is a clear discrepancy between the figures and the message. Rather more directive is Lind’s imagining of a future under socialism, when all will be able to have a meal a day. Actually a photograph of his daughter, Lind has ‘nationalised’ the red flag, symbolic of socialist sympathies, by transposing it onto the image of the blond, healthy girl. In Norway, around the time of the EEC membership application in 1970 and subsequent referendum in 1972, the far left was substantially radicalised. It widened the gap between what was seen as the ‘official Norway’ and the ‘Norway of the people’. “For the Norwegian left, the periphery, as a concept, was full of positive connotations about the simple life of real people. In this way, Norwegian counter-culture connected individual emancipation

with a dominant back-to-nature ideology.”³ Lind’s silkscreen therefore reflects a nationally tinged form of Marxist-Leninist ideology, where socialism from below leads to a ‘real’ Norwegian girl having food on the table every day. However, if one did not know the title of this work it would be hard to understand this ephemeral link. As one is given the instructions for action by Storn, the work could be said to be more propaganda if it was not for the distinctly post modern use of his modernist ancestors. And the disjunction between the text and the figures make the two parts independent of each other. Storn and Lind are expressing similar ideological attitudes but in diverse stylistic or even technical terms, which was essential to the GRAS workshop’s existence.

Looking at these Scandinavian posters side by side, it becomes apparent that broadly speaking they all sympathise with communism, in one form or another. However, it is also apparent that the methods used to express these are very different. One might argue that the impression of both Lind’s silkscreen and Trier Mørch’s illustration is optimistic and uniform, while Storn and FA approach theory from a revolutionary viewpoint, maybe inherent to the personalities involved. Calling for direct action and showing or telling the viewer what to do and what will come next. The pacifism imbedded in the empty American uniform in FA can also be found in the peace dove and loving couple in Storn’s serigraphy – Storn gives one the outcome of a revolution then, while FA does not. It seems evident then that the Swedes and Norwegians in these posters display affinity through pacifism as well as a call for revolt from below, while Trier Mørch’s illustration is merely a positive politicised landscape that whilst displaying the literal meaning of demonstration as a unifying action does not agitate as the citation would suggest. In their stylistic form, RM and FA are closer to each other than they would seem to be to the two GRAS prints are – or these even to each other. Nonetheless, I would argue that Lind’s silkscreen is popular and realistic in form, following a tradition of depictions of working class everyday life and that this aligns his work to FA and RM in this instance. And even though Storn’s image is similar in political content to FA, his use of post modern pastiche situates his work within the context of the art institution than in the street.

5.2.1 The red sun rises in the North

Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76) had a great influence on Swedish and Norwegian Marxist-Leninists, however, in Denmark the left distanced itself from the anti-intellectualism inherent in Maoism. From the late 1950s, however, the far left enthusiastically embraced the translation of a selection of Mao’s writings into English and by

³ Ibid.

the late 1960s into Norwegian, Danish and Swedish.⁴ RM, for example, wrote about how Mao inspired their work especially his 1942 speech at the *Yenan Conference on Literature and Art* which was, in Dea Trier Mørch's words, "...so far the best description of revolutionary artistic practise in a socialist country."⁵ Mao described the duty of writers and artists to depict the people who "...have remoulded themselves in struggle or are doing so, and our literature and art should depict this process."⁶ To be able to depict the true nature of workers, peasants and soldiers, Mao suggested that the artist must live and work among them so as to truly understand the class for whom they were producing. Mao favoured a popular form and encouraged an art that praised the masses, "...if you are a proletarian writer or artist, you will eulogize not the bourgeoisie but the proletariat and working people..."⁷ The Chinese poster *Hold high the great red banner of Mao Zedong's thoughts – thoroughly smash the rotting counterrevolutionary revisionist line in literature and art* (1967, Fig. 5.6) portrays to all intents and purposes Mao's opinions on the informative and guiding role of a communist art. The colourful and serious peasant, worker and soldier sweep away the grey and weakened bourgeoisie and their books/art. All of the groups in question were to an extent infatuated with Maoism, but in its national form.

RM's hardback selection of posters from 1969-72, *Kollektive Billeder* (Collective Pictures, 1972), states that during the Yen'an Conference "...the Chinese intellectuals and revolutionaries tried to map out guidelines for their work. An important point in their conclusions is that art must make itself available to the revolutionary, communist party – and that the party appears as an employer for artists."⁸ RM made several posters and comic strips that support this, one of which is the collectively made *20 års venskab med Kina* (20 years of friendship with China, 1972, Fig. 5.7). Their initial explanation for its creation was as follows:

Røde Mor has always been interested in China and the development of Chinese Socialism. Within the Chinese leadership there are a number of artists, who at the same time are politicians – something unique in the international Communist movement's history. We can therefore find great sections on art in Chinese writings – foremost in Mao Tse-Tung.⁹

⁴ English translation of five volume of writings 1954-57; Norwegian translation 1963-77

⁵ Trier Mørch, Dea, 'Politisk Kunst', part of the Marxist booklets series by *Clarté*, Copenhagen: 1973, pg 16

⁶ Tse Tung, Mao, 'Introduction', *Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and art*, 2 May 1942, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm, accessed on 14 April 2010

⁷ Tse Tung, Mao, 'Conclusion', *Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and art*, 23 May 1942, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm, accessed on 14 April 2010

⁸ From the text accompanying the first poster reproduced in *Kollektive Billeder*, a solidarity poster for Venstresocialisterne (Left Socialists, 1 May 1969); Quoted in Harsløf, Olav & Kruse, Thomas, *Røde Mor*, Århus: Husets Forlag, 2004, p28

⁹ Reproduced in Harsløf, Olav & Kruse, Thomas, *Røde Mor*, Århus: Husets Forlag, 2004, p28

20 års venskab med Kina was produced for Selskabet for kulturel forbindelse med Kina (Society for Cultural Relations with China).¹⁰ The poster is clearly a mixture of carving techniques with subjects ranging from the highly ideological statement “People are the driving force in the creation of world history” to a romantic Chinese (Asian) landscape. In effect the poster covers aspects leading up to and including the inclusion of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations. RM represented an idealised view of the creation of the Chinese communist republic, first and foremost by ways of work. First, people pull towards an equal society as they ‘create world history.’ Second, a study-circle of anonymous figures discusses the ‘new’ ideology. Third, children (boys and girls alike) play table tennis in the open air. On the right, above each other, the fourth and sixth images illustrate the agricultural and industrial developments of the biggest country in the world. In the rice fields human beings are like ants, and in the factory a worker dreams of his sweetheart – quite a idealistic view of China and not at all what it would later turn out to have been. As the poster was made for an apolitical organisation RM has attempted to purely illustrate the ordinary lives of the Chinese people so to demonstrate their likeness to Danes, however, it is one of the most idealistic of their posters. Every frame illustrates the wheels in the machinery that made it possible for China to be a utopian example though.¹¹ RM refers to The People’s Republic of China as the *perfect* Communist state. In other posters the image of that China appears through the daydreams of industrial workers, as it does here where the machinist dreams of a beautiful Asian woman.

RM even included copies of Chinese propaganda posters in their comic strip *Røde Mor tegner og fortæller* (Red Mother drawing and telling stories, Fig. 5.8). In two of the bottom frames reference is made to the Cultural Revolution as a counterpart to the events of 1968. Kruse explained the comic thus:

We saw all those propaganda pictures with all the happy people with the little red book [...] and we put them in the comics. And we copied them, we have made many comics with those pictures [...] We studied them [...] In China, there was the Cultural revolution and then Liu Shao Chi is kicked out as revisionist, and then we drew hurray. [The last] one is a solidarity image of Red Guards with books and beautiful flowers.¹²

¹⁰ Selskabet for kulturel forbindelse med Kina was founded in 1952 to establish friendly bonds between the Danish people and the people of the People’s Republic of China. It is now called Venskabsforbundet Danmark-Kina (Friendship League Denmark-China). <http://www.venskab-danmark-kina.dk/>

¹¹ Of course one will have to remember that the Scandinavian artists did not realise until the mid-seventies that the Chinese utopia they had imagined did not quite operate as they thought it did. By the late 1970s European Marxist-Leninist were often invited by the Chinese communist party to come and experience the so-called utopia first hand.

¹² Thomas Kruse, 11 November 2005

The last image does not look anything like the usual RM style and the overjoyed Red Guards are far removed from the down to earth people RM usually portrayed. The exaltation over Chinese society must of course be seen in relation to the information coming out of the People's Republic, which was scarce, and was based mainly on Mao's early speeches and writings as well as the massively impressive prints and posters being shown in Europe as examples of the impetus of the Cultural Revolution.

In 1970, a poster exhibition took place in Sweden, *Kulturevolutionen i bild* (The Cultural Revolution in Pictures), and was organised by the former Swedish Cultural Attaché to China, Jon Sigurdson.¹³ A great assortment of posters appeared in the exhibition and it might have been visited by FA, RM and GRAS artists. Two anonymous propaganda posters that appeared in the show depict Chairman Mao's head situated inside a bright red sun, *Chairman Mao is the red sun in the heart of the peoples of the world* (1967, Fig. 5.9) and *A long, long life for Chairman Mao* (1967, Fig. 5.10). The *de facto* Chinese anthem *The East is Red* proclaims: "The east is red, the sun is rising. China has brought forth a Mao Zedong."¹⁴ This explains the curious sun in these two posters. The Mao-as-sun corresponds to two GRAS examples, Kjær's *Ny morgen* (New morning, 1971, Fig. 5.11) and Storn's *Morgensol* (Morning sun, 1972, Fig. 5.12). In both images the identical photograph of Mao is found inside a red sun, as if Pop-come-stripe versions of Chinese propaganda. Victor Lind's *Hjelpetikker* (Help Matches, 1971, Fig. 5.13) mixes Norwegian popular culture – a matchbox adorned with the Chinese leader – with a flat abstract forest. The picture is brimming with symbolism as the flames in the background reference Mao's *Little Red Book* setting alight Norwegian minds. Krohg explained the image's controversy: "The hair stood up on the social realist Norwegian Marxists' head. Mao's no pyromaniac who burns down nature's delights, though they were mostly owned by Løvenskiold-Fritsøe!"¹⁵ All of the three works use the smiling Mao photograph, and one is instantly reminded of Warhol's almost mass-produced images of Mao (Fig. 5.14), however these earlier examples reuse the Chinese propaganda poster feature of the sun which Warhol does not. For Warhol, Mao and the Cultural Revolution became vehicles of advertisement rather than ideology, which is particularly evident in his defacing of the 'hero' by scribbles and violent colouration.

¹³ Jon Sigurdson at <http://chinaposters.org/exhibitions/catalogue-9>

¹⁴ Folk song rewritten during the Cultural Revolution, see Appendix I

¹⁵ Løvenskiold-Fritsøe are big lumbering companies in Norway, thereby representative of Capitalism in this context. Krohg, Morten, 'Den Politiske Poet', *Festskriv til Victor Lind*, <http://kunst.no/fest/fortolkning/Krohg.php>

In both Storn's and Kjær's prints, the chairman takes centre stage as the red sun, yet Storn has placed his sun among the leaves of a growing tree and the sun seems more like a flower, which recalls Mao's famous words of "letting a hundred flowers blossom..."¹⁶ Mao is the rising sun above a striped landscape in *Ny morgen*, leading the gaze towards the sun, probably influenced by both Hard-Edge and Chinese posters. In these propaganda posters the rays of Mao-as-sun spread to every corner of the image, which also features in *Hjelpestikker*. Although, the rays in *Hjelpestikker* appear to be a reworking the Chinese examples the sunrays are featured on the actual matchbox even today (Fig. 5.13a). Lind thereby, in true Pop fashion took the matchbox and changed its meaning. In Kjær's print the rays are laid down on the ground to break the plane and create perspective, as "to break with Modernism [...] and really use perspective again" as Kjær put it.¹⁷ He continued:

...what I really meant by that picture, if it was because I suddenly had become a Maoist or whether it was provocation? It was a mixture probably. I was a little hooked on Mao, because I thought Mao [...] was not a totalitarian. He was a kind of Communist hippie. He said, 'Let a thousand flowers bloom', you know. It suited me as an old Conservative a lot better than someone like Stalin...¹⁸

The GRAS prints relate to the Chinese posters but the artists used their free artistic vocabulary to express the idealism connected with Maoism in Norway at this time. Pop, Hard-Edge, abstraction and decorative figuration were all viable means to express their fascination, unlike the Chinese and RM posters, these prints have managed to become timeless. They did not, as RM did, focus on the rhetoric and the appeal for artists to use their art at the service of the revolution in a manner related to socialist realism. Historian Anette Warring explains the hold Maoism had in Denmark thus: "Unlike many other small revolutionary parties founded in Western European countries during this time, the Leftist Socialists [VS] had a much broader social basis, a solid size and enough support to secure parliamentary representation. [...and were] influenced organizationally by both anti-authoritarian ideology and by Leninism."¹⁹ GRAS, the workshop, distanced itself from party politics, even though Krohg and Lind, for example, were hardened Communists. NKP and AKP(m-l) believed in the service of artists to use social(ist) realism as the appropriate style for communist imagery, which did not suit the collective's openness and freedom of expression. From this

¹⁶ Mao Tse Tung, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, 1st pocket ed., February 27, 1957, p49

¹⁷ Author's interview with Anders Kjær November 2004, see Appendix I

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Warring, Anette, 'Around 1968 – Danish Historiography', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p354

comparison, it is clear that the Danish and Norwegian approaches to political image making are opposites, even if inspiration has been drawn from similar sources. It may be noticed here that FA have not, to my knowledge, made any posters corresponding directly to Maoism, the simple reason might be that they functioned as an assembly and if the group could not agree on the slogan or image the poster would not be made.²⁰

5.2.2 Solidarity with the Workers' Struggle

The new realism with its attention to details, its smooth execution and limited format has penetrated everywhere. It would not surprise me, however, if this type of painting soon will vanish. [...] We live in the era of the workers. I wonder if art won't become everyone's property again and take its place in public buildings on large wall surfaces.²¹

All of the Scandinavian poster groups passionately associated with the workers' struggle and in one form or another they tried to support the workers with their imagery. Whether in direct support of industrial actions or in scorching ridicule of the conservative, right-wing parties during election time, the Scandinavian workshops clearly supported the masses. At times the posters utilise a typically Socialist heroic worker figure so frequently portrayed in socialist realist art, yet at other times they simply mimic the style, often with a dash of humour, using new innovative techniques. The groups navigated a sea occupied by a variety of sources from clear-cut Communist propaganda to almost satirical Pop and enigmatic abstraction all at the service of the working class.

In Sweden, the policy of 'solidarity wages', which meant that wages were standardized on a national level, aimed at centralising industry in productive regions, mainly away from the north to southern and central parts of the country. The policy of productivity first and foremost solidified a contention between northerners and politicians by the end of the 1960s. This invigorated a yearning for traditional characteristics and an emphasis on periphery (forests and mountains in the North), "often articulated explicitly against the social-democratic vision of a modern, rational and well trimmed Sweden."²² During the 1970s, the crypto-Maoist journal *Folket i Bild/Kulturkamp* was set up aiming at producing a real popular culture out of the traditions of the Swedish proletariat against the unholy alliance of social democrats and capitalists in Stockholm. In Denmark, the demographic shift was not as great,

²⁰ During the interview with Group of Swedish Artists it was mentioned that the last poster belonging to FA before the LKAB poster, was one with flowers relating directly to the quote by Mao above. However, this poster has not been found.

²¹ Edvard Munch as quoted in Carey, Frances, *Modern Scandinavian Prints*, London: British Museum Press, 1997, p10

²² Ekman Jørgensen, Thomas, 'The Scandinavian 1968 in a European Perspective', p328

depopulated areas were only 30-50 kilometres away from the industrial centres and not thousands as in Sweden and Norway. As Maoism dictates socialism from below with an emphasis on *people*, rather than the Marxist alienated worker, it had immense appeal to the periphery in both countries. The ‘real’ Norwegians or Swedes – the peasant and fisherman – was the agent of a Maoist revolution. Ekman Jørgensen defines it as “the structural conflict between centre and periphery [and] the aesthetic, post-materialist changes in political culture, which added themes such as authenticity to ideas of class struggle.”²³

FA’s *Stöd Arbetarna vid LKAB* (Support LKAB’s Workers, 1969, Fig. 5.15) is a poster made in support of the industrial action taken initially by 35 miners at the state-owned LKAB’s (Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag) iron ore pelletizing plant situated in the northern Swedish town of Svappavaara. Between 9 December 1969 and 4 February 1970, when it finally ended, it involved about 4.800 workers.²⁴ The industrial action was the first large-scale illegal strike, a so-called ‘wildcat’ strike, in post-war Scandinavia and it shook Sweden immensely. It revealed a side to the social democratic state that had been hidden from the majority of the population. In European terms, Sweden is a very large and long country, and as mentioned above there is a demographic difference between the north and the south, as population numbers vary greatly. This is probably why the miners’ delegation insisted negotiations take place at the LKAB offices in Kiruna, close to the mines, and not at the company headquarters in Stockholm (see map with major cities Fig. 1.2).

The poster shows a miner drilling away the base of an industrial chimney that has parts of the word ‘Byråkrat’ (bureaucrat) written on it. Sitting on top of the very tall chimney we have the bureaucrat himself, holding on for his life. There is something at once pathetic and almost vampire-like about the hunched figure in black with long fingers, bald head and pointy ear. This is in keeping with the image of the bloodsucking bureaucrat that frequently appears in Swedish representations as the opposite of the healthy, broad-built worker, and belongs to the types used by critical international as well as local poster producers. Viewed

²³ Ibid., p329

²⁴ The industrial action has been named *Kirunastrejken* (The Kiruna Strike) after the northern city in Sweden where the negotiations between the miners, the union and the LKAB leadership took place. The action happened on the basis of bad living conditions and working environment as well as low wages, particularly for older workers who were replaced or put on short-term contracts when they were regarded as worn-out by the strenuous work. The action inspired several similar illegal industrial actions across Scandinavia as it became apparent that many workers felt betrayed by the increasingly bureaucratic trade unions. The ‘wildcat’ strikes and sit-ins proved a method for the workers to negotiate directly with the leadership without the involvement of union officials, who often negotiated nationwide deals rather than supporting individual branches. This must be seen as one of the problems of the social democratic state’s class compromise, when the employees of a state-owned company are unsatisfied with their working conditions the problem of transparency and negotiation on the basis of fairness for all simultaneously affects the whole country economically and leaves too much room for under the table deals done by bureaucrats on behalf of the workers involved.

from ground level close to the worker's boots the heightened perspective focuses on the power of the worker to bring to a halt or even destroy the bureaucratic system from the bottom or the grass roots, thereby implying the Marxist-Leninist view of revolt from below. As government officials' numbers were increasing, the grass roots appeared further and further away from policy-making procedures, which is illustrated aptly by the distance between the worker and the bureaucrat in FA's poster. Of course, this also demonstrates the physical distance between the workers and their social democratic bosses.

As much as the image represents the miner drilling at the foundations of corporate Capitalism it also critically engages with the very foundations of the social democratic state, at the core of Sweden's economic base were industry and at the core of industry there was the workers. The social democratic state operates within the framework of a market economy, which means that even though the profits of state-owned companies', such as LKAB, go to the day-to-day management of welfare state it still retains the structures, and therefore class divisions, of a purely capitalist system of governance. The miner in FA's poster does not merely present the viewer with the apparent problems at the pelletizing plant, but an inherent problem within the particularities of the system itself. The miner becomes a symbol of the left's aspirations to expose and overturn the social democratic model as a flawed system of compromise. The concern voiced by the left, and illustrated by the workers' plight, was that the supposed egalitarian system had so far only benefitted a growing middle class and not brought about change for the lower class. The economic incentives of state corporatism often encouraged short-cuts and quick solutions at the expense of workers' rights. The industrial action at LKAB awakened a dormant left that subsequently put health and safety regulations back on the agenda.

When the poster is compared to the work by Munch *Kyss I* (The Kiss I, 1897, Fig. 5.16), it is clear that even for these radicalised artists the artistic inheritance of Expressionism cannot be understated. The use of lines is closely related to the Norwegian's work, and the emotional and dramatic emphasis is heightened by its inclusion here. The significance of Expressionism in shaping Nordic sensibilities from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, in particular within the graphic arts, is widely recognised in the literature on Scandinavian art. The shock of the drill, and society at large, is reflected in the air as a myriad of lines correspond with the trembling effect one would expect from such heavy equipment. However the lines emanating from the centre could be associated with rings in water, symbolising the effects the industrial action would have on Swedish society or even its impending spread to

other industries. These budding ideas of disobedience quickly spread to other industrial areas in Sweden and in time Scandinavia as a whole. The cracks in the chimney further emphasise drama, by giving the viewer the impression that the ‘tower’ is about to fall. This reflects optimism connected with the turmoil the miners’ strike could instigate within the working class. The fragility of the chimney is thereby the social democratic state’s fragile relationship with the neglected lower class and in that way the prosperity of the country as a whole.

Since the strike was illegal the workers had no union supporting them financially, however when a bank account was set up financial support came streaming in. This bank account number, PG 65630, is advertised on the poster. In addition, the small lettering at the bottom announces that the sale of the poster (ten kroner) will “go uncurtailed to PG 65630”. This gives the poster’s creation, and subsequent sale, a very specific purpose, rather than FA’s previous posters that had been created as political agitation. It was unusual for FA to support a cause by actively selling posters as the underground group, who often took an anarchic approach to poster-making, avoided affiliation with any specific group or ideology.²⁵ Kiruna was actually the beginning of the ‘spring of wildcats’ as Kjell Östberg puts it, furthermore, he describes the strikes as an important outcome of Swedish ‘1968’:

“...they had such far-reaching consequences for the old, especially for social democracy and the trade union movements. [...] the Swedish working class had perhaps been smitten by contemporary radicalism. This led to a considerable outbreak of activities in order to retain the initiative: comprehensive union laws with co-determination acts, culminating in the bill for employee wage funds, but also more extensive social reforms. Most of the social welfare network is a product of the 1970s: health insurance, parental insurance, housing subsidies, dental insurance, and expansion of day care.”²⁶

Røde Mor’s ties with unions and grass root organisations in Denmark were less conspicuous. As we have seen RM was clearly an organ for the radical left, actively supporting it and setting up a semi-professional poster production of use in activist campaigns. One poster stands out as an example of their direct involvement and solidarity with issues relating to the workers – *Klassekamp er enhedskamp* (Class Struggle is Unified Struggle, 1975, Fig. 5.17) by Dea Trier Mørch was made for Det Centrale Arbejdsløshedsudvalg (DCA, The Central

²⁵ The poster is confirmed to have been made by one of FA’s members Ola Nyberg during the time when FA was operating, but still this obvious support and direct use of the poster separates this poster from the rest of FA’s body of work and questions its very inclusion in FA at all. However, because it has appeared frequently as an example in various sources, the inclusion in this thesis is based on those sources and its date as it appears.

²⁶ Östberg, Kjell, ‘Sweden and the Long ‘1968’: Break or Continuity?’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p345-6

Committee for Unemployment).²⁷ The poster represents a clear political stance in relation to workers' right to organise and actively pursue action when negotiations break down. Kruse has explained that scenes of various social and political actions were made directly from photographs of "known industrial actions", that is the Copenhagen bus drivers' blockade, also known as the HT-conflict, and the aircraft mechanics' sit-down, both in the same year.²⁸ The combination of smaller and larger images within the poster is typical of the later, more clearly worked out, and mature RM style. Mimicking the earlier method of combining different images made by different artists to produce one *truly* collective poster, this single artist work is more cohesive and reads effortlessly as a single story.

At the top we have two sets of public gatherings, on the left, protestors surrounding the equestrian statue of Frederik VII in front of Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen,²⁹ which houses *Folketinget* (the Danish Parliament), the Supreme Court and the Prime Minister's offices, and on the right a workplace union meeting. The middle section involves different petitions in support of workers' and unemployed workers' demands and at the bottom the industrial actions. The poster reflects upon and directly supports the diversity of workers' protests in 1970s Denmark. Yet at the same time it implies a breakdown of communication between, at the top, government and employers and, in the *finale* at the bottom, the workers and trade unions. The pictures are interlinked by the blue-black background, and Dea Trier Mørch's social realist style expresses, without satire, the social reality of mid-1970s workers' Denmark. On 26 November 1974, Byggefagenes Samvirke (The Building Trade Unions' Cooperative, BS) and DCA organised a demonstration which had more than 100.000 participants.³⁰ The number is contested by Steffen Linvald who states that "...about 70,000 people [...] demonstrated against unemployment and the Hartling government's inability to combat it."³¹ A publicity poster (see Fig. 5.18) was made by RM for BS too. The first frame

²⁷ Committees for Unemployment (AU) were a political initiative within the Danish trade unions to activate and organise the unemployed, since the unions work for the employed workers it became a radical leftist vehicle against unemployment and governmental policies. The union leadership could thereby distance themselves from actions and demonstrations not in accordance with laws, regulations and agreements that the unions would have to follow, yet AU did not. DCA was an umbrella organisation for all the different trade union's AUs and by the mid-1970s (as the economic recession set in at the same time as a Liberal Party government held power) would be able to organise mass demonstrations in the 100.000s. These committees (as well as DCA) would become a valuable tool for the Danish Communist Party (DKP), The Socialist People's Party (SF) and The Left Socialists Party (VS) in the ongoing struggle for power within the trade unions against the Social Democrats.

²⁸ HT is Hovedstadsområdet's Trafikselskab (Metropolitan area's public transport company); Harsløf & Kruse, *Røde Mor*, p122

²⁹ The sculpture is the work of Danish sculptor Herman Wilhem Bissen (1798-1868), and was unveiled after his death in 1873

³⁰ <http://www.perbenny.dk/dan4.html> (accessed on 29.1.2010)

³¹ Linvald, Steffen, '1974', *Københavns hvornår skete det* (Copenhagen's when did it happen), Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1979; <http://www.kobenhavnshistorie.dk>, 2006 (accessed on 3.2.2010)

in *Klassekamp er enhedskamp* is likely to have been based on photographs of the event. The viewpoint emphasises, by the distance between the flags in the foreground and the building, a huge amount of people participating because the viewer would be standing, according to the image, in the middle of the avenue running parallel with Christiansborg, Vindebrogade. The word *demonstration* appears on the banner to the left of the statue. The poster might have brought to mind the wave of actions that took hold of Denmark during 1956, which culminated in 65.000 striking workers across the country. On 13 April 1956, the SD government forced the workers to return to work by making law a rejected settlement agreement. In the days that followed, huge demonstrations took place and resentment for the SD was kindled. Outside Christiansborg, DKP leader Aksel Larsen had spoken to thousands of workers and encouraged them to continue the struggle within the workplace.³² One could argue that this is exactly what Trier Mørch is proposing with the subsequent image, which illustrates a group of sitting workers facing the same direction, except for one, implying that they are listening to someone out of view. A contemplative mood is indicated by the man in the middle of the image, who is holding his chin with his hand as if in deep thought. Relating to the use of a single word in the former frame, *arbejdsnedlæggelse* (stoppage) appears at the bottom of the image. The image reflects the assemblies formed at workplaces across the country. AP poster and ‘yes occupied factories’

Active participation is also the theme of the two centre images, giving faces to the activists, strikers and demonstrators. On the left a group of women with placards and pamphlets, and on the right a single man collecting signatures. The woman to the left in the first frame is wearing a board which reads: “Workers, employed and unemployed unite.” This was almost exactly the title of RM’s publicity poster, *Arbejdere, beskæftigede og arbejdsløse, hold sammen!* (Workers, Employed and Unemployed, join together!, 1974, Fig. 5.18), mentioned above. However, the posters differ widely, the main difference, other than the technique, being the style. Whereas the earlier poster is a single picture, the 1975 poster is a compilation.³³ Since the slogan appears in the 1975 poster one can only draw the conclusion that it was developed for the November demonstration in 1974 and drawn directly from that. In this context it is worth mentioning the AP 1968 poster, *La lutte continue* (Fig. 5.19) that has been copied within the image, this shows how RM knew of and admired the French workshop. The aforementioned woman also holds a pamphlet in her hand which has *strejke*

³² <http://www.leksikon.org/art.php?n=3342> (accessed on 2.2.2010)

³³ At this point the 1974 poster is only relevant as a historical reference, and it will be covered more in depth later in the chapter.

(strikes) written on it, this implies that the represented women are actually on strike. Out of the five women within the frame only one appears without a board. “We demand 1.50 kr more per hour”, “Our struggle is everyone’s struggle” and “Blockade against...” may all relate to, on the one hand, a particular strike and, on the other, a Feminist claim, equal pay for example. During the 1970s the number of women in the workforce was on a rise, and certain industries became known as *women industries*, such as the tobacco industry. Wages, for example, were much lower here than in ‘male oriented’ workplaces, such as the ship building industry, therefore the 1970s saw a rise in so-called gendered strikes. Unemployment within the female population was also generally higher than for men. By this time feminism had made its leap onto the battleground and Trier Mørch, both as a writer and an artist, supported the movement through her work.

Throughout the 1970s unemployment was on a rise, and both right-centre and social democratic governments tried to grapple with the downturn following the oil crisis in 1973-4. One particular policy angered the working class more than any other, and that was the halt in pay negotiations, which was encouraged from the outset of the 1970s to stimulate economic growth.³⁴ At the same time some businesses’ profits rose during the 1970s alongside unemployment.³⁵ The social democratic government’s income policy was made possible on the basis of two approaches: Firstly the slackening of economic growth and a halt in pay negotiations; Secondly, an acceptance of their policy by the union bureaucracy, which happened when LO at its congress in 1975 passed a vote of confidence on a bill promoting the values of the social democratic leadership.³⁶ “For a number of years the unemployment rate was much higher for immigrants from non-Western countries than for persons of Danish

³⁴ When the 1975 general settlement was made law and forced upon the workers it meant that the agreement from 1973 was in effect carried over for another two years. Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening (Danish Employers Association, DAF) therefore advised their members not give any pay rises in local negotiations either. As inflation was increasing it was effectively a wage-cut for most workers.

³⁵ Danmarks Statistik’s publication *60 år i tal – Danmark siden 2. verdenskrig* reveals that from 1960 to 1974 unemployment in the registered workforce rose by almost one percent, and by 1983 unemployment was 10.2%. Unemployment figures in Denmark: 1958: 68.446 (9.6%); 1968: 38.656 (5%); 1978: 190.675 (7.3%) <http://www.dst.dk/statistik/ags/publikation.aspx?address=60aar2008>

An example of profit can be seen in Skandinavisk Tobakskompagni (Scandinavian Tobacco) which had dividends between 15 and 20 % during the period 1972-74. <http://www.leksikon.org/art.php?n=4816>

³⁶ Landsorganisationen Danmark or LO is the Danish Trade Union Confederation in this instance, but all of the Scandinavian confederations are called LO. Within SD the Keynesian model was by the mid-1970s superseded by an ideology of cuts in labour costs and public sector spending. As one might argue from the present day example, which has proved a resurgence of policies based loosely on Keynesian Economics by for example the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and the Norwegian government in getting out of the economic ‘crisis’, the 1970s choice of backing away from it might have caused more harm than good.

origin and immigrants with a Western background.”³⁷ The dark hands and Eastern appearance of the male figure in the frame focusing in on unemployment verifies the former statistical statement. Behind him, occupying a large portion of the image is a board reading, “Help the unemployed, sign the requests...” The actual demands are obscured by the figure, who holds a piece of paper with *underskrift* (signature) written on it, making clear his role within the image. By representing the figure with his gaze downturned Trier Mørch personifies unemployment as a demoralising situation. The depression and uselessness connected with unemployment and not contributing to society is, of course, the emotive tool she used to awaken sympathy and solidarity for the central theme of the poster. The final two frames illustrate the active uses of industrial action: The sit-down - an action where workers decide to stop working but remain on site – takes place in two different areas of public transport. The groups of bus drivers and aviation mechanics have both decided to take industrial action, and both parties are sitting/standing in front of the vehicles they are supposed to be operating. As one can see from the bus behind the drivers these men are working for HT, the Metropolitan area’s public transport company. The bus’ ‘Not in Service’ sign emphasises the halt to service as an effect of the men’s actions. The picture of the mechanics probably refers to the Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) conflict in June of 1975 during which the mechanics prevented SAS’ aircrafts from taking off from Copenhagen Airport, Kastrup, by sitting and standing on the runway. This was widely reported in the press, and is therefore the obvious example for Trier Mørch to use.

The poster’s overall theme is solidarity between workers, as well as solidarity between workers and the unemployed. Moreover, the images promote the tools available to workers in their struggle against governments and big-business alike. From 1973 and throughout the 1970s, there was an increase in political strikes and protests against the policies being carried out by the state. All of the strikes represented took place without the direct involvement of the trade union representatives, so they too were ‘wildcat’ strikes that ignored the national agreement between LO and DAF. When one strike broke out, other workers in other industries would declare sympathy strikes so as to put pressure on the employers and ultimately the government. Using the poster as a medium for agitation, Trier Mørch has made a recipe for alternative action against rising unemployment: demonstrations, stoppage, sit-downs, strikes and informational campaigns. Rationalisation and cut-backs left many unemployed and without prospects of getting any employment in the near future, and as her

³⁷ Danmarks Statistik, *60 år i tal*, p13, <http://www.dst.dk/statistik/ags/publikation.aspx?address=60aar2008> (accessed on 4.2.2010)

earlier poster states: “Today it’s me – tomorrow it’s you!”³⁸ – A statement that had become true for 11% of the Danish workforce by the end of the 1970s. The frames, based on photographs of real events, must have been familiar to a contemporary viewer and today these represent a part of working class history, but at the time these poignantly highlighted DCA’s purpose. It is unclear if the patron chose the specific photographs to be portrayed (no documentation has been found to support this) but one has to remember that Trier Mørch did not simply copy. Photographs must have been her starting point, but the figures are closely related to earlier RM poster ‘types’. As explained in Chapter 2, the reuse of figures and other pictorial elements was not uncommon. Her overall composition points to an alteration of documentary photographs, which aligns the height of the figures horizontally. By example, in the bottom two frames the seated workers are positioned in exactly the same place and they have the same size, which means she must have scaled the images to work together. The bus drivers gaze into the other image and thereby unite the two. The same effect appears in the middle section where the women are turned towards the man; furthermore, the outstretched arms stress the connection and symbolically link the two frames together. Nevertheless Trier Mørch has moved away from the typicality of RM, she has begun the poster with the demonstration-type image rather than a triumphant ending. This can be explained by the commission by DCA as the 1974 demonstration was the culmination of the organisation’s efforts, which inspired workers to address issues outside of the trade union (and lawful) framework. Once this is known, the poster becomes a symbol of the power of mass demonstrations and political activism.

At first glance the themes of these two posters appear to address similar outlooks; however, there are significant differences between them which are not simply stylistic. FA addressed the LKAB workers without an assignment to do so, the collective made the poster spontaneously on their own terms in an instance of solidarity with the miners. RM on the other hand was commissioned to produce the work, and knowing the group’s work method Trier Mørch was probably in close contact with DCA about the content of the poster. The poster has been carefully constructed from photographic evidence of actual workers’ actions and display both lawful and unlawful ways of resisting the state. It attacks the established structures in more than one way – it portrays the parameters of the trade unions and can be said to take an anti-unionist approach as the unions ended up being, at least in the eyes of the workers, on the side of the employers and the government. Similarly, the LKAB poster, and

³⁸ Translated by the author.

indeed the miners' 'wild-strike', attacked the trade union as well as indirectly the SD government through their ownership of the mining company.

The execution and composition of the two images are of course different. The FA poster is more reminiscent of early RM posters, but the difference in time might explain this point. With a single, straightforward image FA has made the viewer aware of an array of issues that was highlighted by the 'wild-strike' and it prompts action to be taken in support. Dea Trier Mørch's poster, on the other hand, contains six images that could not be as potent without their partners and, although they tell different stories, in unison they illustrate the slogan and title of the poster only, *Class struggle is unified struggle*. The techniques used are different: Trier Mørch has cut her poster out of linoleum whilst the FA poster is a silkscreen. However, the way that FA cut in film before printing brings the two methods closer together and gives the result a similar appearance. Ideologically both posters appeal to a left-wing, working class viewer, nonetheless the audience is to some extent different. On the one hand a trade union affiliated and supportive viewer, on the other a more generally left leaning person, more critical or even negative towards the trade unions. This can be explained further by turning attention to another poster by FA, *LO driver på* (LO pushes forward, 1969, Fig. 5.21).³⁹

The title of the poster in question comes from the Swedish Trade Union Confederation's (LO) 1960s slogan 'LO driver på'. A giant hand, symbolising LO, yields a three tailed whip over a group of seven stylised worker-types. The poster reflects – although sarcastically – the growing dissatisfaction with the increasingly centralised trade unions in the 1960s, as mentioned above this culminated in illegal industrial actions without the knowledge or endorsement of the unions. Organised workers were alienated by the actual location of the unions in the country's capital, Stockholm. The distance between industrial workers and union officials, who were negotiating on their behalf, grew in actual kilometres as well as political or even economic terms. By the 1960s, many LO chief executives belonged to the middle class and had become SD members rather than SKP, whose membership base was still mainly industrial workers. This actually culminated in the refusal to let LO negotiate with employers and striking workers would instead make collective decisions in assemblies. Furthermore, negotiations would take place directly with employers, cutting past the trade unions. Another example can be found in the caricature of LO as Walt Disney's Donald Duck

³⁹ Here LO is the Swedish Trade Union Confederation.

riding on the back of Batman who has SAF written on his chest in the FA poster *Kollektivavtal* § (Collective agreement, 1969).

One might argue that RM's reciprocal relationship with the trade union(s) in Denmark was straightforward and without conflict, most likely because they worked in close cooperation with its patrons. In *Klassekamp er enhedskamp* Trier Mørch expressed the specific organisation's attitudes by an intricate picture story, one that could be seen as a recipe for direct action or as a memorial to DCA itself. In its imagery the LKAB support poster does not give any advice to what one should do, other than donate money. By supporting the miners, FA verified its place on the radical left by encouraging a continued class struggle even within the social democratic state. The Swedish poster did, in its social context, question the role of the trade union within industry and its conspicuous relationship to the SD. By illustrating LO as a whip-yielding-hand it had already questioned the traditional trade union worker relationship, and by championing the miner in the later poster FA further expressed their direct allegiance with the working class. So even though these two examples are different in terms of format, style and the circumstances under which they were produced – the socio-political national situation and commissioned as opposed to independently made – both RM and FA are proposing an invigorated and alternative workers' struggle for the 1970s.

On the other hand, Norwegian GRAS did not, during its lifetime, make any posters that could be perceived as direct support of any particular workers' dispute. However, Krohg's *Folkets kunst?* (The People's Art?, 1972, Fig. 5.22) does illustrate the relationship between the working class and the bourgeois industrialist. The silkscreen is a retouched photograph taken of factory owner Harry Fett, who instigated a programme for the placement of artworks in the workplace, as he shows three workers – bowed heads and cap in hand – a portrait of a Renaissance prince.⁴⁰ Of course, the title (and image) implies (and displays) the ambivalence of the project by questioning the painting's, and artworks of this kind, relevance to 'the people', here represented by the workers. *Folkets kunst?* is suggesting that what the bourgeoisie determines to be art is not an art of the working class and their solemn, almost religious, attitudes to art are questionable in the relation to a sincere workers' art – a 'real' people's art. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie use culture to legitimise their privileged role in

⁴⁰ Even before Fett started *Kunst på arbeidsplassen* (Art in the workplace) in 1950, he had shown the workers at his family business, Eduard Fett & Co, works from his private collection. His initial idea was an art rental business that would accommodate factories across the country. From the beginning the project was supported by Norwegian LO and the employers' federation. The fact that LO was involved would have been seen by radicals within the art scene as an act of implication into the promotion of an art as a bourgeoisie instrument in the class struggle. For more on *Kunst på arbeidsplassen* see <http://www.kpa.no/historikk.asp>

society. Whilst the print added a distinctly Communist critique to a larger societal debate about cultural assimilation within the context of the social democratic state, it does not in any way point to a specific worker's action. Another GRAS affiliate, Lind, produced a silkscreen in connection with the 'wildcat' strike at Jøtul A/S in Oslo,⁴¹ however this poster was produced in 1976 (Lind claims 1975, but this is impossible as the action took place in the beginning of 1976), and two years after GRAS had dismantled its workshop production. This supportive poster is also a retouched photographic serigraphy, and without prior knowledge of the strike it would seem like an uncontroversial outlook. *Jøtulstreiken* (Fig. 5.23) is radical in its portrayal of the universality and equality represented by the elected strike-committee and the action in itself – it was the first of its kind to involve immigrant-workers and women in addition to the 'traditional' male workers. Lind has carefully selected his figures, which he himself photographed, as they personify the diversity among the workers at the factory – immigrants, two generations of men and women.

5.2.3 Clashes with authorities

In the streets of Paris a battle took place between police and students, workers, immigrants, farmers and unemployed, in Scandinavia clashes between police and demonstrators was almost unheard of. However, two images of authoritarian figures relating to the time around 1968 stand out as extremely similar: Håkan Nyberg's *20 December* (1967, Fig. 5.24) and Victor Lind's *Nattrytter* (1972, Fig. 5.25). Both images portray the mounted policeman, however, the Swedish artists has represented the violence that the authority can deal out without hesitation, yet Lind shows the policeman from below as an authoritarian power tool. Lind's image is particularly interesting when considering his own experience with the policeman he wanted to portray. Nyberg's policeman is faceless, with his back turned, yet we see the frightened innocent demonstrator. Through his drawing we connect emotionally with the demonstrator against the anonymous policeman. Lind on the other hand has made the man

⁴¹ The strike and sit-in took place in February-March of 1976 and was not about working conditions or wage disputes. One of the many foreign workers was dismissed without reasonable cause and a conciliation meeting took place between the employers and the LO affiliated trade union, *Jern og Metall*. At this meeting a list of names was produced as to prove the validity of the resignation by popular demand, this of course enraged the workers, who immediately began the strike. The DNA sympathetic union tried to persuade the workers to return to work and let them negotiate legally, but the AKP(m-l) dominated strike-committee refused to budge and demanded the informant and 'class-traitor' removed from the factory-floor. The strike went on for almost five weeks, until on 16 March the workers returned to work to let the union negotiate 'legally'. The next day they were back on strike as no compromise was met, and sympathy was mounting among Oslo's other metalworkers, who announced a sympathy strike for the following Monday. However, by 20 March an agreement was reached and everyone returned to work for good.

into a symbol of Fascism, uniform and whip in hand. *Potensial* (Potential, 1972, Fig. 5.26) also by Lind uses the same image of the mounted policeman, yet here he has made several photographs come together to make a phallic statement. It is apparent that Lind is ironically playing with the image of power within Norwegian society; however, he is not portraying the act of violence or even aggression probably because it did not happen. In Sweden, it did happen to a larger extent than in Norway, however never to the extent of the French paramilitary riot police (CRS), who according to Ross was partly responsible for turning the workers against the state. “The instrumental role of the police in securing not only order, but a specifically capitalist order in which workers must fulfil the social function allotted to them, could not be more obvious.”⁴² Ross connects the history of French police force after the Second World War with the surge in violence against protesters in the 1960s, and one would argue it can be seen through the posters of AP. Directly after the war the police was purged of officers too close to Vichy regime and a lot of the underground resistance joined, many of whom were communists who refused in 1947 to repress revolt in factories across France. As a consequence, these were then purged in 1951 and the officers of right-wing, nationalist sympathies, that is the ‘old’ officers, were rehired now specialising in anti-communism, surveillance of trade unions and the Communist Party, who were all seen as the ‘enemies of the nation.’⁴³ This might help at least in brief to explain why the connection between the Nazi SS and the CRS was made by AP posters (Fig. 5.27). This explicit connection between the police and Nazis is not made by the two Scandinavian artists, which is most definitely rooted in their common experience of relative peaceful demonstrations. The Scandinavian governments did not use the police as a power tool against the protestors, as de Gaulle did in France.

In Denmark collective protests increased in the years around 1968, but activism did not die out until the 1980s, however, Warring states that “the general level of tolerance demonstrated by the authorities and the political system is often pointed out as the reason why the Danish student revolt did not reach the dramatic heights it did in other countries.”⁴⁴ This goes a long way to explaining why RM generally do not portray repressive elements in their posters, and if they do it is as commentary on international events such as in Paris or at Kent State in the US, or later in relation to Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile. The only example of a clash between police and demonstrator that I have been able to find is from the poster *Nej til*

⁴² Ross, Kristin, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, p30

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p52

⁴⁴ Warring, Anette, ‘Around 1968 – Danish Historiography’, p355

politisk union (No to political union, 1975, Fig. 5.28) made for the anti-EEC journal *Det ny Notat*. However, this frame as part of the six-image format of RM's late posters expresses an unfounded fear of the EEC as a police state. One would assume that the optimism portrayed by RM when relating to national demonstration scenes, as seen above, was rooted in their socialist realist style, even if this image is rather more realistic in form. The lack of representations of a violent experience of '1968' can therefore be linked yet again to the socio-political conditions within the social democracies, "The egalitarian part of the democratic revolt hence took place in a political culture that could accommodate most of the demands without major confrontations."⁴⁵ If confrontations happened, these deviated from a general trend of integration, as we have seen in the case of democratisation of the universities across Scandinavia post-1968. The same can be said of FA, RM and GRAS too, when there were no clashes it was not an issue addressed by artists.

5.2.4 The European Economic Community membership issue

In the autumn of 1972 Norway and Denmark held national referenda in connection with both countries' pending applications for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC).⁴⁶ This section will look at GRAS' and RM's contrasting artistic responses to the debate that occupied two entire nations in the time up until the public vote took place. Situated politically on the Left the groups approached the campaigns against the EEC from a similar standpoint; however their distinct artistic output and commitment was symptomatic of their inherent national environment. National political traditions, as well as artistic and stylistic influences, are means to understanding the imagery produced prior to the referenda. I propose that the art posters produced on either side of Skagerrak displayed indications of the outcomes of the EEC membership issue, through their subject matter, scale, size and output. Furthermore the national ad hoc campaigns against European accession were structurally embedded in the national political landscape, which is reflected in both the Norwegian and the Danish artists' work but in differing ways. There will be a discussion of the direct relationship between the artist and the movement of the people, in what can both be seen as propaganda *and* art in relation to the 1972 accession debate. This section thus suggests that within this specific climate these artists may have propagated a movement of the people in two different directions, although they operated under similar circumstances and politics. RM and GRAS

⁴⁵ Ekman Jørgensen, Thomas, 'The Scandinavian 1968 in a European Perspective', p327

⁴⁶ The referenda took place on 25 September in Norway and 2 October in Denmark.

were symptomatic of the national and political approaches against accession and therefore aptly present a good starting point for any pictorial and social examination of the 1972 campaigns.⁴⁷

RM's 1971 catalogue included a relatively early example of artistic response to the Danish government's proposal for membership in the EEC. *EEC* (1971, Fig. 5.29-30) illustrates the enticing campaign in support of Danish entrance into the community. A male Francophile figure is luring the little chicken, which has a Danish flag on its body, with promises of *velfærd* (welfare), at the same time as he is hiding a club with the inscription D-mark behind his back, which insinuates the camouflage of Germany's real influence within the European Community. The German 'danger' harks back to Danish experiences during the Second World War and a fear of the rise in economic and, consequently, military power of its neighbour in the South. Interestingly John Heartfield's *Nur keine Angst – er ist Vegetarier* (Now don't be scared – he's a vegetarian, May 1936, Fig. 5.31) depicts Hitler about to slaughter a French cock, which then links the Danish 1971 example directly with a foreboding image before the war. *EEC* also appeared in RM's collective image-patchwork poster that accompanied the first musical production by the group's Rock Orchestra, *Rok Ork LP* (1971, Fig. 5.30), touched upon the political themes that concerned the typical Danish worker in 1971. The last frame of this poster represents RM's frequently featured Socialist-community image. The community image was often incorporated into posters (Fig. 2.6, Fig. 2.13 and Fig. 2.27) to call for demonstration and action, as well as displaying the difference in age, gender and occupation of the working class as it stands together against the bourgeoisie or in this instance against the EEC. A recurrent element, the demonstration scene, with its flags and banners appropriating specific political causes to the specific poster's purpose, here contains the slogans 'EEC No' and 'Right to free thinking'. This section of the *Rok Ork LP* poster, within the context of other working class issues, thereby connects the battle against the EEC directly with the class struggle and the fight against Capitalism. A widespread trait also found in the rhetoric of the Left in Danish politics at the time.

The link between Capitalism and the EEC was one that was stressed further by Dea Trier Mørch when she gave her portrait of Karl Marx (from her illustration in the Danish translation of Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*) a speech bubble saying 'No to the

⁴⁷ Other individual artists and groups were producing posters and even paintings for and against both Scandinavian countries' accession, however as this thesis concerns itself with three groups only the production of posters by GRAS and RM will be the focus of this analysis, as far as that is possible for an understanding of their involvement in the movement against membership.

EEC' (Fig. 5.32-33).⁴⁸ As a consequence the poster alienates a middle class Conservative voter, making a NO in the referendum a YES to Marx. In Denmark the hypothetically ad hoc movement, The Joint Committee against EEC membership, was set up as late as January 1972 (referendum took place on 2 October), changing its name to The People's Movement against the EEC in April.⁴⁹ The organisation was meant to be pan-political representing the whole of the anti-EEC movement; nonetheless it was mainly made up of Danish left-wing groupings. The executive, for example, consisted for the most part of Communists, Socialists and Radicals. The left was splintered though in their approach to the masses. Pre-referendum polls showed that the working class, for whom Red Mother was predominantly making art, would be overwhelmingly against Denmark's entrance into the EEC. However, open debates on television and in the printed press exposed the Left as divided, in particular on the issues of how to run the counter-campaign and what relevant questions the ad hoc movement would focus on. So even if the working class and the Left were overwhelmingly against EEC membership the debates were enough to discourage even the sternest Danish Communists.

Correspondingly in RM's *EEC Nej* (EEC No, 1972, Fig. 5.34) a grinning big-bellied pig in a suit is being pushed away by an angry worker with his fist raised proclaiming No to the EEC. The pig is a representative of the executive and the bourgeoisie, a portrayal which is often found in Russian agitprop and appears repeatedly in RM's vocabulary. The executive is overly smug, ironic as it may be today, knowing the outcome of the referendum was 63.6% in favour of accession. On the other hand the worker is threatening with his clenched fists and dark eyes. An added comical value and subversive meaning is the use within the poster of ØF (short for Europæiske Økonomiske Fælleskab, EØF, the Danish translation of EEC) rather than EEC as in Danish 'nøf' would be the animal noises a pig would make. In this way RM has not only made its representation of the pro-EEC movement a pig but made a literal connection between the pig and the name of the Community itself. Paradoxically the poster reflects the anger within the left too, as there was quarrelling over the question of how to appeal to the lower middle class. *EEC NO* and *No to the EEC, says Karl Marx* cannot claim to have helped the matter particularly as both use traditional Left-wing iconography and highly propagandistic symbolism, which clearly look to motivate the Left rather than appeal to the Danish population as a whole. Because there was not a broad political front against Danish

⁴⁸ Dea Trier Mørch's portrait is found in Marx & Engels, *Det Kommunistiske Partis Manifest*, translated from the 1848 text by Sven Brüel, 1st edition, Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1970, p4

⁴⁹ By choosing to change the name the ad hoc movement in Denmark further emphasised its alliance with the people, which traditionally implied the lower and working classes, thereby pushing out or sidelining the more conservative elements within the movement.

membership of the EEC it led to economic difficulties for the People's Movement, this left artists such as RM without monetary support for the production of posters and might help to explain the surprisingly small number of posters produced by the group.

On the question of EEC membership the far Left in Norway and Denmark were generally in agreement against either country's entry. However, in Norway the campaign against membership started as early as 1970 basically as soon as it became clear that the government had sent a formal application, and ad hoc organisations such as Folkebevegelsen mot EEC (The People's Movement against the EEC) and Ungdomsfronten mot EEC (Youth Front against the EEC) were successful in their unification of both the Left and Right under a common banner. GRAS' engagement involved organising public seminars, conferences and poster- and postcard workshops to influence the poll. The printing workshop also produced a large number of posters, flyers and postcards (Fig. 5.35) themselves as well as t-shirts and sweaters in all sizes (Fig. 5.36). Everything made easy through the efficient and cost-effective silkscreen technique. As touched upon earlier in this thesis GRAS' diversity was immense and the evidence of their commitment to the campaign against Norwegian membership is clearly portrayed in the vast collection of postcards they made.

The designs range from traditional Norwegian proletarian symbolism with fists growing out of the national flag to fantastical cuckoos and doves, as well as the characteristic use of the photo emulsion technique. Slogans such as 'No to the sale of Norway' and 'this is also our culture' appeared in different forms throughout the postcards and posters, and clearly link GRAS to the Marxist-Leninist counter-organisation Arbeiderkomiteen mot EEC og dyrtid (The Workers' Committee against the EEC and Dearth, AKMED), as these were the organisation's main slogans after 1972. Morten Krogh and Victor Lind among others were members of Arbeidernes kommunistparti (marxist-leninistene) (The Workers' Communist Party (the Marxist-Leninists), AKP(m-l)) to which the counter-organisation belonged. Although certain postcards alluded to proletarian symbolism there was also anti-Nazi symbolism connected to a fear of Germany and its Second World War past as well as borderline nationalist symbols. Furthermore, nature and the environment were recurrent themes too, playing on a fear of big businesses and industries from 'big' Europe overrunning 'little' Norway.

However, more artistically formulated prints also appeared such as Bjørn Melbye Gulliksen's *Samarbeid og Fellesskap* (Cooperation and community, 1972, Fig. 5.37), which poignantly displayed the mistrust towards the two biggest parties, Arbeiderpartiet (Labour Party) and Høyre (Conservative Party), as they stood together in their wish to join the EEC.

Here Melbye Gulliksen made an alternate version of the thousand kroner note where he replaced the watermark and Henrik Ibsen's portrait with two contemporary politicians and statesmen: Trygve Bratteli the Labour Prime Minister at the time (left) and Kåre Willoch ex-Minister of Commerce in the previous, Conservative government (right). The Conservative government had been forced to resign over the inclusion of sensitive information in the formal application to the EEC.⁵⁰ A question mark has been placed across the national coats of arms as if to ponder Norwegian sovereignty should the country ever enter the EEC.

It is worth noting that non-GRAS artist Rolf Groven's monumental oil painting, *Norsk Nyromantikk* (Norwegian Neo-Romanticism, 1972, Fig. 5.38-39), displays the two politicians as good friends as they sit on each other's lap positioned centrally in a future industrialised landscape where Norway is already part of the EEC. Groven also makes reference to the supposed German threat when he includes an eagle's head as one of the industrial chimneys in the picture's background. Both pictures appealed across the political spectrum much in the same way as The People's Movement against the EEC did and without stating any clear cut allegiance to either party.⁵¹ An effect of the 1972 referendum has been (and continues to be) that the two biggest parties have moved towards each other, towards the middle of the political spectrum. In his attack on established structures of power Melbye Gulliksen also insinuates the distance between the people and the parliament, which was mainly made up of middle to upper class representatives from both parties who had voted for EEC membership. Very few editions of the print survive today as it was confiscated by the police as it was seen to desecrate the Norwegian symbol, especially since it was sold for a mere hundred kroner.

As I mentioned earlier there were images appearing out of the GRAS workshop that might in some contexts be considered to contain right-wing iconography, particularly those involving nationalism. However one has to bear in mind that in Norway the national argument, as it was called, is rooted in a social radical tradition relating to independence in the not too distant past (1814 and 1905). Therefore nationalist symbolism, such as anti-German/Nazi imagery, even appealed to the Norwegian leftwing as it had associations with democracy and freedom. Morten Krohg's *EEC truer Sjølråderetten* (EEC threatens self-

⁵⁰ Similarly, non-GRAS artist Rolf Groven's monumental oil painting, *Norwegian Neo-Romanticism* (1972), displays the two politicians as good friends as they sit on each other's lap whilst centrally located in a future industrialised landscape where Norway is already part of the EEC.

⁵¹ Groven's painting appeared on the front page of leftwing newspaper, *Klassekampen*, with the headline "Show Bratteli and Willoch where the working class stands." It was therefore clearly associated with the left in that context, although Groven had hoped to work for the ad hoc movement. Due to its perceived radical nature the People's Movement distanced itself from the painting and its creator, but AKMED embraced it and therefore had it published.

determination, 1972, Fig. 5.40) is a clear example of this. An animal skull has been combined with a German Second World War helmet in the picture that instantly calls to mind the anti-fascist work of German Dada artist John Heartfield. Krohg's photomontage is clearly propagandistic, and he plays on the collective memory of the occupation of Norway during the Second World War and in particular the contemporary fears associated with Germany's role in the EEC. However right-wing and nationalist this illustration might seem, it was distributed with the socialist magazine *Kontrast* in 1972. It later appeared in the newspaper *Aftenposten* under the headline 'Latest news in the EEC intimidation' and in the margin noted that "the EEC opponents' poster war is now crossing all lines."⁵²

One of the more poetic and picturesque contributions to the debate must be Per Kleiva's photo-emulsion silkscreen, *Hausten* (The Autumn, 1972, Fig. 5.41). The uncomplicated image focuses in on a rundown barn house with the slogan "Nei til salg av Norge" (No to the sale of Norway) painted on its side. *Hausten* alludes to both agricultural concerns that Norwegian farmers would lose their state subsidies if Norway was to enter the EEC at the same time as it reflects the stance of the Marxist-Leninists and AKMED. Kleiva has retouched the original black and white photograph by adding blue and green to the sky and grass. The straightforward outlook of Norway's potential future if it were to join EEC is unmistakably associated with the abandoned and worn down state of the barn itself. GRAS' contribution to the campaign against accession to the EEC was as diverse as the artists involved with the workshop, yet the collective effort displays an understanding of advertisement and the importance of mobilizing the populace. Although the slogans employed refer to a marginal political party and its counter-organisation, the imagery is not clear-cut Social Realism as was generally preferred by the far Left in Norway. GRAS utilises a mixture of ideology and artistic practices that interrogates consumer society at the same time as it makes use of commercial elements to influence the population towards a desired result in the EEC referendum.

The aforementioned discussion sheds some light on the body of work produced by RM and GRAS in support of the anti-EEC campaigns in both Denmark and Norway. One can conclude from this that in Denmark RM decided to produce just a few posters independently close up to the referendum, and this is symptomatic of the splintered and confused Left working against Danish membership. Emphasising a traditional Communist viewpoint and utilising a Social Realist vocabulary RM was clearly supporting an anti-capitalist view of the

⁵² 'Siste nytt i EF-skremser', *Aftenposten*, 29 June, 1972, pg. 3

EEC, which most likely pushed the middle class or lower middle class – the majority of voters – towards accepting Danish membership. Furthermore, the following statement from the Left Socialist Party makes clear that the issue of Danish self-determination could not be utilised by the *true* left as it was directly opposed to a policy of international revolution: “As the struggle against the EEC is a class struggle, VS [Venstre Sosialisterne] will not front a struggle on the basis of Nationalist or bourgeoisie paroles, as those forms of anti-EEC propaganda will in content be directly opposed to the struggle for a Socialist Revolution.”⁵³ The Danish Left-wing felt the main campaign slogan would embed a bourgeois ideological stance in the mind of the Danish people and could therefore not be used in the struggle against membership. Red Mother always highlighted the Communist class struggle in their anti-EEC efforts and the ideologically charged imagery inhibited the group from reaching out across the class divide to propagate a rejection of the EEC by the entire Danish people. Of course aggressive terminology was used by the pro-EEC sections of the debate, as the Danish Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag, threatened to devalue the Danish currency, which would cause industry to relocate abroad and small businesses to raise prices on the whole if the Danish people did not vote YES in the referendum.

While in Norway, although GRAS generally used Marxist-Leninist slogans in their posters and postcards, the artists used a great variety of forms of expression to motivate the masses to vote against the amalgamation of Norway into the EEC. A conclusion can be drawn from this, which emphasises the importance of artistic freedom and intellectual thought within GRAS to having been instrumental in the campaign against the EEC. By avoiding Social Realist ideological implications and broadening the appeal of a negative outcome of the referendum GRAS had a significant impact on the Norwegian public. As the question of self-determination and not ‘selling’ the nation is situated on the Left ideologically, as well as on the right, it made the ad hoc movement and its counter-organisation legitimate in the mind of the people. In comparison, the opposite argument applies to RM’s efforts and its expression of an overtly proletarian angle to the campaign. This strong Communist emphasis, which RM’s style and iconography was a specific signifier of, worked against any hope of mustering a negative vote in the referendum. The case can therefore be made that the two groups’ involvement in the different national campaigns impacted the outcome of the referenda. Particularly since we know today that Denmark became part of the European Community and Norway did not.

⁵³ Untitled document, summary from Venstre Sosialisterne’s meeting, which took place on 12.2.1972, p4

5.3 The International Struggle

The spark that lit the fire, one might say, of 'long 1968' was in Scandinavia most definitely the American intervention in Vietnam. From the outset of the war Scandinavians were set against it, and quickly from the mid 1960s non-party affiliated ad hoc movements were set up in all of the Scandinavian countries, all of which took names that portrayed their populist base. "...Scandinavian governments, regardless of political ideology, also became active in the protest, and alongside the French president, Charles de Gaulle, they voiced more criticism of Washington's Vietnam policy than the other Western countries."⁵⁴ However, France had been involved in a similar war of its own in Algeria coming to an end as the Vietnam War started. Sweden took on a leading role in its criticism due to its history of neutrality, yet the governments in Norway and Denmark followed suit and were the first countries in NATO to denounce the war. The greater impact of the Vietnam Popular Movements in Scandinavia was an increasingly radicalised and highly efficient left-wing that linked the war in Vietnam with an anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism that would spread to many elements of society, finally the establishment of solidarity groups connected to Third World issues and especially the association of freedom fighters with a revolutionary ideology at home. Sweden again was the leader in this arena as it had links with the Third World that stretched back into the 1950s, when writers and journalists travelled the post-colonial world. Such reported heroics of figures such as Ernesto Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, the passion and fierce arguments in the writings of Mao Tse Tong inspired Scandinavian communists to look inward for revolution, as well as outward in solidarity. Their writings and accounts were eagerly followed, if the Third World could rebel and win, in some cases, then so could Scandinavia. Artists, intellectuals and workers reacted by showing solidarity with these so-called freedom fighters and through the posters presented here some very interesting viewpoints appeared.

5.3.1 The Anti-Vietnam War posters

Across the globe there was an escalation in anti-Vietnam War protests after the Tet Offensive in 1968. Since its start there had not been a huge amount of attention paid to the American's campaign in Vietnam by the world at large, however in Scandinavia this was not the case. In 1969 Ronald Haeberle, an army photographer who had been present during the massacre of hundreds of Vietnamese civilians, including children, by American soldiers at My Lai in

⁵⁴ Godbolt, James, Holmsted Larsen, Chris & Rasmussen, Søren Hein, 'The Vietnam War', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33:4, 2008, p396

March 1968, released his colour images to the press following building pressure in the media and a military investigation (Fig. 5.42). The photographs were then shown on national news broadcasts without commentary, and the images, alongside an interview by CBS' Mike Wallace with a soldier who had been present, became international news. One famous response to the events and to the combination of one of the photographs and the television interview was the poster produced by the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), a "...provisional coalition of disparate individuals,"⁵⁵ *Q. And babies? A. And babies.* (1970, Fig. 5.43).⁵⁶ In the interview the soldier stated that his lieutenant had ordered the whole village killed. "Men, women and children?" asked the interviewer. 'Men, women and children', the ex-serviceman replied. 'And babies?' he asked again. 'And babies', came the reply."⁵⁷ The poster is simply a combination of the colour photograph of the bodies of women and children slaughtered in the middle of a dirt road and the reported question and answer. Another version of the same simple agitation asks the question 'Four More years?'

The impact of the image must have been immense; today of course we are numbed and mostly indifferent to similar images, which frequently appear in news reports from war torn areas around the world, yet in 1969 such images were still rare and consequently shocking. The shock of what the photographs actually showed had a greater impact and the AWC meant to put pressure on the American administration to end the war and admit that its fight for freedom and democracy in Indo-China was far from sparing the lives of innocent civilians. Accounts show that the posters were used around the world in anti-war demonstrations. It is precisely this photograph that appears in Victor Lind's *My love, My Lai* (1971, Fig. 5.44), although in the silkscreen it is cut-out from a newspaper and turned on its right side so that the shape corresponds to the form of an attractive female model on the left hand side. Both newspaper and magazine cut-outs share the blue mattress upon which Lind has placed them. "It quickly moved from the newspaper page to the silkscreen."⁵⁸ They share

⁵⁵ Bryan-Wilson, Julia, *Art workers: radical practice in the Vietnam War Era*, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009, p14

⁵⁶ When on 3 January 1969 Vassilakis Takis removed his sculpture from New York's Museum of Modern Art he instigated the formation of an open coalition of artists, filmmakers, writers, critics and museum staff to attempt to impose different reforms of the museum world, with particular focus on MoMA. This became the Art Workers' Coalition which was concerned with such disparate issues as the Vietnam War, Feminism, anti-racism, the autonomy of the artist, and control over artistic production. In the beginning AWC was a vehicle of communication between the museum world and the artists. It held a public hearing at School of the Visual Arts on 10 April, 1969, where hundreds of artists, critics, writers, etc. attended. AWC had seized its activities by the end of 1971. Well-known artist members were: Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Frank Hewitt, Lucy Lippard, Faith Ringgold, Gene Swenson and many more.

⁵⁷ As recorded in Crowley, David, 'The Propaganda Poster', Timmers, Margaret (ed.), *The Power of the Poster*, V & A Publications, 1998; Butler & Tanner Ltd, 2003, p138

⁵⁸ Author's interview with Victor Lind on 30 January 2006

a communal space, the collective public sphere, where they both appear side by side in the newsagent. The ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of Western Capitalist society confronts everyone on the same level, in an equivalent way to that of the shared mattress in the print itself. The mattress is without a cover, it is bare and base, similar to the way that the photographs can exist side by side in a world where advertisement takes up as much public ‘space’ as photographs of atrocious acts of war. In interview Lind talked about the picture in relation to poetically formulated titles, “...the titles were very important, underline the content. For example I have a title, *My Love, My Lai*, which was a combination of the people in My Lai, in the streets there, at the same time as you have an advertisement for mattresses with the dream woman. They lay on the same mattress, and then you can play ...then the title gives in that case a little poetic [twist] ... plus it comes nearer, but not always.”⁵⁹ The colours also make an ironic statement, the ‘dream woman’ in gold and the corpses from My Lai in silver first and second class in a way.

In Morten Krohg’s *US INRI* (1971, Fig. 5.45), Hearble’s photo is also reproduced and emphasis is still on the American flag. Following the stripes vertically one can read the statement: “Our men are Jesus Christ’s soldiers in Vietnam.”⁶⁰ Where normally the stars representing the US states would appear a crucified Christ is revealed instead. The abbreviation INRI refers to the Latin *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum* (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews), which is traditionally represented in art of the inscription over Christ’s head at the Crucifixion. The title and image refers simultaneously to the statement made by American Cardinal Francis Spellman and the discrepancy between the photographic evidence appearing out of Vietnam of the way that ‘God’s army’ is waging war against the innocent civilians.⁶¹ A contradiction is exposed when on the one hand the symbol and significance of Christ within the Christian faith is presented as central to the American national identity and thereby faith in the legitimacy of the war in Vietnam, and this is juxtaposed with the devastation and mutilation shown through Hearble’s lens on the left of *US INRI*.

It is not accidental and at once becomes significant to Krohg’s pictorial evidence that Jesus’ gaze is falling on the dead bodies thereby revealing the paradox of Spellman’s words and the actual cruelty of the war. Another image reflecting the paradoxical nature of the view of the Vietnam War at home (in the US) and the reality of the war being fought is Krohg’s

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Author’s translation of ‘Våre menn er Jesu Kristi soldater i Vietnam’

⁶¹ Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman (1889-1967) was an American Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, and served as Archbishop of New York from 1933 until his death and as a Cardinal from 1946. Cardinal Spellman was an outspoken Conservative anti-Communist, who visited Vietnam on several occasions. The latest being Christmas 1965, which he spent with American soldiers in Vietnam.

Welcome Home Soldier (1971, Fig. 5.46). The print makes an obvious contrast out of the happiness for returning troops and the massacres they have left behind. The top contains a strip of four photographs fixed directly from the scroll to the silkscreen. Although it is doubtful that Krohg had access to the film himself, the bottom consists of a compilation of various advertisement material and a joyful parade scene in tri-colour (red, blue and white) in a more traditional poster language than his previously mentioned print. Rather than mixing the images at random Krohg has here clearly defined the opposing views of a war fought so far away from home. In the lower part of the print there is nothing to reveal that this is not a celebration of returning troops, a nationalist celebration of America and the freedom it stands for. The inclusion of the photographic portrayal of the brutality that took place in Vietnam deliberates on the different views of the war or any war for that matter. The returning troops are welcomed home by the nation for which they are fighting, yet they fight so far away that their actions may take a long time before it reaches the 'home' audience or is publicly known. Of course there is also the question of censorship and the possibility that the whole truth about a war cannot be known without honest witnesses.

One of the most iconic photographs from the Vietnam War has to be Nick Ut's photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phúc, taken on June 8, 1972 (Fig. 5.47), as the burnt child runs away from an American napalm attack on her village. Ut's photograph inspired Lind to construct the print *Blitz* (1972, Fig. 5.48), in which he uses his own daughter, Andrea Lange, as a model. As Morten Krohg puts it, "Andrea was a frequently used model. She ate porridge (*Socialismen fører til Frihet*), was bombed by USA in the garden at Enebakk (*Blitz*) and went on a trip with the Women's Front (*Hvem eier Morgendagen*)."⁶² Lind explains his choice of model such, "...because it could have been her. It isn't always the others' children who are destroyed."⁶³ Lind has made it clear that *Blitz* was a direct response to Ut's photograph,

Yes, that's right. She is running down the road, but I am thinking of it as if it were my daughter. That brings it home – the thing with identifying, you know. Besides it doesn't only involve actions to help others. It isn't the case that all the time things happen in other places, it can quickly happen here. In the end there is no one speaking out about things, and then it happens to you.⁶⁴

The image of the little girl stepping out into the garden is about the split second before everything is obliterated by a bomb. "Here you have the light which appears first and then the pressure follows. The light moves at the speed of light, while the pressure is infinitely slower

⁶²Krohg, Morten, 'Den politiske poet', <http://kunst.no/fest/fortolkning/Krohg.php>

⁶³ Victor Lind 30 January 2006

⁶⁴ Ibid.

– so at first you would get a bright light.”⁶⁵ Lind has created a moment in time that is neither reality nor dream nor does prediction, the picture direct the viewer to contemplation. Andrea, with her very Nordic features, brings the experiences felt by Vietnamese children into a Norwegian context. The title itself suggests a historical perspective to meaning and agitation within the image, looking back to the past experiences of the Second World War.⁶⁶ It is no longer the *other* we are viewing, it is ourselves, our personal experience.

5.3.2 Scandinavia against the United States of America

The US became the ultimate symbol of negativity in contemporary society, represented by the American city, racism, capitalist cynicism and above all the Vietnam War. Artists around the world started using their pictorial means to portray the evils of the ultimate capitalist state in predominantly imperialist terms. As we have seen above Scandinavian artists reacted intuitively to the situation in Vietnam, however their critique of the superpower was not only an extended arm of pacifism. It can clearly be seen as an ideological poster war against the state, as can be seen from RM’s first exhibition poster (Fig. 2.5) where the American capitalist is seen to be taking advantage of slave-like workers (Fig. 5.49). An image that expresses both antagonistic views of the Vietnam War as well as the colonising of the moon is the reoccurring image of a mother and child rushing away from an engulfing flame, which is seemingly brought about by American astronauts (Fig. 5.50), which appeared among others in *Hanoi-aktionen* (Fig. 2.19). Within RM’s output, however, the most adolescent prank can be found in the many representations of Nixon in their posters. The one that seems to reappear in almost any subject is Nixon dressed in a garter and bra (Fig. 5.51) pointing his gun aimlessly out into space while looking over his shoulder seemingly coy. Another example can be found in the 1973 poster *Vietnam bygger (Ho Chi Minh-digt)* (Vietnam is building (Ho Chi Minh Poem), Fig. 5.52-53) where a Vietnamese farmer is hacking away at stone-faced Nixon’s crumbling, obviously a stab at the American’s dwindling success in the war. When a positive image is presented of the US it is through the Black Panthers or Chicano movements, the American student protests are often represented through the police-state violence they endured at Berkley and Kent State. More often than not, though, is American hegemony and military power displayed in a negative light through caricatures so familiar to their Russian predecessors.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ During the German occupation of Norway many coastal towns and cities were bombed either by the Allies or the Germans. When the Germans retreated in 1945 many Norwegian cities were destroyed systematically from the North to the South of Norway.

As expressed above, Lind's imagery often connected Norwegian past experiences with concurrent events such as the Vietnam War. In his silkscreen *USA '71* (1971, Fig. 5.54) a parallel is drawn between the US and Nazi Germany, one which through a view of the 1970s world might have seemed absolutely valid. The Vietnam War for example was seen as an occupation by many far left radicals. In *USA '71*, a hand cuts through the American flag to reveal a giant black swastika, the underbelly of American patriotism perhaps. It might be interpreted as American imperialist ambitions, in the name of free-market-economy democratisation, to make the world into one giant American Reich. It involves thinking about what is behind the curtains, what one can find when one takes apart the flag or the nation. The colours are, as Lind put it, "bathroom-like. They are supposed to be in pastel colours when they torture each other, you know. Clean! Very unsoiled."⁶⁷ Often Lind's work reveals different meanings at once, which after careful consideration can be discovered. There is a certain amount of truth in Krohg's description of Lind as a "political poet"; a simple political assertion evolves into long anecdotes through the mind of the viewer. *USA '71* by its title, situates the print in time and reflects upon a reality seen from a 1971 viewpoint, it might be interesting though to consider the statement by Lind in a more contemporary context as he has made installations that have replicated Guantanamo Bay detention cells. For by looking back at these pastel colours from the viewpoint of today, they seem more to reflect Lind's American counterpart Wesselman than torture. Krohg's *Summer Blonde* (1971, Fig. 5.55) also pulls the curtain aside and displaying the other side to American life, by juxtaposing the Pop art related pin-up advertisement with the photograph of a female civil rights demonstrator lying on the ground. By the appearance of the boots close to her face, she has been forced to the ground by police and a white hand reaches down to frisk her. The GRAS artists work to expose the duality of American society here, probably not to the effect of support of actual American movements, but to uncover in Norwegian eyes the brutality and inhuman conditions of the American hero, which means they are using the US as a symbol of the capitalist order and the effects that capitalism and greed can bring.

It is interesting to see that a Swedish artist previously mentioned in connection with FA, but who was not a member of the group, is Carl Johan De Geer and his silkscreen *USA mördare* (Fig. 5.56). De Geer, who we remember was prosecuted for his use of the Swedish flag, portrayed the Americans, through the symbol of the state, as fascists too. In the print, unlike Krohg's depictions where crosses appear, De Geer has turned the stars into swastikas.

⁶⁷ Victor Lind 30 January 2006

From a Swedish perspective this is unusual because of their Second World War experience, however with this image De Geer is not, as Lind is, connecting the past to the present from a national perspective. The print obviously makes reference to the brutality of the Nazis and referring that symbolism to the American soldiers abroad. FA made one poster other than *Skamgrep*, which has been discussed earlier, that expresses contempt at the Swedish government's supposed alliance with the US, which is *Kräv politisk asyl!* (Demand political asylum!, 1968-9, Fig. 5.57). The poster suggests a reason for the refusal to give political asylum to American deserters. The Swedish state, represented by the flag, reveals it underside namely the dollar and as the text says: "That is why there is no political asylum for USA-deserters."⁶⁸ Unlike any of its Scandinavian neighbours FA, here, directly interconnects American capital with Swedish politics. None expose the American state as imperialist as Håkan Nyberg did in his 1970 post-FA poster *Kambodia, Laos, Vietnam* (Fig. 5.58). Here, Uncle Sam has been transformed into a goat-like creature, so often associated with the devil, with his legs firmly planted in the three countries where Americans were supposedly protecting the people against communism. By use of an expressive pictorial language the imperialist intents of the devilish American is clearly expressed to evoke both Christian and political sympathies for the 'colonised' Asian countries.

What is then Scandinavian anti-Americanism? As expressed through the posters the view from country to country appears different due to national circumstances. The stylistic means with which these artists expressed their resentment towards American involvement in Vietnam spilled into images further exposing their views of the state as opposed to their own social democratic and peaceful societies, as well as making the posters express views that were highly national in flavour. In its compilation posters RM often display imperialism through fantastical and surreal images that do not always specify who the claw belongs to, in this way the imperialist beast is portrayed as the capitalist beast and highly dissimilar to the more realistic view of Danish or even foreign workers'/dissidents' lives. GRAS artists did make it apparent what their views of America were, but through a Pop art of oppositional features. American society is over and over again exposed through its hidden dichotomy, war and consumer society are often seen as interlinked, particularly so in Lind's *Slik bygges et imperium*, (How to build an Empire, 1972, Fig. 5.59) where the underlying content is the building of fortunes out of the misery of thousands of empirical subjects. However, GRAS artists often reference a difference in ideology and traditions when exposing American power,

⁶⁸ *Därför ingen politisk asyl åt USA-desertörer*

as seen in the use of the swastika. In this context FA might be said to be the only group to be highly propagandistic in its production, yet again there is no evidence for FA having made posters directly exposing US imperialism. The superpower is only dealt with in connection with the Swedish state and its policies towards political asylum seekers.

5.3.3 The freedom fighter and the Third World

Che – an icon of the Revolution

Ernesto Che Guevara was an inspiration for revolutionaries around the world and after his death in 1967 he quickly rose to the role of martyr of the (guerrilla) war on Capitalism. RM's Dea Trier Mørch produced her memorial in 1968 simply titled *Che* (Fig. 5.60). It is characteristic in suggesting the martyrdom that many felt the Argentinean had suffered. Her direct recording of the photographs of his dead body, circulated worldwide, (Fig. 5.61) is clear to see. However the execution aligns her portrait with the iconography of Christ. Particularly the Deposition of Christ, where the lifeless body of Christ is taken down from the cross to be entombed. By relating her drawing to Jesus Christ, Trier Mørch has given the Communist revolutionary the same status as Christ himself, thereby portraying his death as an actual martyrdom. However the figure's eyes are open and looking straight down at the viewer, which creates an uncertainty as to whether or not the figure is really dead. Unlike the photographs the linoleum print does not retain the reality of the situation, and although the bullet wounds are clearly visible, for someone not acquainted with the photographs they might just as well be the artist's method of carving. RM also created a song in Che's memory, which was reproduced in their first catalogue and frequently sung at their stage shows.⁶⁹

Anders Kjær's silkscreen *Requiem* (1971, Fig. 5.62), which appeared in the GRAS Graphic Folder, puts further emphasis on the remembrance of Che in the monumental form of a great, enormous obelisk incorporating the aforementioned photograph directly into the print. Here the hero is certainly dead, both on the surface of the picture and in the title. It is a monument to a martyr who had no grave, and a tribute to the philosophy he proclaimed, yet the landscape is left empty and bare, only a sun is setting in the background.⁷⁰ As discussed in the section on the GRAS Graphic Folder, Kjær has mixed his hard-edge painting style with figuration for the first time, combining two almost opposing American movements in his

⁶⁹ Flugt wrote the text and Lars Trier the melody for 'Sangen om Che Guevara' (The song about Che Guevara) in Røde Mor, *Katalog 1*, Copenhagen: Holbæk Ekspresstrykkeri, June 1970, pg 13

⁷⁰ Che Guevara was buried in a secret location in 1967. His remains were not found until 1997, and subsequently sent to Cuba.

homage to Che Guevara however ironic that might be when we know today that his subsequent murder was linked to the American government.⁷¹

In 1969 Cilla Ericson and Hanns Karlewski two FA members (and partners) produced a folder of drawings illustrating *The Lord's Prayer* or *Our Father*, which contains a drawing based on the same photographs of Che Guevara's body (Fig. 5.63-64). Over the inscription "Tillkomme ditt rike" (Thy Kingdom come) Che Guevara's body is being pointed at by a man in a white short sleeved shirt with a camera around his neck and a small black badge stating CIA. He stands between a Catholic priest and an American military officer. At first the image appears to be a direct translation of the by then famous photographs, however, except for Che, the priest is the only figure in the drawing that actually appeared in the photographs. Thus Che's 'real' murderers are insinuated by their inclusion. It is worth noting that Johan Bergenstråhle's 1969 movie *Made in Sweden* starts off with a demonstration where a rewritten version of the same prayer, *Kapitalens Fader Vår* (Capital's Our Father), appears.⁷² This is also reproduced in RM's first catalogue accompanied by a picture novel or comic strip sequence of images by Thomas Kruse (Fig. 5.65). Although the pseudo-realistic representation in question does not make a direct link with *Kapitalens Fader Vår*, the image reproduced on the inside of the second edition folder speaks otherwise.

In this work Ericson and Karlewski outline the scope of the folder; on a grid of twelve squares the artists have written at the top the lines of the prayer and seemingly stamped nine of the otherwise empty rubrics with "exploatering, erövring, destruktion, utsugning, lag och ordning, fördomar, förtryck, revolution, tiden är kort" [exploration, conquest, destruction, exploitation, law and order, prejudice, oppression, revolution, time is short].⁷³ In place of the drawing of Che we find the word *erövring* (conquest), North American conquest in Latin-America perhaps. The inclusion of this preliminary outline speaks for its outright ideological emphasis; of course this is evident in the whole series of images illustrating the prayer. In the outline's vocabulary there is an affiliation with both *Made in Sweden* and Thomas Kruse's RM catalogue comic strip. The interrelationship is further stressed by the fact that in both illustrations one image contains a massacre scene, most likely the Vietnamese My Lai

⁷¹ At the time rumours circulated implicating CIA-trained soldiers in his capture and death. Later it emerged that American officials had been present at the time when Che Guevara's corpse was photographed in 1967.

⁷² The movie was based on the novel *Det hvitmålade hjärtat* by Sven Fagerberg. The Swedish Institute for Film describes the opening scene thus: "A group of protesters appear at Sergel Square in Stockholm and play music. One of them performs an ironically recast Our Father where big business is challenged for the exploitation of workers, environmental degradation and imperialist war." Translated by the author from Swedish, <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-film/Filmdatabasen/?itemid=4817&type=MOVIE&iv=PdfGen> (see Appendix)

⁷³ Only three of the twelve images that appear in the folder are sketched out in the outline leaf.

massacre, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Furthermore both illustrate the mightiest of all evils as the United States of America, either as the root of war and imperialism or as the insignia of Capitalism.

Both the Norwegian and the Danish representations of Che Guevara associate the figure of the secular hero with religious martyrdom and memorandum, yet to differing effects. I would argue that Dea Trier Mørch's portrait is strongly emotive and if it was not for the cut letters at the top it could just as well have been an intimate view of the Deposition. This is clearly not the case in Kjær's silkscreen where the 'real' photographic evidence of Che's death is exposed, yet the symbolic title and the monumental obelisk reflects a wish for remembrance and tribute. Both artists based their commemoration on photographs, even if they could have used another more gallant image of Che as these were certainly in circulation at the time.⁷⁴ Further, the evocative image of his dead body emphasises the evil of his killers as well as his martyr status. One might even argue that the handsome man is even more handsome in death, and the half-smile on his lips and open eyes hold the viewer responsible for the actions taken against him on behalf of Capitalism.

The illustration of *The Lord's Prayer* seems to be the most realistically portrayed Che Guevara, even if Kjær has used the actual photograph in his barren landscape. However Ericson and Karlewski have added two figures that were not there. Though there is a juxtaposition taking place in the context it is displayed, within the series of twelve illustrations, and the nature of the constructed image itself. This does not take place in the other two Scandinavians' works, here the reflection on the actual words or preaching of the faith in relation to what reality is, is counterpoised with the constructed Leftist view of what happened. The remaking of the picture where the 'real' murderers are revealed creates a greater conflict within the series as a whole, particularly if the viewer is to accept the images as truthful representations of contemporary events. The viewer is led to believe something which is not true, one is fooled. Moreover if one takes into account the text accompanying the image both underneath the actual image (thy kingdom come) and on the outline (conquest) an anti-Imperialist viewpoint emerges. Although *Che* and *Requiem* allude to Christian iconography and display a need to identify Che Guevara as a martyr who can be likened to Christ, neither artist places blame directly. These two are merely testimonies and to a degree glorifications of the revolutionary. However FA members Ericson and Karlewski display the

⁷⁴ An example is the widely reproduced and reused portrait by Alberto Korda.

act of killing him as opposed to the Christian faith itself, and thereby attempt to expose the hypocrisy of Christian America by constructing a US presence at the viewing of the body.

Uncle Ho – *the bringer of light*

By the time the 79 year old North-Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh passed away on 2 September 1969, many communists and left-wing radicals had come to admire the steadfast figure. He had become the symbol of the post-colonial age as revolutionary tendencies were ascendant in both Asia and Africa. For the Western viewer Ho Chi Minh's dedication to his nation's struggle against American oppression was a clear indicator of possible success against Imperialism and inspired a continued interest in liberation movements. He had stood firm against American intervention starting in the early 1960s, Japanese imperial forces during the Second World War and French colonial power before that. This made Uncle Ho a figurehead and revered hero for Communist freedom fighters across the colonised Third World.

Kleiva's *Helsing til Ho Chi Minh* (Greetings to Ho Chi Minh, 1969, Fig. 5.66), made after Ho's death, was a salutation to the man who had come to be seen as a humble and almost monk-like figure. The simple serenity of Kleiva's memorandum to Minh evidently supports the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (FNL). The print is abstract in both realisation and concept. Instead of merely reproducing the flag Kleiva has made a lyrical and peaceful landscape out of it. The red and blue planes are turned into a sunset over waves of water and the Communist five pointed star replaced by the Oriental symbol of peace, the lotus-flower. The print is ambiguous in its political content as it reproduces the revolutionary movement's flag at the same time as it refers to notions of peace. The print became a must-have for radical anti-Vietnam War student circles in Norway. It was commissioned by the leftist *Pax*.⁷⁵ The picture broke with the strict Hard-Edge language Kleiva had been investigating and combined stripe elements with a clearly figurative one, the lotus flower. The print was in fact a revelation for Kleiva and hereafter he embraced figuration ardently in his work. *Helsing til Ho Chi Minh* is a positive salutation to the FNL flag (Fig. 5.67) and in effect the newly deceased Ho Chi Minh. The way in which the title, *Helsing til Ho Chi Minh*, adds meaning to the image is highly characteristic of Kleiva, who often used lyrics, political slogans or his own incisive words of wisdom to reveal the picture's connotations to the

⁷⁵ Pax Forlag (from Latin *pax* meaning peace) was established in 1964 as a representative of the Leftist radicalism that was on the rise in Norway. It emerged from *Folkereising mot krig* (People Rising Against War) and its journal *Pax*. The publishing house focuses on literature as well as nonfiction but with particular emphasis on political and social issues.

viewer. The print was both a longing for peace in Vietnam and recognition of the Vietnamese leader's memory and fighting spirit.

In contrast, *Onkel HO og USA på månen* (Uncle HO and USA on the moon, 1969, Fig. 5.68) or *Den dag amerikanerne landede på månen* (The day the Americans landed on the moon) by RM's Ochiai is a realistic representation of the leader. The poster is a more straightforward representation of contemporary views about the FNL leader. Ochiai's portrait of Ho Chi Minh occupies the larger upper part of the image, a wise man gazing down at the astronaut Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon. A flow of lines divides the picture plane, giving the impression of a mountain, river and foliage combined. The foliage seemingly grows towards the astronaut. The foliage and portrait reworks the colourful front page of *Time* from July 1965 (Fig. 5.69). Ochiai has simplified the composition, leaving out the intricate ornamentation of the frontispiece and creating a mirror image where Minh's gaze is directed towards the left rather than right. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the picture depicts the discrepancy between the escalating Vietnam War and the US' goals in space. The poster critiques American adherence to intervention in sovereign states as a foreign policy device to prevent the spread of Communism as explained by the Domino Theory.

Looking at Kleiva's and Ochiai's two prints together it is clear that both artists had great admiration for the Vietnamese leader. However, there is an intellectualism present in Kleiva's silkscreen that speaks to a knowing audience, one that knows the FNL flag and that sympathises with the North Vietnamese struggle. Both images, I would argue, are very decorative in presentation and utilise botanic motifs to emphasise the down to earth image of Ho Chi Minh. In a way both prints thereby become orientalised. Ochiai's RM poster uses this element to divide between two sides of the same world, to display the duplicity of it. Even though Kleiva focuses in on the flag as a national symbol and as a symbol of the struggle for independence, he also depicts the inherent wish for a peaceful outcome. Except for the apparent stylistic difference, Ochiai's social realism and Kleiva's abstraction, the two works are ideologically related.

Solidarity with the Third World

Kleiva's *Blad frå Imperialistens Dagbok I-II-III* (Pages from the Imperialist's Diary I-III, 1971, Fig. 5.70) gives reference to imperialism in its title, but it also relates to Norway directly through its landscape. I would therefore argue that this is a poetic reference not to imperialism but to the colonised – the *Other*. We can only assume as it was made during the 1970s that he is alluding to the US, however, this triptych may very well be about the

experience of being occupied. By simple use of the symbols of war – boots, helicopters and mushroom cloud – the idyllic landscape is overturned to something more horrific. The suggestion I would like to make is that the artist is making a Norwegian audience connect to the *present* war torn countries by way of appealing to their common memory of being occupied during the Second World War. Kleiva manages to convey this by simple reproduction of highly symbolic signs – both of war and of national identity.

In RM's non-narrative *Oprør* (Revolt, 1970, Fig. 5.71) eight different movements are shown, some of which are clearly part of the Western world, from Zengakuren in Japan to the Red-Power Movement and Black Panthers in the US. However, alongside these figures of Western rebels are the stoic female guerrilla fighter and the Chilean political prisoner, the 'real' warriors one might say. The compilation of images displays different movements of insurgency, but these are all brought together in the poster as one. Shown side by side they all become part of the movement for freedom from their oppressor – one might say that in all of the cases this is America. Notably, most of the groups presented here were militarised in one form or another. The image of rebellion that RM presents is therefore one of violent upheaval rather than peaceful protest. It is worth noting that the image was published in the newspaper *Politiken*, as a graphic comment. RM frequently made the step into mainstream media as they saw it as an opportunity to spread the message to ordinary people. One wonders how an ordinary Dane would have reacted to the guerrilla fighters.

Ochiai's *Kvinder er den halve verden* (Women are Half of the World, 1974, Fig. 5.72) expresses straightforward international solidarity between women. The poster was made for Danmarks Demokratiske Kvindeforbund (Denmark's Democratic Women's Federation), which was established in 1973. The organisation worked against fascism and oppression across the world with particular focus on women's role in the struggle for independence in the Third World. The social realist style makes it possible for Ochiai to focus in on the individual women of different countries around the world, including the West and former colonies. By showing the daily life of women across the world she has made apparent the similarities between all women. The majority of the twelve equally sized images portray work as crucially part of a woman's life wherever she is. The poster thereby expresses the intentions of the organisation for which it was made, yet the female artist has taken care to present all of the women in a dignified manner that reflect a class consciousness shared by all. A noticeable feature all of the women share is that none of them look out at the viewer, this makes the image work as representations of their daily life rather than mere portraits. Furthermore, one

could argue that this device also avoids any art historical references to work by male artists.⁷⁶ Ochiai has simultaneously depicted another of the big issues of the 'long 1968' namely feminism and solidarity with the former colonised Third World.

Far more masculine in form is FA's *På vems sida står ASEA i Moçambique?* (On who's side is ASEA in Mozambique?, 1969, Fig. 5.73) where an army soldier is standing on top of a naked coloured body. The message is clear from the text as and the image if ASEA goes ahead with its deal in the still colonised nation it will be supporting the killing of civilians. The way the white man is standing atop of the coloured figure is evidently to provoke a reaction in the viewer, as it associates not only with animal hunting but with the treatment of the colonised people as animals. Could one say this is poster reflects solidarity? Unlikely when its purpose was to expose the business dealings of a Swedish company in Mozambique. The picture also gives connotations that might give the opposite effect, and had the text not been present it could be taken for racism. In FA's poster both figures are turned away from us and seem thus to be anonymous symbols, however, this also gives the image less empathy and to extent realism.

Comparing the four posters it is noteworthy that all represent militarism, yet the images are given their separate meanings. In Kleiva's triptych associations are given to a specific Norwegian experience that bind the Norwegian people to the sufferers of imperialism, FA is similarly national in flavour focusing in on Swedish exploitations of the Third World. However, the image is far from expressing a common experience, or even the struggle for liberation. RM's two images present two different sides to RM production, one early and the other late in its lifespan, whilst one could be said to encourage ongoing struggles the other is humanist in its social realist images of different female workers. One might say the latter expresses a view of the world where women inhabit the same spaces as men yet without conflict.

⁷⁶ The most notorious being Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863).

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In this thesis three different Scandinavian ‘1968’ collectives have been discussed and at first it might seem that these three are inherently different. However, I hope to have showed that, although their styles are varied in their aesthetic meanings and ambitions, these three are highly connected to their contemporary reality. Esther Leslie claims in Brechtian terms that “it is useless to determine the realism of an artwork by comparison with other artworks; rather it is a political matter, and the arbiter of art’s realism is its comparison with life itself.”¹ By comparing the groups’ artistic production I hope to have shed light on the reality surrounding cultural experiences in a time of heightened politicisation among artists. Their collective activities expressed themes that were both international and national, and at the same time the ambitions of the artists were to be part of that felt revolutionary moment. Yet there are some features that appear to distinguish the groups from each other, and I am not referring to style which I will discuss shortly, but the deliverance of an art for the working class through affordability and manner of reproduction. These were attempts at making an art opposed to bourgeois culture and becoming representatives of a class conscious art in Marxist-Leninist terms. This proposal can only be said to be at stake for RM and GRAS because these two were the only to exhibit their works in an institutional framework. FA was in this sense close to its namesake AP in Paris, which denounced ‘representation’, as Kirstin Ross puts it, “Nothing [...] aspires to a level of “representing” what was occurring; the goal, rather, is to be at one with – at the same time with, contemporary with – whatever *was* occurring.”² Yet AP announced: “Bourgeois culture separates and isolates artists from other workers by according them a privileged status. Privilege encloses the artist in an invisible prison. We have decided to transform what we are in society.”³ To which it must be said that all of the Scandinavian collectives would have seen this as an appropriate statement of their own intentions, which leads one to believe that ideologically at least these groups are related, even with their European counterparts. They made attempts at breaking down the boundaries between art and life, art was to reflect society and engage actively with its functions and objectives. And in no way was this unique to Scandinavia.

¹ Leslie, Esther, ‘Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: “The fact of new forms of life, already born and active”’, Beaumont, Matthew (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Realism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010, p145

² Ross, Kristin, *May’68 and its Afterlives*, p15

³ ‘Document: L’atelier populaire’, *Les Cahiers de Mai* 2, July 1-15 1968, quoted in Ross, Kristin, *May’68 and its Afterlives*, p17

There is, however, a common denominator that separates these groups from their international contemporaries, and that is the social democratic society in which they operated. As I have shown the societies around them provided an open arena where ideas would be heard and sometimes even accommodated in policy. That is not to say that there were no negative reactions from other groups politically opposed to the leftist ideology presented through their work, but eventually all of the groups have made their way into the institution. However, institutional critique was quintessential to GRAS approach to art and art-politics, and the disbandment of the group was an essential step for these artists to partake in the overturning of the old and reinvigorate and reform the institutions from within. In view of this, RM has resisted inclusion into the bourgeois canon by way of their explicit working class cultural emphasis, and there is no denying that a generation of left-wing working class and petit bourgeoisie still cherish their posters and LPs. Of course FA's posters, although there were many, have almost entirely disappeared and have not until recently received attention from either its own generation as memories of the *revolt* or from historians interested in their potential social value. Compared to the French AP who has received numerous books in their honour, it seems curious that FA has been almost forgotten, but this might be explained by the lesser impact on Swedish society of the 'long 1968'.

I have been told that even today artists that took part in FA see little reason to exhibit FA posters in museums or galleries as these were practical means for causes that needed to be experienced in the streets and replaced the next night by posters on another up to date issue, which testifies to its perceived value only as propaganda in the worst meaning of the word. This testifies to FA's immediacy to AP and emphasis on political goals rather than artistic. However, a recent interest in FA has come from within my own generation – veneration for the idealism which seemed to plaster change on the walls of Sweden.⁴ GRAS in Norway was firmly part of the establishment, exhibiting in galleries as well as government run museums; on the other hand the individual artists connected to the communal workshop initiated a struggle for artists' rights that would change the practice of these institutions within a decade. To define their impact on the basis of this would be wrong, however, as it was the attitudes of the artists towards the workers that initiated their use of the silkscreen. The boundary between practice and life was indeed blurred – some of the artists would argue it still is – and the impact of the Marxist-Leninists within the group must be emphasised as an immense impact

⁴ Exhibitions of FA work has appeared in Stockholm and websites have sprung up promoting posters from many artists in the so-called 1968-generation.

on the mode of production. Posters, postcards, texts and collaborative works were made within the workshop to serve political agendas, however, the artists kept partaking in the art scene at large. Their prints were, and to some extent still are, seen as radical and highly political. Yet within Norwegian art criticism there is no questioning of whether or not these artists are 'aesthetic' even if they were/are using 'art as a critical instrument'.⁵ The art institutional critique by RM took a different turn than GRAS or even FA as the group's rock band had slideshows of posters and photographs during performances as a way of combining all the elements within the collective 'machine'. And as we have seen when the working class asked for RM to collaborate with it in an institutional setting, like the museum exhibition, the group instantly said yes. This of course speaks to the appeal of their imagery within those grassroots they so desperately had wanted to serve. One has to remember that this was their main goal, 'to produce living art that lives in the people'. As RM produced art for different causes and organisations they were the only group discussed here to be continuously commissioned by popular and workers' movements and by effect their poster production was professionalised – they became actual art-workers. In these terms, FA stand clear of comparison to the other two groups as the group is more symptomatic of the spontaneous time in which it existed, seen particularly in the democratic assembly form of working together to make political as well as artistic decisions. All of the collectives saw the possibilities presented in the collective and democratic assembly, however, GRAS did not relinquish individual artistic practice.

What can then be described as the Scandinavian features of this cultural '1968'? It is clearly not a particular stylistic approach to poster and printmaking, or may the case be that their openness to egalitarian techniques and styles is what made them truly Scandinavian? Most of the artists involved in these groups were of Scandinavian origin, having grown up within a society where the common good took precedence, collectivism was therefore not too far from the functioning of society itself. However, the consensus within the social democratic state to include even the smallest minorities into decision-making processes would have been engrained into these artists from birth. The openness within GRAS and FA to freedom of expression can be explained by such a societal function and, even though RM was open to styles that expressed class consciousness and working class spirit, every image was scrutinised by the collective and their patrons. The group were doctrinal communists and it

⁵ DeRoo comments on the division within the French art world post-1968 of politically motivated art and a new aesthetic conceptual art. DeRoo, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art*, p27-28

would have been unthinkable or even unworkable for an artist to be part of RM when not theoretically inclined to such aims as a popular recognisable style. In the beginning, as we have seen the group was made up of professional and amateur artists who collaborated on works, but this period's lengthy discussions and somewhat lesser consistency in quality of the end product lead the group to form a closely-knit core of three-four artist producers. One could argue that it was here that the collaborative element to the graphics group ended and had it not been for the communication between the organisations and the artists the posters would have been less indicative of current worker-specific concerns.

It has to be pointed out that the groups' differing styles are at least partly rooted in their different printing methods – silkscreen and linoleum. FA learnt the silkscreen process partially from the French example and impact was often more important than form, but the poster language became more intricate and developed with time. It was still a highly propagandistic style of simple 'types' and in only one colour, for ease of execution. GRAS on the other hand came to the technique by way of advertisement, yet no other printing technique could have presented the workshop with a more efficient way of production and agitation. The linoleum's materiality was to be RM's characteristic, and the link to traditional folk art (the woodcut) made the posters closer to the working class culture they wanted to portray. It has to be pointed out that all of the groups used techniques that seemed closer to the grassroots and made their work affordable for a greater range of society, as well as a tool in the class struggle. It is appropriate to pay attention to the close relationship to photography within the groups, as a natural element that added authenticity to their political messages, even if these were manipulated within the posters in all of the groups.

One difference between the Scandinavians, it has to be pointed out, is their stylistic choices. For RM, who wanted to be close to the popular movement of workers, social realism is a style predisposed to popular reproduction and RM's posters were enthusiastically embraced by the people. It might be a sign of their time specificity that the images today seem to have lost some of their radical impetus, yet as documents of their time they present great examples. This may be because of its overtly contemporaneous themes, but it is more likely the style which no longer relates to the techno-crazed people of the present. However, the elementary aspect to RM is its rejection of abstraction and to an extent of the new expressions connected to the neo-avant-garde, such as GRAS for example. RM did not try to express new *experimental* visions far removed from the people they worked for and their traditionalist

imagery might be due to this and their purpose as political poster makers. The cooperative method they applied to their workshop added creativity into a style that in many places was considered passé. The emphasis on these basic principles always guided their production. FA was an underground and secretive group. Its style depended on the individual artist or amateur who received the task. Utilising all means available to portray simply and effectively the instant message was one of their greatest accomplishments. The styles they explored were appropriate for their quick and in the moment approach. Often their posters can be seen as propagandistic and informative, and modelled on the democratic assembly than on a formal grouping the imagery would sometimes suffer. In this comparison, FA's style is clearly the most straightforward poster figurations, simple and easily understood, with little attention to detail. Yet the artists involved did not have to adhere to any particular stylistic manifestation. Stylistically the most complex has proved to be Norwegian GRAS. With no boundaries set for discourses or visual language, other than the limitations of the printing press, GRAS' production is filled with examples which would not have come out of a rigid a group such as RM. GRAS always put great emphasis on freedom within the workshop this is the reason for such a great variety of styles. Pop, Hard-Edge, stylisation, non-figuration, abstraction, Concrete, Neo-Dada and traditional poster figuration more akin to Russian posters than to its contemporaries. However, as have become evident here most of the artists' preferred American influences as this was seen to be in the time. GRAS artists grabbed available sources of inspiration and soaked them up until they had been absorbed into their art, both inside and outside of the workshop. GRAS had no problem merging different ideas and styles to create their own political expression. It is obvious that the experimental attitude of some of these artists stimulated ventures into new areas of art, which essentially is the benefit of the collective.

The question of the autonomy of the art work was questioned by the three groups in different ways. RM started out with individual art works exhibited together under a common name, then for a couple of years the collective name took precedence over the individual artists' signing of the works, yet by the end of its existence the RM stamp figured alongside the artists' names. For FA there was never a question of signing as the posters in execution, from drawing to finished print, was made by all of the group's members collectively under the name of FA. On this issue GRAS distinguishes itself in that the only place that GRAS as a name appears is in connection with exhibitions and the graphic portfolio. Generally the individual artists signed and numbered their prints, only when a print was used for a poster

campaign plastered across the city was the signature missing. And there are of course legal reasons for using a group name rather than one's own but it also makes one part of a community that collectively stand with the you when external forces try to turn you away from your chosen path. For all three groups covered here it is true that the process of communal poster making boosted creativity and even to some extent productivity. This is clearly a feature of the international 'long 1968', yet in Scandinavia as I hope has become clear from this text artists, intellectuals, workers, farmers and students all worked together to the effect of change in the proceeding decades. Their 'revolt' was not a violent one because of the society around them, and even when turning to the far left and the Marxist-Leninists these protests were incorporated into society eventually. There is of course more study to be done in this area of Scandinavian art history, yet I hope to have shed some light on the Scandinavian 1968 art collective experience as reflective of a Scandinavian experience of that exact year.

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Scandinavian Artists' Workshops 1968-1975

Røde Mor, Folkets Ateljé and GRAS

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