

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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MONUMENTAL PROPAGANDA POSTERS OF SOVIET UNION
ON VIEW FOR FIRST TIME IN SIX DECADES AT THE ART INSTITUTE
Windows on the War Showcases More Than 150 Soviet TASS Posters
Special Installation *Belligerent Encounters* Augments Exhibition
Both On View Only in Chicago July 31–October 23, 2011

More than ten years ago, 26 tightly wrapped brown paper parcels were unearthed from deep within a storage area for the Art Institute of Chicago's Department of Prints and Drawings. These parcels contained 50-year-old monumental posters created by a collective of artists and writers working under the auspices of the Soviet Union's news agency, TASS (an acronym for the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union). These posters became the seeds of the landmark exhibition ***Windows on the War: Soviet TASS Posters at Home and Abroad, 1941–1945***, on view **July 31 through October 23, 2011**, in the museum's **Regenstein Hall**. While the focus of the exhibition is primarily on these rarely seen posters, viewers will also find their rich historical and cultural context revealed through photographs and documentary material illuminating the visual culture of US–USSR relations before and during the war. Drawn from the Art Institute's collection as well as the Ne boltai! Collection of 20th-century propaganda, this exhibition brings to the fore many Soviet artists previously unrecognized in the United States, demonstrating that, despite the brutal regime of Joseph Stalin, creativity flourished among these diverse artists and writers as they sought purpose working in and for a totalitarian state. The exhibition marks the first time the hand-made



posters, originally designed for window displays in empty storefronts, have been displayed in the United States since World War II.



Made using the unconventional technique of stenciling, these impressively large (all between 5 and 10 feet in height) and exceptionally vibrant painted posters resulted from the collaboration of leading Soviet artists and illustrators with some of the most significant writers of the day. By war's end, the TASS agency had generated approximately 1,250 individual designs—one for nearly every day of the conflict. The ambition and devotion of the TASS artists are palpable: they produced, assembly-line style, daily editions of between 100 and 1,000 striking and sizable posters entirely by hand, through the means of painting through cut stencils and with a labor-intensive technical virtuosity previously unheard of in poster production (some of the most intricate and chromatically brilliant designs demanded 60 to 70 different stencils and color divisions).

The core of the exhibition is comprised of the Art Institute's 157 TASS posters, which were mailed to the museum by VOKS (the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) as part of its campaign of international cultural diplomacy during the war. The exhibition examines not only the TASS

studio production in Moscow but also the critical role played by the posters as international cultural "ambassadors" to the Allied nations, as these unique works were published in the American press as well as exhibited at the time on American soil. Thus the display of the posters will be set in the context of the historical relationship between the United States and the USSR; the American poster design debates of the 1940s and the mobilization of visual images by both isolationist and interventionist groups; and the support by American advocacy organizations and artist-allies.

Windows on the War is accompanied by a 400-page catalogue, which will be the first major scholarly English-language text on the posters' production and will feature essays by Peter Zegers, Douglas Druick, Jill Bugajski, Cher Schneider, Konstantin Akinsha, Adam Jolles, and Robert Bird, with contributions by Lauren Makholt and Molly Zimmerman-Feeley. The richly illustrated catalogue will include chapters on the founding of the TASS studio, its stylistic choices, and role in the war; the poetic/literary collaborators in the poster studio; the international dissemination and American reception of the works; and a technical study of the posters' medium and assemblage. The TASS posters

displayed in the exhibition will each receive in-depth treatment, reading the unique visual iconography and style of the works against their specific historical context. The catalogue, published by the Art Institute of Chicago and distributed by Yale University Press, will be available for \$65 at the Art Institute's Museum Shop.

The exhibition will also be supplemented by an extensive online initiative that will showcase hundreds of additional unique works not featured in the exhibition, accessible via an exhibition microsite (<http://www.artic.edu/TASS/>), Tumblr page (<http://tass-posters.tumblr.com/>), and special Twitter feed (@TASSPosters).

This exhibition is part of *The Soviet Arts Experience*, a 16-month-long, Chicago-wide showcase of works by artists who created under (and in response to) the Politburo of the Soviet Union. Additional exhibitions on view during the showcase include *Vision and Communism* (September 29, 2011–January 22, 2012) and *Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard* (August 30–December 11, 2011) at the Smart Museum of Art; *Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary* (August 22–December 31, 2011) at the Special Collections Research Center at The University of Chicago Library; and *Views and Re-Views: Soviet Political Posters and Cartoons* (September 20–December 4, 2011) and *Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910–1917* (September 23–December 11, 2011) at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University. Visit www.SovietArtsExperience.org for a full schedule of events.

Belligerent Encounters: Graphic Chronicles of War and Revolution, 1500–1945

Visitors to *Windows on the War: Soviet TASS Posters at Home and Abroad, 1941–1945*, on view in Regenstein Hall from July 31 through October 23, 2011, should not miss a concurrent and complementary exhibition: ***Belligerent Encounters: Graphic Chronicles of War and Revolution, 1500–1945***. This exhibition in the **Jean and Steven Goldman Prints and Drawings Galleries in the Richard and Mary L. Gray Wing (G124–127)** highlights European and American prints, posters, and drawings spanning almost 500 years of war and revolution. Conceived as a prelude to *Windows on the War*, the exhibition is organized both thematically and chronologically.

Wars and revolutions have been recorded in words and images since time immemorial, commemorated in architecture, sculpture, mosaics, frescoes, and tapestries. In Europe, the advent of printing and printmaking in the 15th century meant that the chronicling of historical and contemporary conflicts was possible on a scale as never before. Woodcuts, engravings, etchings, and lithographs recording aspects of wars and revolutions can be seen as ancestors to the kinds of digital technologies that made this year's "Arab Spring" a global event.



Some images included in *Belligerent Encounters*—by the likes of Albrecht Dürer, Jacques Callot, and Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes—are quite famous; others—by Édouard Manet and Otto Dix—may be familiar to some; but there are others still—from such artists as Frank Brangwyn, Albin Egger-Lienz, Jan Poortenaar, and Heinrich Hoerle—that will be unknown to many people. While some of the works on display were intended to stand on their own, a number of prints come from thematic portfolios, the contents of which were intended to be seen together. These include Max Beckmann's *Hell*, Heinrich Hoerle's *Cripple Portfolio*, and Otto Dix's *War*. Select sections, including a thematic gallery devoted to *Imperial Branding: The Origin of a Pejorative—The Kaiser and the Hun*, have been guest-curated by Paul Jaskot, professor of modern art and architectural history at DePaul University.

Windows on the War: Soviet TASS Posters at Home and Abroad, 1941–1945 is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago and curated by Peter Zegers, Rothman Family Research Curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings; Jill Bugajski, research associate in the Department of Prints and Drawings; and guest curators Adam Jolles and Konstantin Akinsha. Generous support is provided by the Ne boltai! Collection. Research support was provided by Edward McCormick Blair. Further support is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, Donna and Howard Stone, and Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sullivan.

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IMAGES: Nikolai Fedorovich Denisovskii and Pavel Petrovich Sokolov-Skalia. *Our One Thousandth Blow*, 1944. The Art Institute of Chicago: Gift of the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

Pavel Petrovich Sokolov-Skalya. *Wolf the Moralist*, 1943. The Art Institute of Chicago: Gift of the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

Edmond Guillaume. *Wilhelm I, King of Prussia* from the series *Les Génies de la Mort*, 1870. The Art Institute of Chicago: Robert Chase Endowment.

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 am–8:00 pm Thursday

10:30 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

FAMILY FREE WEDNESDAYS BEGIN JUNE 1, 2011. The museum is free to all the first and second Wednesdays of every month.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

Adults \$18.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Children 14 and over, students, and seniors \$12.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Chicago residents receive a \$2.00 discount with proof of residency

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

Free Evenings are free to all. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.