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This is What Democracy Looks Like: Art and the Wisconsin Uprising

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Abstract

In February of 2011, an enormous popular political movement came to life in Wisconsin. For many people who were engaged in the month-long occupation of the Capitol in Madison, the Wisconsin Uprising was their first experience with direct political action. For the artists who are the focus of this article, taking part in the Wisconsin Uprising seemed like a natural outgrowth of their many years of socially engaged artmaking. In this article, I offer a brief overview of the Wisconsin Uprising followed by a discussion of the contributions of the artists in the protests in the context of their larger bodies of work. I close with an argument about why art matters in social justice movements and why art teachers have an obligation to include activist art in their curricula.

Art is indeed a weapon,
and an especially powerful one
in the midst of a peaceful movement.
(Julie Gueraseva, 2012)



Figure 1. Madison Day 4. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

In February of 2011, an enormous popular political movement came to life in Wisconsin in response to a bill called “Act 10,” which used a trumped up budget crisis to gut unions and strip funding from public schools. It was miraculous; the people (many of whom had previously seemed indifferent to political engagement, being preoccupied with the Green Bay Packers and Friday night fish fries) got up off their couches and barstools and took to the streets – in huge numbers, side by side. For many people who were engaged in the month-long occupation of the Capitol in Madison, the Wisconsin Uprising was their first foray into direct political action. For the artists who are the focus of this article, however, taking part in the Wisconsin Uprising seemed like a natural outgrowth of the many years of socially engaged artmaking done collectively and individually. It was like watching a small spark, carefully tended, burst into a wildfire.

Jesse Graves, Nicolas Lampert, Colin Matthes, Barbara Miner, and the Overpass Light Brigade (founded by Lane Hall and Lisa Moline) are all Milwaukee-based artists who make work that deals with a wide range of social justice issues including the environment, prison reform, the politics of schooling, racism, and poverty. Each has been engaged in social activism and art in diverse ways over the course of their careers. In this article, I offer a brief overview of the Wisconsin Uprising, from my perspective as a participant, followed by a discussion of the contributions of the artists involved in the protests in the context of their

larger bodies of work. I close with an argument about why art matters in social justice movements and why art teachers have an obligation to include activist art in their curricula.

The Wisconsin Uprising: A Brief History

The Wisconsin Uprising was sparked by the introduction of “Act 10,” also known as the “Budget Repair Bill.” The budget in the state was actually in much better shape than it was in many others at the time, but newly elected Republican Governor Scott Walker was out to make a name for himself and to pay back his wealthy political patrons by stripping unions of power and paving the way for more privatization of schools among other things (Miner, 2013). Walker coupled his announcement of Act 10 with news that he had put the National Guard on alert in the event that there were strikes or other forms of unrest. It was a grandstanding, politically self-promoting risk taken by a politician with national aspirations. Although he threatened his constituents with military force, Walker did not actually expect trouble. Act 10, which was supposedly created to address a fiscal crisis in a state that had no real crisis, was expected to smoothly pass through an assembly and senate that were both controlled by Republicans. No one counted on the peaceful, powerful energy created in the ensuing weeks.

At first we were stunned. Act 10 made clear Walker’s goals to attack public schools and dismantle public worker unions. This was obviously aimed at ramping up the Right’s long-range assault on the Commons, while annihilating the support unions have traditionally lent to Democrats in the state and across the country. The bill grew out of model legislation drawn up by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which has been behind so much corporation friendly, anti-worker, and anti-democratic legislation in this country from publicly funding an increasingly privatized prison industry with so-called “Three Strikes” laws, to the “Stand Your Ground” laws that have recently been highlighted in the tragic yet predictable murder of Trayvon Martin.¹

Wisconsin’s union-busting bill was one of sixteen such bills introduced across the country, but Walker was the first to pull the trigger (Jerving, 2011). According to Miner:

Walker’s first assault involved unprecedented legislation that eliminated collective bargaining rights for most public sector workers in Wisconsin—ironically, the first state to allow collective bargaining by public sector unions. In Wisconsin, elementary, secondary, and higher education employees account for the majority of those employed in the public sector. Teachers and students soon were in the forefront opposing Walker’s antiunion agenda. (personal communication, October, 23, 2012)

The Wisconsin Uprising was unlike any political action in the state’s history (Paton, 2011). Larger than the massive protests that took place in Madison in the 60s against the Vietnam War, the crowd also differed from any other in its demographic make-up. These protesters were not only leftist students and university professors (such as myself), they were also teachers, Teamsters, retirees, farmers, firefighters, doctors, and priests. The 2011 crowd was multiracial and intergenerational; young families marched side by side with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson and his entourage.

¹ For more on ALEC, see: http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC_Exposed).



Figure 2. Madison Day 12. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

I had marched on Washington with hundreds of thousands of people before, but this was different. It was homegrown, and the energy that was created by mixing the masses of new and seasoned activists was like none I had ever experienced. Each of us was filled with a profound sense of loving kindness and righteous indignation. As McChesney eloquently wrote, “the Wisconsin protests reaffirmed what many Americans had forgotten, and some never knew: that when people come together in solidarity directed at social justice they are capable of great sacrifice and unrivaled joy” (as quoted in Yates, 2012, p. 12). Joy was indeed present in all we did together that winter. Standing shoulder to shoulder, chanting “Kill the Bill!” we were a cross section of the heartland, bundled up in our parkas, mittens, and earflap hats.



Figure 3. Madison Protests. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

A few days after Walker’s press conference, hearings on the bill began. On that night, and every night after for a month, hundreds of people stayed overnight in the capital building

knowing that, by state law, the building must stay open if the public wishes to engage in the legislative process. Sleeping on hard marble floors, the “People’s Popular Assembly” took care to practice real democracy rooted in the common good. They shared food, music, wellness support, and information, swept and scrubbed the floor, and broadcast the whole thing on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The ubiquitous chant - “Tell me what democracy looks like...This is what democracy looks like!” - was enacted in the words and deeds of all of the protestors in Madison and around the state of Wisconsin, but those who camped in the Capitol were a true inspiration. Their actions provided another rallying cry: “Whose House? Our House!”



Figure 4. Madison at Night Day 7. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

Emboldened by the energy of the protests, 14 Democratic Senators left the state to try to keep the Republicans from ramming the bill through the legislature, giving time for light to shine on Act 10. Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz began regularly featuring in-depth stories about the protests on MSNBC. Other news outlets covered the story, though less thoroughly (McChesney as cited in Yates, 2012). News about the uprising made it to Egypt (where another protest was taking place!), and someone from Cairo ordered pizzas for the protesters in Wisconsin from Ian’s Pizza, which changed its tagline to “This is What Democracy Tastes Like.” News from the Right took a turn for the ridiculous when Fox News ran a story claiming that the protests were getting violent, repeatedly broadcasting footage of riots to drive home their message. The only problem? There were palm trees in the background of the videos, since the footage was from California, and Stephen Colbert caught them red handed! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOzerRfB27o>)

The weeks between the departure and return of the “Wisconsin 14” were filled with injustice and inspiration. Scott Walker refused to negotiate even after public worker unions voluntarily consented to the part of the bill that called for a 12% increase in worker contribution to pension and benefits. This refusal poked holes in the Republicans’ claim that Act 10 was about a budget deficit. Three weeks later, with the protests going strong, Walker and the Republicans shed any pretense of the union-busting bill being a budget fix by stripping the fiscal portions out so they could go ahead and vote without the quorum that had been denied by the departure of the 14 Democratic senators.

The following Saturday the “Wisconsin 14” returned and were greeted by a crowd of well over 150,000 (Miner, 2013), filling the streets and the grounds around the Capitol despite temperatures that were hovering around zero degrees Fahrenheit. It was one of the most amazing days imaginable. It began with a “tractorcade” of farmers who showed up first thing in the morning to circle the square around the Capitol, demonstrating solidarity with other workers. All morning, taxi and bus drivers and others parked or driving around the periphery of the capital square tooted their horns in time to the rhythm of the chant, “This is what democracy looks like.” When the “Wisconsin 14” came out on the stage, the entire crowd spontaneously began chanting in unison, “Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!” It felt as if we were all held afloat on the strength of our collective gratitude. That was the pinnacle of the Wisconsin Uprising.



Figure 5. Madison Day 24. Tractor. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

Since that day, things have become much less dramatic, turning away from the adrenalin rush of the occupation to the quiet organizing that must always follow (Reed, invoking Ella Baker, 2005). We have had some victories and some serious setbacks. Out of the uprising grew a movement to recall Scott Walker. A million signatures were gathered, twice the number needed to require a recall election. Then the movement was whisked out of the hands of the people and turned into a campaign by the Democratic Party of Wisconsin. All the effort and enthusiasm for change were squandered, and the governor retained his throne. Several Republican senators were successfully recalled, and the balance of power tilted for a few months, but the most recent elections gave both chambers to the Republicans, thanks to redistricting that from the looks of things will ensure their hold on state politics for years to come. Parts of Act 10 were declared unconstitutional by an appellate judge, but there is a stay at this time while the state pursues an appeal.



Figure 6. Madison Day 7. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Miner.

Artists of the Wisconsin Uprising

Artists need Movements.

Movements need Artists.

(Nicolas Lampert, 2012)

Scores of artists and art teachers took part in various aspects of the demonstrations in Madison. *Art Workers for Wisconsin*, for example, is a collective of artists and teachers that formed out of the protests. The group's most notable public intervention was a parade in which about a hundred participants marched around the square in ornate costumes and banners made out of the blue painters' tape, the harmless stuff our opponents claimed did millions of dollars of damage to the Capitol (for a story on Jon Stewart's take on this see <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/jon-stewart-ridicules-how-fox-news-reported-clean-up-cost-to-wisconsin-capitol/>).

For some artists, this was their first real foray into the realm of the political, but the artists focused upon in this essay had all earned their "radical credentials" well before the Wisconsin Uprising (Fowkes & Fowkes, 2012, p. 12). Their work helped spur the creation of thousands of posters that were made and employed during the occupation of Madison. They have continued to do important work that should make its way into art classrooms. Therefore, links to downloadable images of the posters and to the artists' websites and other sites of interest are provided at the end of this article as a resource for educators.

Barbara Miner, whose photographs illustrate the story above, has come to the art world after finding much success in writing. An award-winning journalist and former Managing Editor of *Rethinking Schools*, Miner added photography to her repertoire of investigative tools fairly recently. She brings a journalist's incisive eye to the act of documentary photography, linking it with a commitment to social activism. About her work, Miner quotes from Berger's (1972) *Ways of Seeing*: "The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (<http://www.barbarajminer.com/#mi=1&pt=0&pi=2&p=-1&a=0&at=0>).

Miner is always keenly aware of that relationship. In 2008, she won a Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellowship for Individual Artists. She used the award to document life along a major east-west street that cuts from affluent lakeside neighborhoods, through the heart of the central city, to the conservative stronghold of Waukesha County. The exhibition, *Anatomy of an Avenue: North, from the Lakefront to Pewaukee*, was powerful and highly acclaimed. According to Christensen,

More than any other major thoroughfare in the Milwaukee area, North Avenue links neighborhoods, cities and counties. Barbara J. Miner...follows North Avenue and examines what unites and divides Milwaukee as a community. It is designed as a visual spur to challenge assumptions and to encourage people to get to know neighborhoods that may seem as distant as far-away countries but that are, literally, only down the street. (2009, n.p.)

Miner has connected the power of her journalistic work with documentary. She continues to explore the unsettled relationship between what she sees and what she knows. Resources on Miner's work and the other artists can also be found at the end of the article.

Jesse Graves is an emerging, interdisciplinary artist who possesses impressive facility in a range of media and an equally impressive depth of concept for an artist so early in his career. Graves was trained as a metalsmith but works with any media that best suit his message. His work has a compassionate quality that reveals much about his moral compass as an artist as well as his politics. Graves is currently teaching art at the elementary level in a public school system in the Milwaukee area and continues to engage in artmaking that connects him to local, regional, national, and international activist communities.

Graves's artwork addresses environmental issues, urban/guerilla gardening, and critiques of capitalism and consumer culture. He gained notoriety in the eco-street art community while still an undergraduate. In Nicolas Lampert's Art and Ecology course at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Graves developed "mud stencils," a method of street art stenciling that is ecologically friendly, inexpensive, and not illegal. He became internationally recognized for this contribution to activist art. Since then, Graves has used mud stencils to collaborate with activists in tactical media campaigns in cities across North America. Because they take place outside of the realm of traditional art spaces and are designed as social intervention, these tactical media campaigns fall squarely within the realm of interventionist art that Richardson (2010) urged art educators to consider. In this case, the artists engage in artistic production in a public space and then use the curiosity their work engenders to engage people in difficult dialogues about issues such as prison reform.

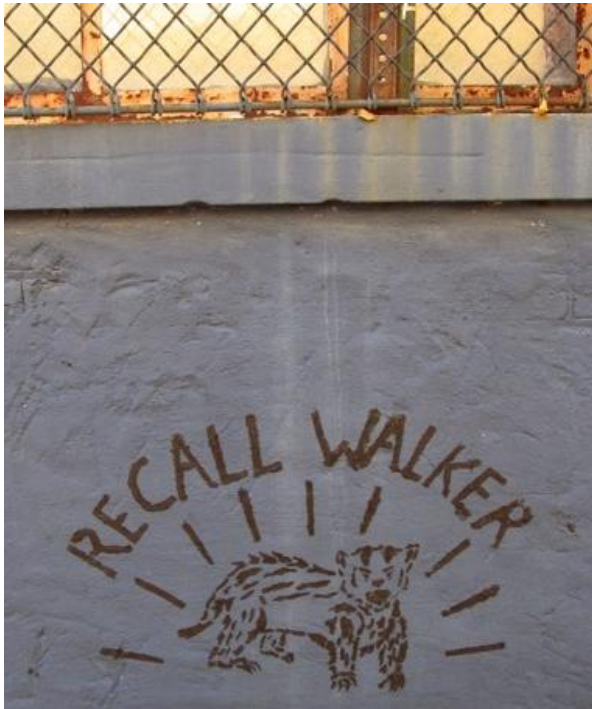


Figure 7. *Recall Walker*. Jesse Graves, 2011, mud stencil.

As part of his artistic reaction to Act 10, Graves created this mud stencil of an angry badger, which found its way around the state. The badger, the official animal of the State of Wisconsin, was featured in many of the poster designs found at the marches and in the occupation of the Capitol. Interestingly, Wisconsin was not named the "*Badger State*" because the animal proliferated here (Dictionary of Wisconsin History, n.d.). In the 1820s and 1830s lead miners first settled here. Without shelter in the winter, they lived in tunnels burrowed into hillsides, as badgers do. Badgers may live in holes, but badgers also fight when provoked! The state named after workers discovered that when workers come under attack, they fight back!

During the Wisconsin Uprising Graves worked with fellow artists Nicolas Lampert, Colin Matthes, and others to produce poster designs and prints that could be distributed free of charge to the protesters. This screen print was made using a photo taken by Graves during the protests in Madison. About this print Graves wrote: "In the Gettysburg Address Abraham Lincoln calls the American government a 'government of the people, by the people,

for the people'. Whether or not this was ever a true statement is debatable, but it is certainly not true of Wisconsin's government in the wake of Act 10" (personal communication, November 15, 2011). Graves and associates wheat-pasted the poster throughout Madison and Milwaukee.

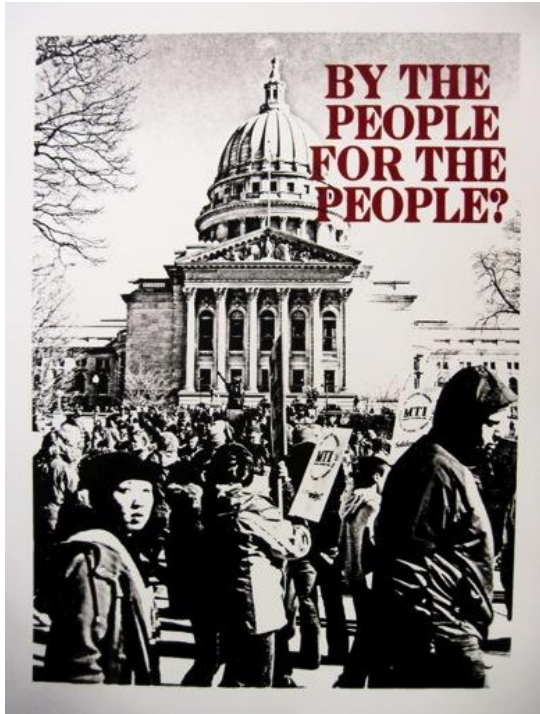


Figure 8. *Question Authority*. Jesse Graves, 2011, screen print.



Figure 9. *Question Authority*. Jesse Graves, 2011, screen print.

Nicolas Lampert also employs any means necessary to get his ideas to the people. Working primarily in print and collage, he also makes sculptures, installations, and music. Lampert has also undertaken numerous curatorial projects employing an activist's eye. Lampert's work has strong, though not didactic, political implications. Currently Lampert is pouring much of his creative energies into his forthcoming book, *A People's Art History*, which will be published by The New Press in 2013. The book will be an incredible resource and teaching tool for art educators.

In addition to his fine art practice, Lampert engages in direct political action such as the project he and Jesse Graves did in conjunction with the activist group *Tamms Year Ten* to expose inhumane conditions for prisoners in Illinois's Tamms prison. Lampert and Colin Matthes are both members of the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, which is committed to bringing low cost educational prints to the people. Free downloads of poster designs are available on their website (<http://justseeds.org/>), and, according to Lampert, Justseeds saw "massive traffic" to their site during the Wisconsin Uprising (personal communication, October 13, 2012). This is another interventionist tactic employed by artists in the Wisconsin Uprising, making poster designs widely available through free online distribution and, in a process of discursive social exchange, making new designs based on protesters' revisions and reiterations of the designs (Richardson, 2010). Lampert told me that one of his favorite memories of the protests was walking up to the Capitol and seeing a crowd of

complete strangers screen printing his designs at a makeshift printing station (personal communication, October, 13, 2012).

On the blog *Printeresting*, Urban (2011) wrote about this work:



Figure 10. Screen prints of designs by Colin Matthes and Nicolas Lampert. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.

As most visitors of this site are painfully aware, there is a lot of lip service paid to “the political print.” Too often it’s framed in historic terms: the demo- yaaawwwwn - cratic artform. Something print *used to be*. This work (and much of the justseeds work in general) is a living, breathing example of print being employed for a cause of the day. While twitter and facebook may be amazing organizational tools, holding up your iPhone at a political rally to share a political graphic is less effective. That’s where old-fashioned paper and ink come in handy. Thanks for sharing, Nicolas. (Urban March, 2011, n.p.)

WI
RISE
UP!

Figure 12. *WI Rise Up*. Nicolas Lampert, 2011, screen print.



Figure 11. *Protest Scene*. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.

Colin Matthes makes socially engaged multidisciplinary artwork and graphics, much of it connected to social justice issues including labor history, factory farming, capitalism, and our dependence on oil. He also makes a wide range of types of work including zines, prints, installations, murals, and other forms of public art. In a video about a public art project he worked on in Milwaukee's central city, Matthes said, "I guess anytime art has a larger, non-art audience, my ears perk up a little bit" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AyUSnQvCG8>). That statement captures the spirit of much of Matthes's work, it is truly for the people. The work Matthes made for the Wisconsin Uprising was most certainly for a larger, non-art audience.



As noted above, Matthes works collectively with Justseeds, a decentralized network of twenty-six artists living in the US, Canada, and Mexico. They run a print collective, produce portfolios, contribute graphics to movements, co-publish books, and build installations. Matthes made what I consider to be two of the most iconic prints of the Wisconsin Uprising, *Union Made* and *Occupied for Labor*, which can both be downloaded from the link provided above. As can be seen in the figures below, these designs pack a visual punch with Matthes's signature, sketchy style, and quirky hand-drawn typography that give his posters the sense that they are by and for the people. *Union Made* can still be found in many windows on our campus and throughout Wisconsin.

Figure 13. *Union Made*. Colin Matthes, 2011, screen print.



Figure 14. *Occupied for Labor*. Colin Matthes, screen print, 2011. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.



Figure 15. *Recall Walker*. The Overpass Light Brigade. Photograph courtesy of Lane Hall and Lisa Moline.

The Overpass Light Brigade (OLB), founded by Lane Hall and Lisa Moline, has become a movement unto itself born of the Wisconsin Uprising. The idea was simple: the artists made panels with illuminated letters to bring messages to the public in a sort of flash mob performance. Heimerl (2012) humorously dubbed it “Lite-Brite Activism” and said,

Holding lighted anti-Walker signs from pedestrian bridges overlooking busy interstates, the group inspires split-second reaction times from drivers below, whether it’s a happy “toot toot” from an approving motorist, or a booming “Fuck you!” from a giant SUV thundering under the bridge. (n. p.)



Figure 16. *Solidarity Forever*. The Overpass Light Brigade. Photograph courtesy of Lane Hall and Lisa Moline.

After a time, the signage itself grew less important, and the import of the community of “Holders of the Light” took on more significance. There are now affiliate groups throughout the United States. About this Hall said, “it is the community of volunteers who continue to amaze me. It is like we built this weird operating system, and these great people inhabit it” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Milwaukee OLB continues to stage occupations and has done so in collaboration with the Nuns on the Bus (<http://occupyriverwest.com>), who joined the team to illuminate the signs “Question Austerity” and the Bainsport occupation (<http://freakoutnation.com/2012/10/17/behind-your-back-documentary-details-bain-capitals-erasure-of-american-jobs/bainsport/>). Images of their signs have gone viral on the Internet and have appeared on MSNBC’s *the Ed Show*.

In the run-up to national elections (and in the style of the Billboard Liberation Front, which engages in “improvements” of existing commercial billboards to make statements about the ubiquity of advertising and the unhealthiness of consumer culture <http://www.billboardliberation.com/mission.html>), OLB launched an offensive against a full-frontal attack on voter rights in the form of a billboard that appeared all over the central city.² After the interventions of OLB and other more conventional activists, the billboards were taken down, and a counter-campaign was reportedly launched to rebut the original message.



Figure 17. Action in response to voter suppression billboards, OLB Milwaukee. Photograph courtesy of Lane Hall and Lisa Moline.

² The billboards were paid for by Stephen Einhorn, Principal of Capital Midwest Fund, President of Einhorn Associates, and a member of the Milwaukee Art Museum’s board. <http://www.ideastream.org/news/feature/49912>.



Figure 18. Action in support of Black Friday Strikes, OLB Milwaukee. Photograph courtesy of Lane Hall and Lisa Moline.

Why Does Activist Art Matter?

Could an occupation take place without visual culture? Of course, but it is art and visual culture that give form to the ideas and demands of a movement, help people stake claims to the public spaces, and, along with video documentation, persist as historical artifacts once the occupation is over. Reed (2005) references the importance of art to social movements in his cogent analysis of the work of ACT UP and Gran Fury in the 1980s saying,

The war over HIV/AIDS was going to be very much a “discursive” battle, a battle over the meaning of works and images. This was surely not something wholly new in a social movement, but the extent to which “semiotic” warfare became self-conscious and central to the work of ACT UP was unprecedented. (p. 185)

With their signature style of bold images and spare but powerful text (such as the black poster with the inverted pink triangle and the message “Silence = Death”), ACT UP taught us to use the language of advertising and marketing to share meaning with one another as well as with the wider population through the news media.

As noted previously, there was considerable media coverage of the Wisconsin Uprising. As a result, images played a large role in the perceptions of people outside of the immediate area. This sometimes ended up being a discursive loop, for example, when palm trees suddenly began appearing on home made signs and in inflatable form in street performances after the Fox News story had run. The artists of the Wisconsin Uprising used the lessons of artists in ACT UP and the *Celebrate People’s History Project* (MacPhee, 2010) to great effect keeping text to a minimum to heighten the visual impact of the posters, which served as quick reference guides to the issues that were important to the people of Wisconsin.

Urban (2011) points out the continued importance of the political print as a democratic art form, even in the age of the Internet and digital devices. This is especially true in the thick of an occupation. According to Solnit:

A revolution is a moment of waking up to hope and power, and the state of mind can be entered into from many directions. If revolutions often prompt posters to appear, the appearance of posters, murals and graffiti may foster revolution or at least breathe on the cinders, keeping the sparks alive until next time—which is why gentrification and repression often see to create silence as a texture. (2010, p. 9)

There does seem to be an allure to the print in times of unrest. Throughout the uprising, the Print Club at our school held open studio times when students, faculty, staff, and community members could come and screen print t-shirts and posters with the pro-Wisconsin worker messages. We were surprised at the turnout for these events. It seemed as though people wanted to have physical artifacts to help keep the movement alive. Thus the artistic interventions of the artists of the Wisconsin Uprising helped breathe on the cinders of revolution.

Staking a claim to a public space was a major component of the uprising, as it is in any movement that includes physical occupation (Campana, 2011; Garoian, 1999; Richardson, 2010). According to Duncum (2011), “today we face a serious contraction of public space. Due to the relentless logic of consumer markets and the visceral fear of physical attack, some have asserted that public space is now dead” (p. 348). Public space was very much alive during the Wisconsin Uprising, and the occupation of the Capitol owes a debt to art and visual culture for helping stake the claim.

With shopping malls passing for public spaces in our “consumer culture,” the occupation of a government building seemed almost outside of the realm of possibility in 2011. But early artistic interventions, both musical and visual, helped make the occupation in Madison happen and helped articulate a conception of public space that differs from commercial spaces for parallel consumption, places of discourse and democracy. Duncum writes,

I consider public space, both actual and virtual, as a place of conversation and contestation in pursuit of social justice issues.... Here, I am more narrowly focused upon public spaces as sites appropriated for the purpose of holding a conversation that extends to contestation. (2011, p. 349)

The space that was created through art and activism in Wisconsin was indeed a place of compassionate contestation. An appropriation of space that everyone had forgotten was ours and that the conservative foes, knowing the power of such a space, tried in every way to bar was incredibly significant. And that occupation, along with the Arab Spring, paved the way for the Occupy Movement.

The artists of the Wisconsin Uprising continue the good fight in the largely disembodied, post-encampment occupation period. Some, like the OLB, have successfully continued to bring bodies together in pursuit of political change. As Lane Hall wrote, “after the recall [actions]... OLB gets (oddly enough) more interesting” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Although the crowds may be gone from the public space, the public space remains in the minds and work of the artists.

Finally, art is important to movements because art and visual cultural artifacts can be catalogued and preserved for posterity. During the height of the protests the Smithsonian Institution came to Wisconsin and collected many samples of posters and photographs of

the occupation (Arioto, 2011). Thus there is a collection to draw upon in the future. Although our history books do not contain much about labor history or popular uprisings, the information is available online through alternative venues such as the many links I have offered here, and in official spaces like the Smithsonian. I believe we have an obligation to teach about these alternative histories.

Why Does Teaching about Activist Art and Artists in Movements Matter?

As noted above, the information that students have access to in history textbooks is not inclusive of the people's history (Zinn, 1980/2003). That is no accident. There are history teachers who find ways to bring the people back into history. So too should art teachers. You may not see yourself as a radical. You may even say that you are not political. But everything we teach in schools is political. According to Reed (2005), "any aesthetic text can be put to political ends, and all aesthetic texts have political implications, but no aesthetic text is reducible to its political meanings" (p. 303). We have an obligation. If you do not teach alternative social and art histories, you are ignoring the political implications of doing so and propping up a system that is working against your own well being as well as that of the rest of the 99%.

Teachers need not jump in head first. There are degrees of engagement with social justice teaching. According to Duncum (2011),

Art educators have adopted a variety of pedagogies: descriptive, proscriptive, prescriptive, as well as alternative, and oppositional. Some pedagogies describe social reality with only an implicit agenda; others more clearly argue against existing social realities; while still others attempt to prescribe other possibilities. Conceived as a continuum of intervention in the cause of social justice, these pedagogies range from social critique to social action. (p. 351)

I would argue that if we wish to continue to engage in art education as a profession, we must get beyond fears that may hold us back and do as Bastos (2009) has advised – start somewhere. The future of public education lies in the balance. Many people who marched around the square next to me in the Wisconsin Uprising would never have imagined themselves to be protesters even a week before the uprising began. But when you realize those who would do away with public education are coming for you, and your students, you may surprise yourself. So if you are afraid or otherwise resistant, begin with descriptive lessons and slowly (at first perhaps) ease yourself into social action. Soon you will find yourself chanting, "This is What Democracy Looks Like!"

Resources for the Artists

Barbara Miner: a book of photographs from the North Avenue project can be found at: <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/3115276>. More on Miner's work can be accessed at her website: <http://www.barbarajminer.com/>; on her blog: *View From the Heartland* <http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/purple-wisconsin/view-from-the-heartland.html>; or in her book, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City*, available from The New Press <http://www.ebooks.com/978748/lessons-from-the-heartland/miner-barbara/>. A copy of a book of Miner's photographs of the Wisconsin Uprising can also be found at: <http://www.blurb.com/books/2766608>.

Jesse Graves: the artist's website: <http://jessegravesart.com/bio/>; instructions for how to do mud stenciling: <http://mudstencils.com/>. Downloadable graphics from the Wisconsin Uprising: http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2011/03/wisconsin_downloadable_graphic.html).

Nicolas Lampert: To view images of the Machine Animals in the MoMA collection, go to: http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=30219), and the artist's website: <http://machineanimalcollages.com/>. For a story on the Tamms intervention, see: http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2009/06/illinois_torture_publicized_wi.html); an example of a curatorial project can be found at *The Watershed Art Project*: <http://watershedmke.wordpress.com/>). Downloadable graphics from the Wisconsin Uprising: http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2011/03/wisconsin_downloadable_graphic.html).

Colin Matthes: the artist has many prints, books, and zines available at www.justseeds.org. His website is colinmatthes.com. Downloadable graphics from the Wisconsin Uprising: http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2011/03/wisconsin_downloadable_graphic.html).

Overpass Light Brigade: The movement's website can be found at: <http://overpasslightbrigade.org/>). Lane Hall and Lisa Moline's other artwork can be found at their website: Bad Science: <http://www.badscience.org/>.

Related Resources

Occuprint: All posters displayed on this site are part of the [creative commons](#), and available to be downloaded for noncommercial use, though they ask that artists be given attribution: <http://occuprint.org/Posters/ViewAll>.

Printeresting: <http://www.printeresting.org/2011/03/04/printing-for-a-cause/-more-19188>.

Occupy Art and Design Pinterest Page: <http://pinterest.com/occupydesigning/occupy-design-art/>.

Interference Archive: “The archive consists of many kinds of objects that are created as part of social movements: posters, flyers, publications, photographs, moving images, audio recordings, and other printed matter. Through our programming, we use this cultural ephemera to animate histories of people mobilizing for social transformation.”
<http://interferencearchive.org/>.

The 100 Best Protest Signs At The Wisconsin Capitol:
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