



International Center of Photography

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media release



Mi Revista [My Magazine], March 15, 1937
Biblioteca del IVAM

Other Weapons: Photography and Print Culture during the Spanish Civil War

On view from
September 26, 2007
through
January 6, 2008

Media Preview
September 25, 2007
9:30 - 11am

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When we think of images associated with the Spanish Civil War, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, Robert Capa's front-line photographs, or the thousands of posters that were produced during the war's nearly four year duration come to mind. In addition to these more well known visual traces, there was another, widely circulating form of communication: hundreds of illustrated bulletins, weeklies, and magazines that were published and distributed throughout Spain from 1936-1939. *Other Weapons: Photography and Print Culture during the Spanish Civil War*, on view at the International Center of Photography (ICP), 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, from September 26, 2007 through January 6, 2008, places a selection of these publications in relation to the posters and other forms of ephemera in which photography was used to record the war's main events and to create dynamic propaganda.

"Great war photographs and photojournalism in general have always been seen in the context of picture magazines and newspapers, what might be called 'print culture,'" said Brian Wallis, ICP Chief Curator. "In our exhibitions and collections at the International Center of Photography we have tried to make this aspect of photography—its reproduction and circulation—a key focus. *Other Weapons: Photography and Print Culture during the Spanish Civil War* shows the powerful role that photography played as both news and propaganda during the Spanish Civil War."

This exhibition takes its name from a series of articles about artists and their work titled “Las Otras Armas” (Other Weapons), which was published in the Valencian anarchist magazine *Umbral*. The articles stressed the important role of artists and designers in the fabrication of images that strove to communicate a range of messages and served multiple purposes, from the overtly propagandistic to those more ambiguous in function. Many of the magazines in the exhibition shared characteristics with other national and international publicity and propaganda, especially the politically informed designs coming out of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union.

While some magazines vividly displayed the traumatic events of war, others—such as *Nova Iberia*—stubbornly resisted featuring any political conflict on their covers. Yet in both cases, the appearance of these magazines raised questions about the role of artists in mediating war for a broad audience of readers both within and outside Spain. Many established artists, such as Josep Renau, actively contributed polemical writings and designs to these illustrated publications, which served as a location for debates in modern art and politics during the restrictive conditions of wartime.

There was a boldness and daring in the sheer variety and range of the magazines, from the kind of paper and designs used to the expressed ambitions of the publications’ editors and contributors. In many magazines and posters, photography became a defining feature of this new kind of visually modern propaganda. Images from afar were brought close up for inspection, not only as journalistic documents but also as artistically manipulated photomontages, such as the ones created by Manuel Monleón for the covers of the anarchist magazine *Estudios*.

Layers of paper, pasted along the sides of buildings, inside metro stations, and hanging from the newspaper kiosks in Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, offered guidance, directed sentiment, and persuaded individuals into (or discouraged them from) action. Posters were sent to the United States by volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, delivered to foreign offices by government agencies, and torn down by the opposition—whether “Loyalist” (supporters of the Second Republic and leftist politics) or “Insurgent” (those who stood with General Francisco Franco against the legitimate government). While both sides produced their own posters and magazines and had their own artists, this exhibition focuses on examples of the works that were produced largely in Spain in support of the Republic.

While at the time some described the republican illustrated magazines as “propaganda laboratories,” the posters were considered to be monumental “shouts from the wall.” Across Spain their brilliant colors and declarative messages impressed and even overwhelmed Spaniards and foreign visitors alike. The overabundance of conflicting, complementary, and contrasting information eventually led to a dangerous level of political miscommunication—so much so that at one point during the Civil War the walls were cleaned and artists were redirected to other forms of propaganda, such as hand-made “wall-newspapers.”

By assembling over seventy magazines and posters thematically, and accompanying each grouping with texts that explain the agencies, artists, and issues involved vis-à-vis their particular use of photographs, this exhibition will serve to highlight the extraordinary diversity and complexity of photography and print culture during the Spanish Civil War.

Other Weapons is organized by Jordana Mendelson, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and Visiting Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, New York University. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated bilingual catalogue published by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. There is also a web kiosk (www.magazinesandwar.com) containing 30 fully digitized magazines from the collections of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and the Library, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

This exhibition is made possible with support from Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior (SEACEX) / State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación / Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Ministerio de Cultura / Spanish Ministry for Culture, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Campus Research Board, and the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain’s Ministry of Culture and United States Universities.

