



International Center of Photography

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news release



Alberto Korda
Guerrillero Heroico, 1960
©Alberto Korda, 1960
Courtesy Korda Estate and Diana Diaz

Che! Revolution and Commerce

On view from
December 9, 2005
through February 26, 2006

Media Preview
December 8, 2005
9:30 - 11am

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Guerrillero Heroico, Alberto Korda's 1960 photograph of Che Guevara, is claimed to be the most widely reproduced image in the history of photography. The portrait has remained remarkably durable as a symbol of revolution and youthful rebellion, even as it has been endlessly reproduced on posters, t-shirts, and mass-produced objects. Examining the extraordinary power of this image and the history of its circulation, *Che! Revolution and Commerce* will be on view at the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) from December 9, 2005 through February 26, 2006.

From Madonna's album cover for *American Life* to Pedro Meyer's *American Five Dollar Bill*, where Che replaces the face of Abraham Lincoln, Korda's Che is both populist and counter-culture. The image is used simultaneously today as caricature and parody and as a political rallying cry for movements and concepts as disparate as world debt relief, anti-Americanism, Latin-American identity, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Organized by Mexico City-based curator Trisha Ziff, the exhibition features works by artists including Vik Muniz (US/Brazil), Pedro Meyer (Mexico), and Martin Parr (England); original posters lent by the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles; and artifacts and Che memorabilia. These images chart the Korda photograph's evolution from its initial creation to its current contemporary usages.

The portrait of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was taken on March 5, 1960 by Alberto Diaz Gutiérrez (1928-2001), known as Alberto Korda, a former fashion photographer who had become Fidel Castro's personal photographer. Korda snapped two frames of Guevara as he briefly stepped forward onto the memorial service podium during a mass funeral for those killed when a French freighter carrying munitions exploded in Havana Harbor. The photographer remembered being inspired by the intensity of Che's expression, which he described as being *encabronado y dolente* (angry and sad). In the original frame, Che stands between a man and palm fronds, but in the process of printing the photo Korda isolated Che—and thus was born the iconic image of his resolute gaze.

What happened to the photograph from the moment it was taken, through to its current life as one of the most recognized images in popular culture, is a complex tale of conflicting accounts. Generally unknown until it was reproduced in Italy at the moment of Guevara's death, the image subsequently burst onto the worldwide scene as an icon symbolizing the student uprisings of 1968. It appeared on posters and murals and was used in myriad protests and demonstrations during the time that followed.

Korda's Che has since taken on a life of its own. The complex ideological beliefs of Guevara are often trumped by the generic revolutionary symbolism of his image, so that independent of the specifics of Che's life and achievements, *Guerrillero Heroico* continues to appear around the world as an easily identifiable symbol for a range of political struggles.

At the same time, *Guerrillero Heroico* has become a unique contemporary phenomenon. Forty-five years after its creation, while retaining its power as a symbol of revolution, it has also merged into the world of popular culture, fashion, and celebrity. Whether presented in a sophisticated artwork, used as a radical-chic figure on commercial merchandise, or as the subject of spoof, it is instantly recognizable.

Che! Revolution and Commerce has been organized by independent curator Trisha Ziff for UCR/California Museum of Photography in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, Los Angeles, the Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, and zonezero.com. The show is supported in part by the Anglo Mexican Foundation.

The New York presentation is made possible with support from The Smart Family Foundation, the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York, and Mexicana Airlines.

Publication:

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which will host the exhibition in 2006, will produce a catalogue to accompany the exhibition. Including essays by ICP guest curator Trisha Ziff, ICP Chief Curator Brian Wallis, and Hannah Charlton, the catalogue will be available in the United States through Abrams in summer 2006.

Other exhibitions on view:

The Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness, and Healing

African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection

Ken Light: Coal Hollow

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