



Disobedient Objects

26 July 2014 – 1 February 2015

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The V&A will this summer present the first exhibition to explore objects of art and design from around the world that have been created by grassroots social movements as tools of social change. From Chilean folk art textiles that document political violence to a graffiti-writing robot, defaced currency to giant inflatable cobblestones

thrown at demonstrations in Barcelona, to a political video game about the making of mobile phones, *Disobedient Objects* will demonstrate how political activism drives a wealth of design ingenuity. The exhibition will showcase forms of making that defy standard definitions of art and design. The objects that will be on display are mostly produced by non-professional makers, collectively and with limited resources as effective responses to complex situations.

The exhibition will focus on the late 1970s to the present; a time that has brought new technologies, social and political challenges. The objects are made in a number of ways including: the appropriation of everyday objects for a new subversive purpose, as seen with the Bike Bloc which was produced from discarded bicycles and audio equipment welded together during the 2009 Reclaim Power protests in Copenhagen; the employment of traditional crafts like hand-appliquéd protest banners; and hacking cutting-edge technology to create such protest tools as a counter-surveillance drone.

Many of the exhibits will be loaned directly from activist groups from all over the world, bringing together for the first time many objects rarely before seen in a museum. Context will be provided by newspaper cuttings, how-to guides and film content, including interviews and footage of the objects in action. Each design will be accompanied by the maker's statement to explain how and why the object was created.

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A said: *"This exhibition celebrates the creative 'disobedience' of designers and makers who question the rules. It shows that even with the most limited of resources, ordinary people can take design into their own hands. This is a brave and unusual exhibition; these are brave and unusual designers. We are proud to present their work."*

The first part of the exhibition introduces the design of activist objects in relation to four ways of effecting social change: direct action, speaking out, making worlds and solidarity. A specially-commissioned film will explore the history of 'lock-ons' – simple yet ingenious blockading devices designed to attach activists to the site of protest. Large shields employed on the front line during the 2010-11 protests against education cuts, were decorated to look like book covers, thereby changing the dynamic of the police's confrontation with protestors. This design idea spread to similar protests around the world as it was such a powerful statement.

The way that protestors convey their message to avoid censorship and navigate the power of the media will be considered. Giant puppets have long been a tool of social movements, and a tableau of three puppets used in protests against the first Gulf War by the politically radical US-based Bread and Puppet Theater will be included. Recently, simple pamphlets, placards and banners have been re-worked for the modern world and used in conjunction with social media. A selection will be shown, including a hand-painted placard made by gay rights activists in Russia and used in the antigovernment demonstrations in Moscow in 2012. A series of defaced currency will also be displayed including 'Occupy George,' dollar bills circulated with fact-based infographics about the economic disparity of the US.

The maps and architectural experiments of protest camps illuminate the physical infrastructures that enable protest movements. The inflatable general assembly structure devised by 123Occupy offers protestors a place to gather, keep dry and discuss strategies and ideas. Meanwhile, a makeshift tear gas mask from the 2013 Istanbul protests, demonstrates a creative solution to support an individual protestor.

Creating a personal connection to a collective cause or identifying with an injustice can be an essential part of building a movement. This solidarity can be demonstrated by even the smallest objects. On show will be badges and t-shirts bearing the inverted pink triangle used by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), as well as a display mapping how anti-Apartheid badge designs spread in the 1980s from South Africa to solidarity groups around the world. There will also be pieces of jewellery design by members of the Black Panther party while in prison and sent to supporters.

The final part of the exhibition profiles a series of case studies in protest design from the last 30 years. This section opens with a data-visualisation mapping every protest since 1979. The case studies include masks of the Guerrilla Girls who speak out against sexism in the art world, and the Tiki Love Truck, an anti-death penalty statement which takes the form of a mosaic-covered pick up vehicle by artist Carrie Reichardt. A web-based comedy series by Masait Mati using finger puppets to lampoon the Assad regime in Syria will be displayed as well as a project by the Barbie Liberation Organisation which involved switching the voiceboxes on talking GI Joe and Barbie dolls to highlight gender stereotypes in children's

toys. The whole space will be hung with banners drawn from a diverse range of protest sites including the 1980s Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the UK to recent anti-nuclear protests in Japan.

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- This FREE exhibition takes place in the Porter Gallery
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 to 17.45 and until 22.00 on Fridays
- The exhibition is curated by Catherine Flood, prints curator at the V&A and Gavin Grindon, currently visiting research fellow at the V&A
- The 2D design of the exhibition, accompanying catalogue and marketing material is being created by Barnbrook, one of Britain's leading graphic design studios

Exhibition Publication

An accompanying exhibition catalogue *Disobedient Objects* (edited by Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon) will be available from V&A Publishing priced £19.99 in paperback. For PRESS information, contact Julie Chan on 020 7942 2701 or j.chan@vam.ac.uk

A World to Win: Posters of Protest and Revolution

An accompanying display, opening 1 May, will explore a century of posters agitating for political change, from the 'Votes for Women' campaigns of the early 20th century to the recent Occupy movements. It will present around 70 posters drawn from the V&A collection, including new acquisitions gathered from recent outbursts of protest in the UK, Russia and the Middle East.

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Zoë Franklin or Lucy Hawes in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2497 / 2500 or email z.franklin@vam.ac.uk / l.hawes@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk