November 4, 2014

* Illustrating Change: Propaganda and Activism
  + Propaganda: a reputation of being purposely misleading and lying by omission and given by people in power: Creates ideologies
  + Activism: usually given by people in compromised positions: Challenges ideologies
  + Propaganda is evident everywhere; advertisements, children’s media, etc.
  + Two different attitudes in children’s books:
    - Ex. Madeline, 1953
      * Themes of everyday life as girls go through their everyday life. About conformity and following rules
    - 2002 children’s book: A is for Activist
      * Alphabet book intended to educate children and encourage them to think independently and fight for their life.
  + Different attitudes on animal representation
    - One is an advertisement for pork sausages
    - One is a screenshot from the Simpsons where Lisa decides to become a vegetarian
    - And the other is “Vegan Taxidermy”
  + Ancient forms of propaganda: Drawing referenced from cultures such as Egypt, Mesopotamian, and Ancient Roman
    - They directly support people in authority
    - Many of them show rulers as gods or deities
    - Kohl palette carved in slate; The figures show hierarchal scale; the Pharaoh is the largest figure.
    - The Pharaoh is not meant to be a role model, but more as a symbol of the unattainable devine
    - Idealized bodies and symbolism show power and authority
    - Old coins shows Julius Caesar, showing his dominion and power over economical matters. They are easily distributed and passed from one to another, and travel far and wide.
    - The king, Pharaoh, or Caesar would be seen as a divine figure in these times.
  + Illustrations by the women’s suffrage movement
    - Artist tries to associate women’s identities with the identity of the region: Ohio. She is inextricably linked to the success of the region.
    - Man has a sailboat labeled “VOTES”, while the woman only has a rowboat; they are both rowing toward Parliament.
    - Anti-suffrage art: Women having votes would destroy the ideal family life. Children would be neglected, etc.
    - “What will men wear when women wear trousers?”
  + Propaganda and activist slides in the Vietnam war.
    - Due to a fear of communist spread in Asia the US steps in and supports South Vietnam. Propaganda spreads.
      * Shows a heartbroken Vietnam soldier holding an object: the object is a little boy who was slain by the viet-cong.
      * “Liberation or conquest?” “The struggle in South Vietnam”.
    - Anti-Vietnam War movement started by students, protesting the government about the war as a whole. Many propaganda posters resulted.
      * “I WANT YOU for US Army” Uncle sam is depicted as a skeleton
      * Uncle Sam is a symbol of the American Government
    - “The war is over” Shows 3 different soldiers wounded and lost; shows a general statistic of the death tolls in the war. They also show the death toll of the vietnamese. It shows that both side is equal, and the deaths are equally senseless.
    - “North and south united, to build and look after the fatherland of Vietnam” Distributed after the war in Vietnam to try and promote national unity
  + Contemporary examples of activist art
    - 2011 earthquake in Japan and the nuclear meltdown
    - “Double Seven” Guerilla style installation They inserted their little piece into the existing mural, to show that Japan’s present is just as important as their past. The mural depicts Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in a similar way Picasso’s Guernica did.
    - Shows that it is real and devastating and the government is hiding a lot of information. They hope to show the danger of the effects of nuclear radiation.
    - Paired up with a university professor to show evidence of contamination
    - Collects material and takes photographs of them. Under each photograph he writes a description about it.
    - “Rat” After the nuclear accident empty houses were invaded by rats; this rat was caught in a rat trap. There are radiation materials in the rat’s organs, especially in the liver.
    - Wanted to show the spread and deadliness of radiation in a form that is easy to understand and relate to.
    - More examples: Fish and Leaves. The photography shows build up of radioactive materials.
    - Illustration is about communicating information.
    - It’s important to understand the social and political context that our work will be used in, as well as historical work that informs how our work will be interpreted.
  + The internet is a place for activism.
    - It is cheap, and there are no geographical boundaries.
    - On the internet everyone has a say. Whether it’s propaganda or activism is difficult to determine. One should be aware of whether we make assumptions based on whether we agree or not.
    - Many of these people wouldn’t have a significant voice in any other place.
    - “Nothing Nice To Say” : 2002 - now earliest punk comic online
    - The comic isn’t “activism” in a conventional sense, the reason is that even a simple act of expressing one’s opinions or expression of a subculture can be an act of activism.
    - In other Illustrations or comics things may be subtle or overt.
    - Memes:
      * The existence of memes is hard to ignore in activist or propaganda art.
      * Very formulaic. This type of meme seeks to make a point about something, or to gain sympathy or relation
      * Memes offer a sense of belonging, familiarity, and group membership and communication.
      * Memes have a strong connection to illustration
    - “Shit Reddit Says” seeks to protest Reddit and its racist views
    - Reddit can be benign, but is not always so. It is a public forum for discussion, which can be terribly problematic when it isn’t policed.

CLASS DISCUSSION:

* Power in simplicity; knowing exactly the right type of language and imagery to best communicate your message (Madeline, the radiated rat image, etc.)
* Propaganda is constantly being usurped by those who understand it
  + It is “found out” and “subverted”
  + Leads the people who make propaganda to be more sophisticated
  + The US has mastered the act of rather subliminal propaganda
  + It is now blurred to the point with Shepherd Fairy??? Using the look of soviet propaganda in order to prop up a candidate against the dominant republican party, but it’s not even effective anymore because everyone understands it
* The link between people being able to choose systems of representation that was effective in communicating ideas. That’s very important.
* People really related to the last point about propaganda/activism on the internet. There were a lot of comments about that echoing the same points made in the presentation, pretty much. Especially that something is either propaganda or activism based on whether or not you agree

LECTURE:

* Illustrating ideas, representing values, challenging belief, finding a voice
* “The Book of Genesis: Illustrated” by Robert Crumb
* Spent 5 years illustrating the book of genesis, the first book in the Christian Bible.
* Why should illustrators care about ideology?
  + Ideology is intertwined with issues of power: Those who benefit from a dominant idea often wield power in a society
  + Ideologies are perpetuated through a number of institutions in society; including illustration
  + Images are produced by individuals (or group of individuals) who bring their own preexisting ideas to their work
  + Whether intentionally or unintentionally the work of artists and illustrators embodies elements of their ideologies
  + What is Crumb’s understanding of the Book of Genesis?
* Why should illustrators care about representation?
  + Ideology serves the interest of the dominent group of society by defining their role in relation other less powerful members of society
  + Subordinate groups are often represented in visual and literary forms as “the other”
  + Crumb was interested in Durer because of how he was interested in challenging the images that made some people seem strange, unusual and distant
  + Both use democratic forms of distribution.

VIDEO:

* “The Confessions of Robert Crumb” (1980-something. 87?)
* (I’ve seen this before!)

Further lecture:

* German art in the 16th century moved to the forefront of Northern European culture.
* Albrecht Dürer: Very scientific, travelled to Italy to study, very academic
* Craanich (Craanach?), Holbein, Grunewald

Our presentation is on Friday, November 28th.