

Cunst Gallery (St. Louis, MO)

Designing Dissent: Independent Publishing and the Left

8/12/2022-9/23/2022

Introduction

Mass political movements since the beginning of the modern era have been facilitated in no small part by the mass printing techniques which developed concurrently. Especially since the relative democratization of machines like the mimeograph in the early 20th century, progressively scrappier political organizations have been able to print and distribute their own propaganda. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Communist Party USA was responsible for many official and well-distributed communiques and pamphlets, but also more homespun flyers and broadsides printed through regional offices. The advent of the New Left, the counterculture, and photo offset printing in the 1960s saw a surge in “underground” publishing, which included everything from newspapers printed by hippies to brochures on socialist economics put out by student groups. As politics atomized after this flourishing of “movement printing,” so too did the design and distribution of radical literature: with photocopying and anarchism came zines, along with their style and ethos.

This show features objects from a collection of political ephemera amassed by curators Troy Sherman and Lou Vinarcsik. It focuses on the most visually compelling examples of the stuff described above: expressionist graphics on Communist Party posters, vibrant covers for Black Nationalist rags, and fractured collage alongside early punk screeds.