Political Graphics Cubes
Josh MacPhee
A significant portion of my practice has always been focused on history, and in particular the history of political graphics and imagery. Over the past couple of years I’ve had the opportunity to install a number of exhibitions which pivot around this history, and encourage the audience to engage in this history. One of my main goals for these shows has been to create as many points of entry into this visual language of social movements as possible. One of these is the creation of giant graphic blocks—who doesn’t like to play with blocks? These blocks are a creative tool to engage a wide range of pedagogical questions: media literacy, image iteration and copying, the ownership and copyright of visual ideas, and the history of how images are used by people organizing to change their world.

I’ve designed and produced eighteen blocks, each side featuring a different image from one of thirteen visual themes (for a total of 108 images, or sides). These blocks were created in 2022 and deployed at my We Want Everything exhibition at the Reinberger Gallery at the Cleveland Institute of Art.
Catalog of images which appear on the cubes

THEMES

[A] The Sharp End of the Stick (bayonets)
[B] Silenced (people being gagged)
[C] More than LOVE (riffs on Robert Indiana’s LOVE painting)
[D] Rats! (The use of rats in political graphics)
[E] Saturn Devours (references to Goya’s painting)
[F] Triangles, Pink and Otherwise
[G] The People of Vietnam Will Triumph! (tracing the use of a photograph of a North Vietnamese fighter)
[H] I Want YOU (the use of direct address in political graphics)
[I] Red Wedges (iteration based on El Lissitzky’s Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge)
[J] The Fuzz (representations of police and representation)
[K] We Must Stay Productive! (the evolution of factory and workplace imagery)
[L] The Many Arms of Feminism (feminist recuperation of religious iconography)
[M] Shout (the many uses of Alexander Rodchenko’s Lengiz graphic)

CUBE 1


CUBE 2

[B] Intersindical, detail from Solidariedade Com o Povo do Chile, offset poster, Portugal, 1976.

CUBE 3

[A] Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias/FIJL (art: E. Alumbreros), detail from La Juventud Defiende La Unión (The Youth Defend the Union), lithograph, Spain, 1937.
CUBE 4
[D] Partido Revolucionario do Proletariado Brigadas Revolucionarias, Morte ao Fascismo—Vigilância Revolucionaria (Death to Fascism—Revolutionary Vigilance), sticker, Portugal, ca. 1975.

CUBE 5
[A] Artist unknown, detail from Fateful European Adventure, lithograph, USSR, 1940.

CUBE 6
[H] ASAR-O, ¡Pueblo! ¡Defiende Tu Petróleo! (People! Defend Your Oil!), block print, Mexico, 2010.
[I] Vickto Deni, detail from Down With Fascism, lithograph, USSR, 1929.

CUBE 7
[H] Dmitri Moor, detail from Have You Volunteered?, lithograph, USSR, 1920.

CUBE 8
[H] Nederlandse Vereniging Sexuele Hervorming, detail from U heb de NVSH nodig (You Need the NVSH), offset poster, Netherlands, ca. 1970s.
[K] Izquierda Cristiana (design: Antonio Larrea & Luis Albomoz), detail from Izquierda Cristiano a la Universidad (Christian Left to the University), offset poster, Chile, 1971.
[B] Sex Pistols (design: Jamie Reid), God Save the Queen, offset promotional poster, UK, 1977.
CUBE 9

[H] UGT-PSU (art: Lorenzo Goñi), Y tí? que has fet per la victòria?, offset poster, Spain, 1938.

CUBE 10

[J] Solvognen, detail from Lov & Orden i Christiania, screenprinted poster, Denmark, 1974.
[B] Ben Shahn, detail from This is Nazi Brutality, offset poster, US, 1942.

CUBE 11

[H] KuK, detail from Alle Menschen auf die Beine gegen die Faschistenschweine (All People Stand Up Against the Fascist Pigs), offset poster, West Germany, 1989.
[B] Solidarite Internationale Antifasciste (art: Badia Vilato), detail from Gala Franco Espagnol, lithograph, 1953.
[I] Gustav Klutsis, detail from The USSR is the Shock Brigade of the World Proletariat, lithograph, USSR, 1931.

CUBE 12

[K] FETE-UGT (artist unknown), detail from El Obrero Ignorante Forja Sus Propias Cadenas (The Ignorant Worker Forges His Own Chains), offset poster, Spain, 1937.
[B] Italian Collettiva Femminista, detail from Quando Gli Uomini Parlano le Donne Devono Tacere (When Men Speak Women Must be Silent), offset poster, Italy, ca. 1970s.

CUBE 13

[H] OSPAAAL (design: Victor Manuel Navarrete), detail from World Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, offset poster, Cuba, 1980.
[M] Artist unknown, detail from Ho-ruck nach links: Wählt sozialdemokratisch! (Move to the Left: Vote Social Democratic!), offset, Germany, 1932.
CUBE 14
[K] Goos Energie Komitee (design: Fred van Brouwer), De “hoop” voor de toekomst (The Hope for the Future), poster, Netherlands, ca. 1970s.
[I] South Atlantic Souvenirs, Constructive Xmas, Christmas card, UK, ca. 1980s.

CUBE 15
[D] Independentistes dels Països Catalans, Acabem amb les Rates Feixistes (Let’s end the Fascist Rats), sticker, Catalonia, 1979.
[M] Lesbian Avengers (design: Carrie Moyer), Lesbians Speak Out, photocopy flyer, US, ca. 1990s.
[E] Peter Paul Rubens, Saturn Devouring His Son, oil on canvas, Southern Netherlands, 1636.
[F] Tom Robinson (designer unknown), Stand Together, 7” record cover, West Germany, 1982.
[G] Quilapayun (design: Antonio & Vicente Larrea), X Vietnam, 7” record cover, Chile/Peru, 1968.

CUBE 16
[H] Hervi (Hernán Vidal), ¡Viva Chile! ¡Por Fin el Cobre es Nuestro! (Long live Chile! Finally the Copper is Ours!), offset poster, Chile, 1971 (photo: Leonore Mau).
[I] El Lissitzky, detail from Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, lithograph, USSR, 1919.

CUBE 17
[E] Francisco Goya, Saturn Devouring His Son, Spain, 1819–1823.

CUBE 18
Each cube is made of cardboard, and assembled from 3 pieces, which can be affixed together with a hot glue gun or other adhesive. Each side is 18” x 18”, and the images are full color vinyl stickers affixed directly to the cardboard.

The unassembled cubes are stored flat in 2 large cardboard boxes, each one measuring 38” x 38”: 