

Master copy

FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

on

ANARCHISM

Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon, USA



The first article in the
of the REVOLUTION of Pierre
Several other proponents of the movement, such as the father of anarchism
Courbet, was himself a revolutionary thinker who spread anarchist
political and social ideas and who took part in the Paris Commune
and was later imprisoned for his role in the revolution.
Charles-Louis Burdet, a French anarchist, was the first to use the word
anarchism.

Anarchists Seen by Painters
by Pietro Ferrua

ANARCHISTS SEEN BY PAINTERS

Twenty years ago Edgard Wind read a series of lectures entitled "Art and Anarchy." Whatever he meant can be condensed in this quotation, "I hope that the word 'anarchy' in the title of these lectures does not suggest that I shall speak in defence of order. I shall not. A certain amount of turmoil and confusion is likely to call forth creative energies..." We shall espouse a different point of view. Let's make it perfectly clear that we do not believe in Anarchist Art (unless by that it is meant that art is free or should so be) as we do not believe in art used for propaganda purposes. We share the views of those who think that art to be revolutionary does not need to paint revolutionary scenes, or that a revolutionary scene is per se revolutionary; it might even be pompously academic. The ideal, of course, would be a piece of art whose form and content are both revolutionary. That could be the case of I Funerali Dell' Anarchico Galli by Carlo Carrà as well as of May 1968 by Marc Saporta, (who is not an anarchist nor pretends to be a political revolutionist) presented as a novel but consisting of a Paris' stone (a "pavé") which evokes more easily a "ready-made."

The artists represented in this exhibition are not all of them established artists, some are just occasional free lance. They are not all anarchists, some have never been or have been only for a short period of their lives. The pieces have been chosen exclusively for their direct relation to anarchist personalities or scenes. This is mostly a collection of portraits and most of the portrayed figures recur in one of the papers, lectures, or films to be presented at the Symposium. This explains also why some anarchist painters who have not painted anarchist subjects are not present or why only those of their paintings representing anarchists (sometimes obscure, forgotten, or unknown pieces²) have been retained and preferred to more celebrated artworks.

The first drawing of the catalog is ironically by one of the most bitter enemies of the anarchists who was not an artist but a philosopher and a political economist: Friedrich Engels. Moreover, his subject never declared himself an anarchist but is revered as such by all individualist anarchists since the end of the last century and studied as an "anarchist" philosopher: Johann Caspar Schmidt, better known under the pen name of Max Stirner.

The next artist chronologically selected is Gustave Courbet, author of the Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1853, as well as of several other portraits of the man many call the Father of Anarchism. Courbet was himself a revolutionary militant who shared Proudhon's political and social ideas and who took part in the Paris Commune and was later imprisoned for his activities.³ Amédée Bourson and Charles-Auguste Corbineau have also both painted oil canvases of Proudhon.

Featured also is a self-portrait Courbet at Sainte-Pélaque as well as a Portrait of Jules Vallès, another "communard" cherished by the anarchists.

educative
Following realism, the next pictorial revolution is that endeavored by the Impressionists followed soon by what Felix Fénéon, the noted anarchist literary and art critic, called the Neo-Impressionists. In this group we find many anarchist militants, such as Camille Pissarro (several times exiled), and his sons, particularly Lucien, Paul Signac and others. Twenty years ago I had myself the agreeable surprise to find and purchase from an antique dealer seven letters by Jean Grave, one of which was addressed to Camille Pissarro⁴, while the Herberts have studied some of the correspondence from Pissarro (plus Signac and other painters) to Jean Grave.⁵ Pissarro is portrayed by Gauguin, Cézanne, Piette, Forain, as well as by his son Lucien and by himself. He is the author of a color lithograph Le Laboureur, used as a cover for a book by Kropotkin of Les Sans-Gîtes for the anarchist review Les Temps Nouveaux. Lucien Pissarro expresses on several occasions his anarchist beliefs⁶ in his life and his work, i.e. woodcuts for Le Père Peinard. Seurat is the author of a portrait of Paul Signac, a very committed anarchist, as evidenced through his paintings (Au pays d'Harmonie's first title was Au pays d'Anarchie) as well as through his articles in La Révolte, his friendship with Reclus and Grave, and his opposition to Grave's attitude during World War I in the name of anarchist coherence. Le Demolisseur and The Collapse of the State are among his more "engage" works. The latter, a water-color, is particularly important also from the technical point of view. Angrand is represented by Frontière, a drawing to illustrate a book by Elisee Reclus, while Henri-Edmond Cross is realized through a lithograph for Les Temps Nouveaux, L'Errant, and a drawing for a book by Reclus, Colonial Blessings. Maximilien Luce is the author of a portrait of Camille Pissarro and another by H.E. Cross, as well as of a lithograph of Felix Fénéon in Mazas Prison, and Puddleurs for an anarchist publication. *meets*
* Ibels draws La Chanson du gas for Le Père Peinard while from Switzerland Félix Vallotton authors The Anarchist, a woodcut that was exhibited by the Smithsonian Institute for the first time in this country eighty years after its engraving.⁸

he
Another Swiss artist deeply involved in anarchism at that same period is Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen⁹, a frequent illustrator of Les Temps Nouveaux (La Liberatrice, La Répression and Aux Temps Nouveaux). Theo Van Rysselberg is another contributor to anarchist publications of the end of the century (Les Errants) and author of a portrait of Felix Fénéon, as is Adolphe Villette and the younger Van Dongen both authors of portraits of the French anarchist and friends of the painters.

While Neo-Impressionism was in vogue in France, Pablo Picasso started painting in Barcelona and travelling to Paris (it is only after his seventh visit that he decides to stay). Catalonia is the cradle of anarchism and Picasso is exposed to the theories of Bakunin and Kropotkin. One of his first drawings, at age sixteen,

X depicts an anarchist meeting. It might be a sketch from a real life scene (one of three discussants bears a certain resemblance to the fiery individualist anarchist Libertad) or just a product of his imagination. Picasso will then discover communism and enter the Party, a life-long membership. It is said¹⁰ that the Polish anarchist Mieczyslaw Golberg, widely read and discussed at the turn of the century (he was residing in France) influenced the birth of non-figurative painting. Golberg was linked to the Symbolists, as was Félix Fénéon, especially with the group editing La Plume, closely related to anarchists. The Dutch symbolist Jan Toorop (1859-1928) calls Anarchy one of his paintings. It is also the time of the "Belle Epoque" when Toulouse-Lautrec is fashionable. Known are his posters and paintings of Aristide Bruant (dressed in black with a red scarf) and, again, Félix Fénéon, perhaps the most portrayed of all anarchists. A series of drawings by Vaughan Trowbridge shows us Jean Grave, Proudhon, Charles Malato, Louise Michel, Octave Mirbeau, and Laurent Tailhade. Before becoming one of the leading abstract painters, the Czech František Kupka¹¹, a friend of Ferrer and Elisée Reclus and an active militant, draws some illustrations in pencil or india ink for Reclus' books.

Modighiani is said to have been an avid reader of Kropotkin during his Italian youth, but I was unable to find a single painting inspired by these ideas. The same holds true for Marcel Duchamp, a sympathizer of Stirner's theories. In the U.S.A., the leading anarchist artist at the beginning of the century is Robert Henri, author of a portrait of Emma Goldman and teacher at the Francisco Ferrer School in New York, together with George Bellows, his friend and admirer. Portraits of Henri by Bellows, of Bellows by Sloan (a socialist very influenced by the anarchists) and by Aiken are included in our exhibition. Perhaps the most famous disciple of Henri and Bellows was Man Ray, two of whose obviously anarchist drawings were published as cover illustrations of the anarchist magazine Mother Earth. Man Ray himself speaks of those years with nostalgia¹². In Mexico, Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros paint revolutionary scenes occasionally linked with anarchist events. Siqueiros, however, is denounced as a staunch Stalinist by André Breton in a manifesto published by Le Libertaire. The surrealists, by the way, have always been very close to the anarchists and all the artists belonging to their movement signed anarcho-surrealist manifestos in the early fifties.¹³

Among the contemporaries we reserve a place of honor for Enrico Baj and Flavio Costantini. The former, born in Milan in 1924, attracted the attention of the critics since 1951 when he founded the "Nuclear Movement" and remains since in the avant-garde, whether it is with his involvement with spatialism and Lucio Fontana, with the International Movement for an Imagist Bauhaus, with the French New-Realists, the Neo-dadaists of New York, the surrealists (Breton writes an essay on him), the pataphysics, etc. After 1968 he becomes interested in anarchist themes and paints the series I funerali dell' anarchico Pinelli, prohibited by censorship (one of the most recent and scandalous events linking art and politics).

Costantini, on the other hand, is called by some "the historian of anarchy," because he has dedicated dozens of paintings related to historical events, with a predilection for violent scenes. Since 1960, Costantini has seen his public growing with one man shows and critical studies in several countries.¹⁵ He is well represented in this exhibition.

Among the most recent artists we have a plaxation mechanism by Rolan Van den Berghe, from Amsterdam, called The Horse of State envisioned as a form of democratization of art. A group of Portlanders, comprising Luke Berlin, J X Elliott (author of the Symposium's logogram), Michael X King, Eva Lake (also one of our speakers), Bill Mscichowski, have now some of their art works hanging at the Secret Side Exhibition put on by the Northwest Artists Workshop in Portland. Symposium delegates are warmly invited to visit this simultaneous show while we are trying to add some of their paintings to our own exhibit without knowing titles at this date.

Finally, Maurice Lemaitre and the Letterists are represented both in the musical and in the figurative art program.

A last minute addition are some collages by André Bernard from Paris and an allegoric lithograph on the Spanish Revolution sent from La Rochelle, France by J. Vergara.

There are, of course, omissions. Some are deliberate, some are due to lack of supporting evidence or available prints. There are no Vlaminck pieces (although Louis Lecoin used to speak of him as an anarchist) nor by Jankel Adler (praised by Herbert Read)¹⁶ born in Poland and dead in Israel, or by Juan Gris, who was said to be anarchist, and many more. Among other fallacies, there is also the one of my limited knowledge of the topic, for which I assume entire responsibility.

Pietro Ferrua

Footnotes

- 1 Edgar Wind, Art and Anarchy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) p.1
- 2 It is the case of Man Ray's two pieces which are not even mentioned in Arturo Schwartz's monographies (New York Dada; Prestel Verlag or Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination; New York, Rizzoli) otherwise the most accurate accounts of his painting.
- 3 For more details, consult: T. J. Clark, Image of the People (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society), Robert Fernier, Gustave Courbet (New York: Praeger); Jack Lindsay, Gustave Courbet, His Life and Art (New York: Harper and Row); Gerstle Mack, Gustave Courbet (New York: Knopf, 1951); Laura Malvano, Courbet (Milano: Fratelli Fabbri); Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Courbet in Perspective (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall) and the articles by Alan Bowness "Courbet's Proudhon," Burlington Magazine, 900 (March 1978) 123-129 and Pierre Schneider, "Rebonjour, Monsieur Courbet!" L'Express, Oct. 10-16, 1977, 24-26.

- 4 They have been deposited at the International Center of Research on Anarchism, in Geneva, Switzerland, which makes them available for research through the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire of the same town. A description of its content is to be found in a short article by Jean-Jacques Langendorf in Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme Bulletin n.7 (May 1962) 13-14. See also Benedict Nicolson, "The Anarchism of Camille Pissarro," Anarchy, Vol. 8, n.9 (Sept. 1968) 269-275.
- 5 Robert L. and Eugenia W. Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others," Burlington Magazine, Nov.-Dec. 1960, pp. 472-482 and 517-522. The originals are deposited in the Archives Signac or the Institut Français d'Histoire Sociale, in Paris, France.
- 6 See John Rewald⁹ studies on Lucien Pissarro, particularly his edition of Camille Pissarro's Letters to his son Lucien (Mamaroneck: Paul P. Appel, 1972) or W. S. Meadmore, Lucien Pissarro, un coeur simple (New York: Knopf, 1963).
- 7 Very revealing is his correspondence, see footnote 5.
- 8 The Graphic Art of Félix Vallotton (Los Angeles: The Grunwald Graphic Arts Foundation, 1972); see also Piero Bianconi, Vallotton (Milano: Fratelli Fabbri) and Francis Jourdain, Félix Vallotton (Genève: Pierre Cailler).
- 9 See the catalogue of the Exhibition at the "Galerie des Arts Décoratifs" in Lausanne, Switzerland (Lausanne: Gad 1973).
- 10 Anthony Blunt-Phoebe Pool, Picasso. The Formative Years. A Study of his Sources (London: Studio Books, 1962) comment to ills. 147-48. This book is also useful for the discussion of the relationship between Picasso and the anarchists during his Barcelona years. See also Phoebe Pool's Ph.D. dissertation on the same topic.
- 11 His anarchism is discussed in Ludmila Vachtová, Frank Kupka, Pioneer of Abstract Art (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968)
- 12 Selfportrait (Boston: Atlantic-Little-Brown, 1963).
- 13 One can consult the collection of Le Libertaire and the weekly "Billets surréalistes" between October 1950 and February 1952.
- 14 The most complete biography, bibliography and iconography is the Catalogo generale Bolaffi delle opere di Bai by Enrico Crispolti (Torino: Bolaffi, 1973). On the Pinelli affair see "Les funérailles de l'anarchistes Pinelli interdites à Milan," by Alain Jouffroy, in Opus International n. 38 (Nov. 1972), 1-52
- 15 Selected bibliography: Sterling McIlhany, "Two Italian Graphic Artists," American Artists, March 1960; Manuel Gasser, "Flavio Costantini," Graphis, n. 117; Fiorella Minervino, "Costantini,

il cantastorie dell' Anarchia, "Bolaffi Arte, April 1972;
Flavio Costantini, The Art of Anarchy (London: Cienfuegos
Press, 1975); etc...

- 16 "The Artist," Freedom, vol. 10, n. 11 (May 28, 1949)p.7.
See also "The Man," by Gerald Brenan, and "The Friend," by
Gamel Woolsey, in the same issue. Also in Freedom, Vol. 11,
n. 15 (July 22, 1950) a short note "Anarchist Painters."