

THE HEROIC AND THE GUILTY BODY IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POSTERS OF LATVIA DURING THE PERIOD OF SOVIET OCCUPATION

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ABSTRACT

The poster as the genre of graphic arts is a medium where the representation of the human body functions as an important semiotic sign. This genre has also reflected and influenced the most diverse spectrum of artistic, social and political processes. In addition to informative and illustrative content, the inclusion of the human body in the composition of the poster has always had ideological purpose. The aim of this paper is to discuss how political ideology integrates the images of the human body in the posters and how it contradicts the individuals' personal feelings and bodily experiences. The case study of two categories of posters from the Soviet period (1950s – 1980s) indicates the ideological strategies of sports promotion posters and anti-alcoholism propaganda posters. Political propaganda posters, including sports posters, reveal the body politics of the communist ideology: to create a uniform, disciplined, desexualised, masculine bodies capable of embodying the image of the "New Soviet Hero". I suggest that the main artistic tendencies of the so-called "harsh" or "severe" style that evolved in Latvian painting at the time can be seen in the sports posters of this period. Anti - alcoholism posters tend to employ a cartoon aesthetic. This tradition has its roots in the mass propaganda of the Russian Revolution (1917), which encouraged the emergence of extreme dichotomies in visual communication. These posters show the human body as a ridiculous and weak object that deserves to be condemned by family members, friends and all society. In this communication programme, alcoholism is not presented as a disease and a global problem of Soviet society, but as a "bad choice" of individuals. The research is based on archival studies of Soviet posters from the Institute of Art History of the Art Academy of Latvia. Complex research methods have been applied, including iconography, semiotics, contextual and comparative analysis.

Keywords: body politics, soviet period, posters, propaganda

INTRODUCTION

The representation of the human body in art, mass communication, ideological propaganda or advertising demands and withstands the scrutiny of the self, arousing admiration, the desire to follow or, on the contrary, disgust or even revulsion. The Latvian cultural and artistic environment is still characterized by a public sensitivity towards the representation of the human body, where the physiological and bodily qualities of the figure are at the center of the message. The study of post-communist societies also includes the study of art in a broader discourse. The poster of the Soviet period, which lies at the intersection between graphic art, design and mass communication, is a rich source of research reflection. In this paper, the author focuses