

The Museum of Strasbourg

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Opening times :
Daily from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursdays from 12 noon to 10 p.m.
Sundays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Closed on Mondays

Closed 14. April and 1 May 2006

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Press release

JOHN HEARTFIELD
POLITICA PHOTOMONTAGE 1930-1938

7 April - 23 July 2006

Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art

This exhibition will feature a wide selection of the photomontages by German artist John Heartfield (1891-1968) which were published in the periodical *AIZ* (*Die Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*) between 1930 and 1938, along with a rich documentary fund of book covers, periodicals and leaflets, all of which were designed or conceived by the artist for the publishing house Malik Verlag. Most of these exhibits were loaned by the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Spain (IVAM), which collaborated on this project. In addition to Heartfield's published works, a number of original photomontages from the collections of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, will also be shown.

Heartfield started as a member of the politically active Berlin Dada group, alongside his brother Wieland Herzfelde, the founder of Malik Verlag, and George Grosz. Heartfield soon became known for his work in the field of photomontage, perpetuating a long tradition of social and political satire in a new medium. Heartfield witnessed the series of crises that shook the conservative Weimar Republic until the advent of Nazism, and, through his work for the communist periodical *AIZ*, was a passionate critic of the political compromises and intimidation tactics that enabled Hitler to seize power. In addition to this, he fought tirelessly against Nazi propaganda and obscurantism, exposing the party's repeated attacks on civil and individual liberties. Heartfield received threats because of his outspoken opinions; he was eventually driven to seek refuge in Prague, along with many other artists and intellectuals. Nevertheless, he continued to contribute artwork to *AIZ*, which changed its name to *VI* (*Volks Illustrierte*) in 1936. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by German troops in 1938 was a death-blow to the periodical, and forced Heartfield into a second exile in London.

Ever since he joined the Communist Party in 1919, Heartfield never ceased to serve the cause of the Revolution, and with the slogan "Use photography as a weapon!" placed his whole artistic output under the sign of political struggle. The talent with which he used his weapon against the Nazi regime makes him rank among the greatest caricaturists, such as Daumier, as well as among the artistic avant-garde of his time. His works have lost nothing of their evocative power, and many of them have become universal symbols of resistance to the oppressor.

The Strasbourg exhibition will be a unique occasion to see works that, despite being well and widely known, are, paradoxically, seldom exhibited in France. This exhibition will contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of this major artist, by presenting both the man, a model of a politically committed artist, and his hugely influential oeuvre.

A richly illustrated catalogue will complement the exhibition, with contributions from David Evans, Carlos Pérez, Franck Knoery and Michael Krejsa, as well as some of Heartfield's own writings (in translation). This catalogue will be a timely and welcome addition to the all-too-few works available in French on this subject.