

20th-Century Propaganda Featured in New Tang Exhibition

When the major wars of the first half of the 20th century moved beyond the battlefield to engage the citizens as well as the military of warring nations, governments commissioned posters and other propaganda to support their war efforts. An array of these artifacts and strategies of persuasion will be on view at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery June 25–Oct. 30, in an exhibition titled *Weapons of Mass Dissemination: The Propaganda of War*.

Organized by The Wolfsonian-Florida International University in Miami Beach, Fla., the exhibition showcases numerous examples of propaganda produced during World Wars I and II and the Spanish Civil War. They include sculpture, novelties, children's books and games, housewares, and a wealth of posters, whose subjects range from a sweet-faced 1918 Red Cross nurse to extreme caricatures of German and Japanese soldiers.

The artworks and objects, all from The Wolfsonian's extensive collection of American and European decorative and fine arts 1885–1945, represent many nations: the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Japan, and others. As unabashed weapons of mass communication, many of the objects are visually explosive. An Italian poster issued in 1944 features a monstrous-looking African-American aviator pounding a bombed-out Italian city with his oversized bare fist, exploiting both anti-American sentiment and the racism rampant in Italy at the time.

Many of the objects and artworks employ images of flags, heroic soldiers, and a nation's glorious past. Uncle Sam makes an appearance in *Weapons of Mass Dissemination* on a 1943 poster urging U.S. citizens to keep quiet about military actions. Other posters were designed to encourage production, such as Herbert Bayer's World War II poster titled *Our Allies Need Eggs—Your Farm Can Help*, and some, like the 1939 French poster showing how to correctly don a gas mask, did convey vital information in a straightforward manner.

Whether sentimental, patriotic, inflammatory, or informational, the images and objects of *Weapons of Mass Dissemination* remain as powerful today as when first created. Many continue to be disturbing reminders of societies—including our own—engulfed in racism, hatred, and fear.

Public events accompanying the exhibition at the Tang include an opening reception in the museum atrium from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 25, and a lecture titled "Art or Propaganda?" at 6 p.m. Sunday, July 17, by William Lewis, an assistant professor of philosophy at Skidmore.

Summer hours at the Tang Museum are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, and noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; the museum is closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free; donations are suggested. For more information about Tang events and exhibitions, call 518-580-8080.