

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

LEON GOLUB

CONFLICTING IDEAS ABOUT WHAT MAKES ART POLITICAL
MAKING MANIFEST "THE WILL TO POWER" IN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1950s when Abstract Expressionism was gathering momentum, what later became known as the Chicago School of Art was already in existence in Chicago. And that school was the 1950s when Abstract Expressionism was the only serious movement, indicated by the fact that, in Chicago, the only serious movement was Abstract Expressionism.

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During the 1940s when Abstract Expressionism was gathering momentum, what later became known as the Chicago Monster Roster came to prominence in Chicago. And throughout the 1950s, when Abstract Expressionism as the main - stream tendency, dominated the New York scene, the Chicago Monster Roster was the main force among Chicago artists. In fact, of all the American art centres, only in Chicago were abstract artists noticeably in a minority. Leon Golub was the most accomplished painter and activator of this tendency. George Cohen and the sculptor Cosmo Campoli are two of the more prominent artists also associated with them. In general they tended towards German Expressionism, primitive and psychotic art, Surrealism and with Golub in particular, fragmented classical sculpture.

Their ideas and art differed in many respects from those of New York artists. As Peter Fuller writes of Golub, a point equally descriptive of the Chicago Monster Roster " But the decisive critical difference between Golub and the New York artists was Golub's absolute determination to find a way in which his practice as a painter could relate immediately, consciously and critically (though without compromising itself in any way) to historical experience."¹

Because of this significant difference, there was a certain antagonism between these artists and those of the New York school. This conflict of interests is addressed (from Golub's Chicago point of view) in his text A Critique of Abstract Expressionism.² When published in 1954, it exerted a considerable influence in Chicago. Golub wrote, for example " Any dervish principle - that the prime elemental resources within the psyche have intense pictorial equivalents - (or can even be tapped) - is still to be demonstrated."

These Chicago artists preferred a more direct witness to experience, an art which addressed itself to contemporary social experience and to what was in their estimation, the more essential historical reality of American society. Golub in particular sought to develop an art which would be antagonistic to the ideology of Imperial America, a 'raw realism' which would directly confront the values and injustices of Imperialist America. He considered these issues to be neglected by the dominant art form, and it is most likely that he was hoping for the Chicago school to displace the dominance of Abstract Expressionism in New York.

The "New Images of Man" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, included work by Golub and many of the artists from the Chicago Monsters Roster. This came at a time (the late 1950s) when Abstract Expressionism was obviously in decline. It was Golub's hope that this exhibition would mark the emergence of Chicago type art as the dominant force in the American art world, returning to the art scene a more direct and specific relationship to social realities. However, the exhibition did not have such a profound effect on the development of art in New York and the Chicago Monster Roster remained essentially as a periphery development.

It wasn't until 1982 that Golub had his next show in a Manhattan gallery. His last show before his reemergence in 1982 was in 1963. For nearly two decades he had worked apart from the New York art world, where the conditions were not sympathetic to his peculiar endeavour. However, in 1982, as Carter Ratcliff pointed out in an article in Flash Art

"Golub has resurfaced as the beneficiary of a pluralism insatiable now for figurative images, even his, which advance an esthetic of grinding horror."³

Since then, Golub has received a great deal of critical attention and his art is consistently on demand on the international art circle. As a painter who emerged at the same time as Abstract Expressionism only to come to fruition in the eighties, his art and the issues it involves provide an interesting focus for discussing some conflicting ideas about art and its function in society. Golub is particularly interesting because, although his work has been consistent, fluctuating ideas about what might constitute artistic value and success have caused him to be neglected for almost twenty years only to reemerge acclaimed and highly exposed.

In chapter one, I examine some issues relating to Golub's critique of Post - War art in America, the opposition between some conflicting approaches to art and its function in society. It identifies Golub's practice as concerned with a social, historical interpretation of art and its position in society. Chapter two discusses Golub's earlier style and its construction as an ideological discourse, his interpretation of style as "Visual ideology" and the way his ideas are given form by manipulating existing styles and conventions of painting as a critical exercise of ideological intent. Developing these ideas, I will examine in Chapter three, the Gigantomachies series and its dialogue on 'the will to power', raising some issues about the intent and possible effect of these depictions of violence. In Chapter four, this discussion is continued in relation to his later work, beginning with the Vietnam series of the early seventies. Other issues concerning his style and its use of media imagery will be considered.

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

- I - Peter Fuller: Leon Golub Beyond the Crisis in Art
London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative Ltd 1980
P.P. 104 - 09
- 2 - A Critique of Abstract Expressionism
College Art Journal 14, no 2 (Winter 1955) 142 - 47
- 3 - Carter Ratcliff: Contemporary American Art
Flash Art 108 - 16 (Summer 1982) 32 - 35
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CHAPTER I

LEON GOLUBS CONFRONTATION WITH ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM.
ASSERTING THE NECESSITY OF A SOCIAL, HISTORICAL
APPROACH TO ART AND IT'S POSITION IN SOCIETY

The concerns of Leon Golub cannot be confronted without first understanding the conflict of ideologies and class interests within Modernism since its beginning in this century. The word confronted has not been used casually here. Often, Golub's work is aggressive in dealing with these issues and therefore has to be considered in a consciously critical frame of mind. In Golub's case, these kinds of concerns have evolved as a reaction to the treatment of art (particularly post - war American art) as a disinterested activity, unrelated to the social and historical considerations in which it is situated. Golub is engaged with this continuing debate and surrounded by the ideas of critics who often seek to illustrate correspondences between their discourses and his art. His art clearly mediates ideological concerns as a primary, self-conscious endeavour. His role as a political artist is, therefore situated within a complex proliferation of ideological analysis of the role of art in society.

As an American painter, his position is particularly relevant in relation to the criticism of formalism as a utopian progressive ideology associated with the changing identity of post - war America and its foreign expansion, the relationship between American cold war politics and post-war art in New York. Max Kozloff's American Painting During the Cold War is an example of this kind of criticism which has forced new perspectives on abstract art. Basically he questioned the Modernist discourse of interpretation and analysis, resisting Modernist dogma, and questioning ideas such as autonomy, creative freedom and individualism which were prominent in accounts of Abstract Expressionism. His perspective differs from that of critics such as Greenberg, placing

an emphasis on the conditions of production and the ideological implication of the art work. He wrote, for example, of the Modernist avant - garde

"The other is the simple assumption that avant-garde art is in deep conflict with it's social, predominantly middleclass setting. The liberal esthete otherwise variably critical of American attitudes, has been loathe to witness them celebrated in the art he admires, even though this is to subtract from it's humanity as art".¹

The intention of Modernist ideas (as for example in the writings of Greenberg who helped to express them) through exposure to such hostile criticism, have been brought into question and reinterpreted in the light of current intrests. This has contributed to a decline in the belief in the integrity of a detached art since the sixties. It has also allowed for a more sympathetic critical climate in which Golub could reemerge as a prominent figure.

This development is the reversal of the crisis of Marxism during the 1940s in America, out of which the new avant-garde of post-war America emerged. Greenbergs "Art for Arts sake" was in fact born out of a revolutionary climate in the American art world of the thirties. Groups like the John Reed Club and the American Artists Congress were the focus of the activity of left wing, social realist artists who believed art must engage ideological issues. Popular Front realism, was the strongest form of political protest that such artists pursued in their efforts to extend the meaning of art outside that of the dominant classes. However, this type of work, based on the descriptive narrative aesthetic of the social realist tradition, was reevaluated in the light

of changing ideological and aesthetic positions. It was seen to have become both ideologically and aesthetically redundant. In its insistence on a properly motivated political art, dedicated to the plight of the proletariat, it was considered to have failed to have established an adequate critique of ideology or an effective aesthetic option for the dissatisfied American left. Consequently there occurred a shift in left-wing thinking that was to favour abstract art as an option, which effectively declared the social realist tradition with its conventional descriptive and narrative painting to be obsolete.

A belief in the efficiency of art when used as a means of engaging ideological issues was to be displaced by the gathering momentum of Modernist ideas. Yet Greenberg who was to formulate the most coherent interpretation of Modernist ideas, evolved his position out of an earlier conflict in Marxist thinking. This conflict between Stalinist and Trotskyite positions, debated the most effective role for art and culture under capitalism. The Stalinist position placed a greater emphasis on the effective propaganda purpose of art, a position which the Social Realists adopted to a large extent. But as David and Cecile Shapiro remark of Greenberg

"His expression of the need of the avant-garde to create something new in a sense quite different from Platonic mimesis - and radically different from anything that had existed before in American art - can also be interpreted as a way of escaping from constraint,² as Trotsky advised."

His conclusion for art was therefore also an attempt to engage the problems (as he understood them) for art and culture under capitalism. So it was both a symptom of the exhaustion of the

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social realist tradition and a direct attack on it. As David and Cecile Shapiro point out

"Moreover although nowhere is American art of the 1930s specifically derogated, the essay in our view is a direct response to and attack on the then schools of American art, particularly Social Realism, and it is an attack which arises as much from political considerations as aesthetic ones, albeit, in this case the two are indeed one" ³

This refers to Greenberg's Avant - Garde and Kitsch

first published in 1939 which provided a solution to the American artists faced with an impasse in the politics of painting. As Greenberg pointed out himself, the American avant-garde started out as Trotskyism in opposition to Stalinism, which was in effect an attack also on the Social Realists. But while these "political considerations" were to occupy Greenberg for a time, the Trotskyite interpretation of artistic freedom was to lead on to a very different idea of "Art for art's sake". As an escape from this "ideological confusion" and the propagandizing in art that devalued its quality as art, Greenberg offered a solution ⁴ in the form of the modernist avant-garde. This transition from a Trotskyite position to that of the avant - garde was a move away from overtly political concerns to purely artistic concerns. His new emphasis on the autonomy of art which became firmly entrenched in the 1950s and 1960s departed from the ideas of Brecht, Benjamin and Lukacs whose ideas featured in the conflicts of the 1930s. Trying to establish the role art plays in production in society as a necessary way of understanding its corresponding role in class society was central to the thrust of their ideas. The idea of 'Art for art's sake' derives from the opposite pole of aesthetic evaluation, developing through Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and even traced back to Kant in Greenberg's

writing. This tradition represents art as an innocent dissinterested activity, the expression of an absolute, placing it beyond it's historical conditions. A position directly contrary to a social historical interpretation of art and it's relation to society.

Expression, and formal concerns came to be the primary interest of both art and criticism, the causal conditions of art being confined to those of art itself. Thus the necessity of reference or illustration of content became immaterial and the critical endeavour of the avant - garde became introverted : To quote Greenberg "Each art had to determine through the operations peculiar to itself, the effect peculiar and exclusive to itself" ⁵

In order to preserve the integrity of art Greenberg saw this as a necessary measure, withdrawing from both bourgeois and anti-bourgeois politics. This conclusion was offered as a response to the position of art in society as Greenberg understood it, threatened by a consumer society, the decay and corruption of culture. He offered then, a new consciousness of history, an historical criticism explaining the modern development of the arts as a progressive evolution towards self definition, establishing each art's own area of competence through those aspects peculiar to the nature of it's medium. This is the exercising of Kantian self - criticism he explains as the rational justification of the activity of art. The success of this self - criticism in justifying the 'autonomy' of art, necessary to his explanation of modern art, was the success of a particular way of regarding art. Illusion, representation, and narrative, previously regarded as qualities which were related to the cognitive value of art, were now ⁶ represented as negative qualities which only served to conceal art.

The proper and only true factors pertinent to the interpretation of art, according to Greenberg, were formal concerns. In gaining autonomy art had to divest itself of representational, literary

concerns. This placed severe restrictions on the cognitive capacity of both art and criticism, claiming the necessity for art to detach itself from direct social concerns. This rejection of reference and any engagement of ideological issues was an important aspect of modernist criticism in securing the integrity of art.

The critical point of debate in relation to this disinterested art is whether such an approach to art can survive in respect to American imperial power and its vast communications and technological networks. Golub asserts the inadequacy of such a "Utopian ideology" preferring instead to base general theory on social historical situations.⁷ His own venture emphasises instead the necessary ideological nature of art and criticism seeing art as a form of production intrinsic to man's identity as a social being. Thus it is inevitable that he would criticise the activities of post-war American art and criticism as an "intellectual know - nothingness"⁸ ignorant of its implications and use in a technological society where innocence is no guarantee of security. In withdrawing from engaging political issues, emphasising autonomy and art for art's sake, it would seem that the 'purity' of art preserved it from the corruption of propaganda. However, as Golub points out

"We can indeed hope that if art hitches a ride on technology, that technology itself will prove to be as innocent and non-malevolent as the artists claim"⁹

It was ironic that abstract expressionism, intended as an apolitical art and a way to restore "freedom" to art, should be thwarted in its intentions by the interference of the C.I.A. Its representation in international exhibitions as part of official policy, transformed the possibilities of its original intention. It corresponded instead to the new American sense of identity, perpetrated through the rhetoric of the Cold War. Despite its own critical consciousness, the project

and intentions of the Abstract Expressionists was abused, manipulated and misrepresented by the Government for it's own purposes. Many of the Abstract Expressionists defined themselves and their art as hostile to the establishment in America and yet it's significance, by virtue of it's official representation, inserted it into the project of the new American world culture, which acted both socially and economically as a kind of cultural and political imperialism. Abstract Expressionism unwittingly contributed to this program, and Greengard's Avant-garde, can be seen to have been adopted into the thrust of America's capitalist mission of redemption for the world. The belief in the American dream was also transferred in perception as the utopian destiny of the world, a Utopian dream that Golub associated with the project of Modernist disinterestedness in art. In response to Barbra Rose's article The Politics of Art Part II Jan 1969 he wrote "Utopian ideologies won't go. The politics of utopia won't go either."

"Those arts that began with the modernist dreams of human freedom may find they serve technological masters and the American empire."¹⁰

This interpretation of post-war American art is shared by Kozloff in his essay American painting during the Cold War showing how the aloofness of the dominant art during the Cold War from ideological and political engagement facilitated it's appropriation as an object compatible with American imperialist assertions. This conflict, unchanged by the dominant art, saw the avant - garde, assuming itself to be in conflict with it's context in society, involved in a dichotomy between the awareness of social concerns and the purity of "art for art's sake". It is that dichotomy that undermines the untouchable purity once ascribed to the achievements of post - war art in America.

The point of opposition between the two approaches to art is between the revelation of the interests behind visual representation and a belief in the integrity of "art for art's sake", the autonomy

and 'purity' of art: an opposition between the value of a disinterested art and the necessity of social and political considerations.^{II} For Greenberg art became a kind of anarchistic struggle for individual freedom, an activity not to be restricted by ideas, particularly "reasons of state" but to concern itself only with itself. In the words of Rosenberg in his essay American Action Painters, artists "decided to paint.....Just to paint, the gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation from Value - political, aesthetic, moral." I2

However, an artist like Golub asserts that the activity of making art cannot be divorced from social and political considerations. In neglecting external "social political reality", rather than transcending it, the artist fails to come to terms with it, and this "utopian" venture, (the term Golub uses) fails to come to terms with the conditions of it's creation which negate and even pervert the possibility of redemption through gesture. The argument for the disinterested nature of the aesthetic experience can be seen in Fry's assertion that, "in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have an added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator, that he made it on purpose not to be used but to be regarded and enjoyed, and that this feeling is characteristic of the aesthetic judgment proper." I3 This, however, fails to acknowledge the use - value of the disinterested art object, and in particular it's adoption in Golub's estimation and others e.g. Kozloff, by the agencies of American imperialism. It is to this social and political reality that Golub addresses his art.

He denies the disinterested gesture of the imagination as an activity that transcends the realities of mortal external reality restoring an aspect of existence essential to the Life of man. An activity that would restore freedom to the distorted nature of existence.

The theoretical discourse he locates his art in is aggressively social and historical seeing art as a representation of reality, of ideological and political intent. The social context of art as opposed to "Art for art's sake" is the primary concern. Thus the former boundaries of the disciplines of art, its history and criticism are brought into question and expanded. This results in a redirection of the concerns and nature of the discourse that constitutes the history and criticism of art. Golub brings a social historical method of interpretation to bear on art and criticism. His representation therefore of the effectiveness of Modernist art conflicts with the ideas and intentions of those engaged with Modernist ideas. He presents a different if not contradictory image of that art. This is the contradiction and conflict of interpretation, the result of differences in philosophies of art and ideology. A conflict that can discredit previous perceptions of art and methods of interpretation. Golub moves away from the purely sensory, probing instead towards its meaning towards the hidden operations of power.

Placing an emphasis on social and political considerations is not however at the expense of materials and technique, because he establishes a communion between the meaning and its sensory appearance. So despite the emphasis on meaning and the problems of realism, his art is never removed from its sensory base. Yet there is no affinity with the ideas of Abstract expressionism, of gesture as an expression of the imaginative life. While that art sought through a discovery of self-knowledge in the activity of painting on canvas, a way of restoring freedom to society, Golub chooses instead a discovery of self-knowledge in the activity of social criticism. While his earlier work has been considered as a form of Expressionism, and his current work has a raw expressive surface; he has often divorced himself from what he calls the "devish principle - that the prime elemental resources within the

psyche have intense pictorial equivalents (or can even be tapped)"^{I4}
 His insistence on the social and historical interpretation of art,
 the necessity of objectivity and political confrontation objects to any
 ideas of subjectivity or idealism, particularly that of post - war art
 in America. He relates to modernist criticality in respect to his
 resistance to society though he seeks to infuse this with a new
 criticality through his peculiar realism that operates on the opposite
 pole to the aesthetics of form and Greenberg's definition of "Art for arts
 sake". His aesthetic is oppositional even in it's ugliness and scraped
 raw surface.

Though exploring a subjective experience of the world, it is
 presented in a self - conscious was as a brutal and raw criticism of
 social and political reality. The subjective experience is objectified
 as the collective experience of society torn by the violence of domination
 and conflicts of power.

Essentially this is an approach to art as visual ideology
 and the motivation behind his insistence on a political art is that art
 can have some political effect. The potential of art as a force in the
 conflict of social and political intrests is a constant subject of debate.
 And Golub as a 'social activist painter' (Kuspit's phrase) works with
 the conviction that art, to some extent has the potential to effect change
 because the politics of art and culture are inseperable from the momentum
 of social and political change.^{I5} Apart from what he says of his own art,
 this can be seen in his criticism of post - war art in America. When art
 presumed itself to have complete autonomy the appropriation by the state
 of that art for the purpose of promoting it's own intrests demonstrates
 that art can have implications outside those of purely aesthetic concerns.
 In drawing attention to this kind of struggle between the artist and
 the state and other conflicts relevant to the production of art, the

visual art's as language are understood to have great potential as instruments of domination. So apart from an acknowledgment of the exercise of taste in the creation of the art object, Golub draws attention to it's 'use value'. This places an emphasis on the processes of imagination and intention, the cognitive activity that informs it's creation. So apart from formal concerns it raises the issue of representation and communication and consequently the ideological uses of art. As Bernard Smith points out in his article Marx and Aesthetic Value Pt II

"since all human productions possess the capacity to communicate symbolically they may all be used to serve the needs of ideologies. Ideological value is a special kind of use value."

Golub in his insistence on the social and historical conditions of artistic production works with an awareness of this 'special kind of use value'. This explains his attention to the historical conditions in which post-war American art was produced rather than accepting it on it's own terms of 'Art for art's sake'. It is the conditions of artistic production affecting the kind of art produced and the way in which it can be produced that become important. This revives some of the ideas of Brecht and Benjamin that featured in the essays of the 1930's the emphasis being on the author as producer. The autonomy of the artist, his freedom of individual creativity is denied by considering him to be working in the service of certain class interests. The artist is understood as a producer working within a given social and historical situation. The conditions of production, the institutions of art, the media etc. must be considered by the artist. Technological and institutional conditions which act as constraints and distortions of the artists intentions become important considerations in determining the nature of the work. Golub's reference to the malevolence of the technological

world shows this awareness of conditions of production, particularly the immense power of the media.

He situates his practice within the total social structure and within its historical context. Rather than accepting an atheoretical analyses of cultural institutions and cultural production he relates his work as an artist to the wider implications of production and conflicts of interest in society. Working with an awareness of these conditions, he manipulates a wide variety of artistic conventions and aspects of the technology of society as given materials which he transforms and reconstruct for the mediation of his own ideas. His art then is formed in and reflects upon the political and ideological forms at work in society. In this way he attempts to address himself to the responsibility of making art in a society where power relations are abused and perverted. He sees this as the single function of his art but he does not intend his art as propaganda, as a function of ideology. Though conscious of the ideological implications of his art, he is never the less aware of the necessity of quality in art. To quote Walter Benjamin in the essay The Author as Producer

"We stated earlier that the correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality, because it includes its Literary tendency, we can now formulate this more precisely by saying that this Literary tendency can consist either of progress or of regression in literary technique". 17

The social realist tradition may have regressed in its technique and critique of ideology. However Golub's realism is not a return to the conventions of the social realist tradition. Rather it is an attempt to revitalise some of those concerns and to inject an awareness of the diversity of conditions of contemporary artistic production into the criticality and problematic nature of his peculiar realism.

FOORNOTES TO CHAPTER I

- I - Max Kozloff - "American Painting During the Cold War"
 source - Pollock and After - The Critical Debate
 Edited by Francis Frascina London 1985
- 2 - David Cecile Shapiro - "Abstract Expressionism : The
 Politics of Apolotical Painting"
 source Pollock and After
- 3 - Ibid
- 4 - Greenberg : Avant Garde and Kitsch
 "Hence it was developed that the true and most important
 function of the avent - garde was not to 'experiment',
 but to find a path along which it would be possible to
 keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion
 and violence," source Pollock and After
- 5 - Greenberg: Modernist Painting source Modern Art and Modernism:
 a critical anthology, London: Harper and Row 1982
- 6 - This restriction on the cognitive value of art is explained
 by Fred Orton and Charles Harrison as a necessary aspect
 of the justification of Modernist ideas. Modernism Criticism Realism
 "the Modernist misrepresentation of art's cognitive significance
 is effectively a means to insulate Modernism itself against
 substantive critical and historical examination".
- 7 - Leon Golub - Letter Art forum 7, no 7 (March 1969)
 "Utopian ideologies wont go. The politics of utopia wont go
 either. And a determination to base art on what was authentic
 in culture."

- 8 - Leon Golub Ibid
- "Modernism as a European or "alien style", the American regret that there is nothing to remember." "This is intellectual know-nothingness, a claimed innocence and frontier ideology hardly to the point in respect to American imperial power and our vast communications and technological networks".
- 9 - Ibid
- I0 - Ibid
- II - This point is emphasised in the introduction to Modernism, Criticism, Realism edited by Charles Harrison and Fred Orton
- "The accelerating tendency of the former is to 'uncover' the intrests at work in visual representation. The tendency of the latter is to uphold the value of aesthetic experience and production precicely because they are seen as disintrested".
- I2 - Harold Rosenberg - American Action Painters source Modern Art and Modernism
- I3 - Roger Fry - An Essay in Aesthetics source Modern Art and Modernism
- I4 - Leon Golub - A Critique of Abstract Expressionism 1954 source Kuspits Leon Golub - Existential Activist Painter
- I5 - Quote from Golub. Interview with Jeanne Siegel
- "Everybody knows art dont change society, but that's too easy a way to put it. Artists are part of the information process. If artists only make cubes, then what the world knows of art will be cubes. If there are artists doing other subject matters including Interrogations, these start to enter into differential dialogues regarding the nature of art and circumstance. It may not change the world, but the contexts

and operations of art shift. Art becomes part of the
context of experience in unexpected ways."

- I6 - Bernard Smith - Marx and Aesthetic Value Pt. II
- I7 - Walter Benjamin - The Author as Producer
source Modern Art and Modernism

CHAPTER II

STYLE AS 'VISUAL IDEOLOGY'

GOLUB'S MANIPULATION OF EXISTING STYLES AND CONVENTIONS
OF PAINTING AS A CRITICAL EXERCISE OF IDEOLOGICAL INTENT:

Despite Golub's criticism of Modernist ideas and abstract art the impact of Modernism and it's relevance to current art practice is evident even in his own art. The modernist critique established in the Late nineteenth century undermined the academic standard by clearly distinguishing between representation and resemblance. And this can be seen as central to Golub's own peculiar mimeses. So, rather than a return to the descriptive narrative aesthetic of social realism Golub's realism is of a different kind, constituted on the basis of critical ideas established by modernism. It was modernism in particular which shifted the integrity of art from that of a naturalistic canon to that of it's value in being art. This development underlies Golub's paintings where the representational content is not purely imitative. The picture instead develops it's own dialogue in a peculiarly modern way. Klossowski, an artist who writes extensively about art and the nature of his work, is particularly interesting in his explanation on the nature of the peculiar dialogue of the art work. His drawings and paintings which are laden with expressive silent gestures evoke the illustrations of the Petit Journals of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Though his art is often obscure, his philosophical essays and writings about art are lucid and informative. His idea of the "anatomy of the picture" i.e. the nature of the pictorial dialogue is relevant here,

"The pure and simple destruction of the stereotype in painting at the beginning of the present century announces the rejection of the imitative (and hence exercising) role of the simulacrum and the abandonment of the "subject". The picture ceases to be a simulacrum to become a thing in itself".¹

Greenberg among others amplified this critique into the idea of the autonomy of art, an emphasis which was to exclude any mimetic or narrative elements within painting. Contrary to this approach

The peculiar characteristic and emphasis of the concept of realism lies in its claim to cognitive significance as well as aesthetic value. The thrust of Golub's realism apart from its aesthetic value is in its claim to a specific relationship to social realities, to knowledge and conflicts of ideas which had become obscured from the realm of the aesthetic with its disinterested judgement and restriction to formal concerns. But in insisting on the cognitive value of art the character of artistic discourse can be degraded. Golub, however, pursues significant content through a transformation of the conventions of painting that secures the integrity of his art. The style he develops is both sensuous and ugly, but his aesthetic of ugliness is a complicated and carefully considered approach to painting as a form of political agitation. It is brutal and uncompromising, as uncompromising as the ideas that are consistently pursued in every painting. The single purpose of Golub's art has been to demystify the operation of power in society. Yet despite these political concerns his art is not mere propaganda. He has developed a sophisticated form of representation, a 'synthesised' realism which applies modernist knowledge in its own way.

The Modernist developments in ideas of representation such as those of Roger Fry and his "new indifference to representation"² underly the transformation of realism seen in Golub's painting. The necessity of Modernist knowledge to the current practice of a realist art as pointed out in the introduction to the book *Modernism, Criticism, Realism*, is that "Realism is not a matter of correspondance, or even of conventions of correspondance. On this point Modernist theory has always been correct. It is a matter of how, on what basis, one goes about the process of criticism and correction of any representation".³

Golub finds in his art a means of dialecticising what are for him the useful aspects of Modernist theory with the practice of a contemporary politicized realism. The insights that realised the necessity of an

alternative realist practice and the redundant formula of the social realist tradition are brought to bear in his art.

Because art is a process of representation it's value is not in it's reference to the real world but in the way conventions of representation are reworked and recreated. Golub's critical awareness is given form in his use of conventions and styles, a process which demonstrates his reflection on the nature of realism as representation. His realism therefore is of an entirely different nature to the imitative stereotypes, the descriptive realism of the social realist tradition. The picture as an object in itself is no longer a mirror of the world. Golub is not so much concerned with the nude in his earlier work or a "true to life" depiction of mercenaries and interrogations in his current work. It is his own ideas in relation to the scenes depicted that is the primary subject. To this end, the subjects depicted are submerged in the complex dialogue of the painting itself, it's relationship to other art and the significance of the surface. He has transformed figurative painting through a complex assimilation of it's fine art traditions (and in his later work it's relation to traditions established in media imagery) into a blunt yet stimulating politicized practice. This process unfolded from his generalised depictions of men in combat (Gigantomachies) to his current work which operates on a more sophisticated level of direct political confrontation.

This process of "criticism and correction of any representation" which Golub develops is concerned with an ideological analysis of style. Because he sees style as a representation of reality synonymous to 'visual ideology' he manipulates the styles and conventions of art as a critical exercise of an ideological kind. By treating the style in a certain manner he transforms the 'visual ideology' of that style and in this transformation his own criticism is represented. His work then is not mere propaganda, it makes it's own statement and has

it's own critical function. This reflects Nicholas Hajinicolaons idea of "critical visual ideology". He makes the distinction in this way "critical visual ideology implies that a works visual ideology exerts a critical function in regard to other non - visual kinds of ideologies, some elements of which are to be found in the work. Criticism is carried out through the treatment of the works subject".⁴

This is the process of criticism and correction of codes of representation that replaces the descriptive realism of social realism. The social realist tradition tended to be a kind of political allegory rather than exerting a critical function. It also introduces the dialogue of the work of art as the object presented to the viewer rather than the value of the work being in relation to it's descriptive function. The point about Modernism introducing an awarness of "the process of criticism and correction of any representation" can be seen then to have particular relevance to Golub's realist practice. His intention to "make domination explicit" is realised in the process of reflection on styles as forms of visual ideology and thus the material that can be manipulated and paradoxically reused in order to exert his own critical thinking.

Thus in his paintings the activity of style and representation can be seen as a cognitive activity engaging the social experience of man through manipulation of the conventions of art. The style is the language, the medium through which his ideological responses are mediated and the social experience is given form. This necessarily involves attributing ideas to pictorial style, ideas and interpretations of conventions that can be reinterpreted and recreated. Through the reworking of those conventions a new critical statement is given form. Golub's Gigantomachies in particular, reflects on classical art and it underlies the realism of his current work. The meaning he attributes to particular styles, such as the classical concept of identity is used to create his own

ideas through involvement with those styles and their particular significance. (This point is explored at length in the following chapter in relation to the Gigantomachies series. In Gigantomachies his paradoxical use of the classical ideal as articulated in the perfection of classical form is an appropriation of that knowledge and a transformation of it into a new statement of contemporary antiidealism). In this way his manipulation of the style, in the depiction of the figures, the surface quality, gesture etc. is a critical activity that is intended as both aesthetically and ideologically engaging. It is concerned with style as representation, as interpretation of the real rather than an indulgence in self expression. In this way it is a self consciously social activity reflecting on the ideological forms at work in society.

Golub innovates in this way using traditional and contemporary forms to make his point. Donald Kuspit analyses his art in this respect. He unravels Golub's use of aesthetic conventions such as the genre of history painting and places him in relation to classical art in order to discover the purpose behind the way in which he has reconstructed and manipulated particular codes of representation. It is through this process of reading in (particularly in his pre "activist" work) that the meaning is divested from what is actually depicted or obvious in the picture. The significance of his manipulation of different cognitive materials i.e. aesthetic conventions and forms of representation from diverse sources e.g. classical antiquity and media imagery, is the meaning embedded in the surface of the picture. This meaning is revealed through a critical reading and through the surface rather than the painting illustrating the idea. Such a criticism would ignore his careful mediation of the ideas, a calculated and meticulous process which demonstrates how meaning and social structure and processes are not simply reflected

in art in a passive way. As Janet Wolff points out

"Ideology is not expressed in it's pure form in the work the latter acting as a passive carrier. Rather the work of art itself re-works that ideology in aesthetic form in accordance with the rules and conventions of contemporary artistic production".⁵

So, his depictions of classical figures in combat, mercenaries etc. can be said to resemble people with particular expressions and features, but this must be unraveled further to understand their specific appearance in his paintings. To understand what they represent is to search for their critical function and cognitive content, a subject on which Golub is always articulate. Their complex logic is vividly explained by Golub in any interviews or writings of his own, and it is apparent that his process and method is a very conscious (rather than intuitive) manipulation of ideas and theories in visual form. His approach to making a picture is primarily about significance. Questions of degree of resemblance are neither necessary nor sufficient for his paintings representational content, though details such as facial expression are important to the narrative of the idea. So the primary object of this realism, the hidden object, is his continuing dialogue on the abuse of power. The features of the picture, even the rawness of it's surface are explained and accounted for by Golub in terms of these ideas about power conflict. Every aspect of the painting, the image, style, the surface etc. is determined by and has it's genesis in the idea. This is obvious from his ability to articulate the very complex concepts and interests, the causal intellectual activity that mediates between the objects and their representation. There is no simple relationship between the scenes he paints and the way in which he paints them. His realism is a very conscious engagement of existing forms of representation and in his later work, the implications of

photography for a political art. In an interview with Matthew Baigell he said

"There is a necessary ambiguity in my work between direct intention (to make domination explicit) and the complexity of events and "modernist" knowledge which blocks straight forward one - to - one explanation. Accessibility has to be built on critical assessments of the make up of the contemporary world"⁶

The causal relations, i.e. the cognitive activity that informs Golub's barbaric realism is the substance of his art rather than any resemblance to the scenes depicted. This is his interest in the forces operating in society, the agents and agencies of power. It is not only figures in combat he depicts, it's the psychology of power in society made manifest.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

- I - Klossowski by Klossowski Flash Art 107 May 1982
- 2 - "With the new indifference to representation we have become much less interested in skill and not at all interested in knowledge",
Roger Fry 'Art and Life' 1917
- 3 - Fred Orton and Charles Harrison
Introduction (p. xix) to Modernism. Criticism. Realism:
Alternative contexts for Art.
- 4 - Nicholas Hajinicolaon source Modern Art and Modernism(Anthology)
Art History and Class Struggle
- 5 - Janet Wolff The Social Production of Art Cpt (Art & Ideology)
- 6 - The Mercenaries: an interview with Leon Golub:
Matthew Baigell Arts Magazine Vol 55 No 9 May 1981 p 169

CHAPTER IIIGIGANTOMACHIES

CONFRONTING THE "RAW REALITY OF POWER"

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF GOLUB'S AESTHETIC OF AGGRESSION

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Roland Barthes account of realism is

"Thus realism consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy.....Through secondary mimesis (realism) copies what is already a copy" ^I

In Golub's narrative of the operations of power in society primary depiction of power, an already depicted copy of the real, is available in classical art. In his Gigantomachies series, the process of criticism of an existing code of representation as a means of asserting a new idea can be seen in relation to classical battle art. This idealised conflict is demystified in Golub's interpretation of power, and the classical conflict is recreated as a contemporary image of a fragmented dehumanised society. The classical autonomy of identity and harmony is stripped to it's anatomy, eroded even in the rawness of the paints texture. The fragmented, debased form of the classical which remains, is ugly and repulsive, communicating in it's unpleasantness the tormented view of society which Golub insists on.

The classical concept of man, idealised and autonomous, which is powerfully expressed in classical art, is taken as a basis for Golub's images of contemporary man. His paradoxical use of the classical ideal, articulated in the perfection of classical form, is an appropriation of that knowledge and a transformation of it into a new statement of contemporary antiidealism. In classical art a vivid definition of man emerges, integrated with his world and sure of his identity. It is not a representation of individuals, instead the figures are absorbed into the ideality of art, and the idealism of art articulates an ideal of man. The vividness of the art makes clear the confidence of the society. Golub is drawn to that confidence as a means of expressing contemporary unease. His appropriation of the

classical view raises the question of modern man's understanding of himself in a world where the ideal is never as obvious as it appears in classical art. But Gigantomachies are not a revival of the classical sense of identity. It's his peculiar process of using existing representations to make a point of contemporary significance. He makes and then destroys the classical ideal, allowing it to rot and disintegrate into the empty space of the canvas. The heroic classical man disintegrates into the contemporary image of fragmentation and conflict. The ideal of the classical is transformed in this collision with Golub's ideas, and the classical hero who transcends history and expresses himself as a universal perfection is defiled and demystified stripped of beauty and perfection and injected into the contemporary world as an image of the degeneration of society.

This attitude to the classical expression of an ideal, a perfect expression of a perfect society is essentially the same attitude Golub takes to abstract art. The abuse he directs at the hope of abstract painters who intended the gesture and expression of paint as a means of expressing the freedom and ideality of art is aggressively applied to the anatomy of classical man. The destruction of the classical is a destruction of the ideal it embodies, a parallel to the "utopian ideology"² that he associates with abstraction. His dissatisfaction with both classical art and abstract art as images that transcend history is apparent then in his paradoxical use of classical form. The sublime that is aspired to in art is denied in Golub's technique, and with it any hope of transcendence. What begins to emerge is the 'critical realism' rather than idealism that his art is intended to be. Man as an historical being, with an indefinite identity emerges through the defilment of the classical image and it's confident idealised projection of identity. The figures in Golub's paintings are aquad rejections of the sublime, emptied of any possibility

of spirituality or idealism. His brutal realism tears the perfect flesh of classical man and leaves a transparent skin that scarcely conceals the entrails. This is an aggressive, even brutal process of demythologising the classical idealisation that reduces it to his own perception of man as an existential physical machine driven by elemental needs and a desire for power and domination.

This realism that reveals in a brutal way Golub's idea of modern man is what he calls 'barbaric realism'. A realism particularly harsh in its rejection of any possible ideal, and an aggressive way of forcing a reconsideration of the identity of modern man in relation to the desire for power. He forces reflection on our own sense of identity by deconstructing the classical myths and identity pushing into our space images of man with extreme limitations. It is a tragic image of modern society. Perhaps he was initially attracted to the classical ideal but the final statement seems a rather pessimistic statement about humanity. The classical ideality of form is perverted and this creates a space for Golub's reality of the human condition as a degraded version of the classical ideal. The figures have no real identity and each individual is alone in a endless struggle where no side seems to have a cause or purpose. And what is most pessimistic is the absence of the heroic nature in classical art. There are no victors or reasons for victory only the inevitable continuity of conflict. Lawrence Alloway remarks that "There is a basic similarity between the hunter and the hunted, the armed and the unarmed, the Lapith and the centaur the giant and the God. It is a non-consolatory and naturalistic view of life, not the basis for traditional heroics".³

Golub understands the nature of contemporary man as being aware of but devoid of the heroic aspirations of the Classical. This is the existential interpretation of man that seems to emerge strongly in Gigantomachies. What he does in Gigantomachies is to remove any

security of a universal significance that the classical possessed.

The activity has none of the mythic context of the Pergamon relief from which it is derived. And consequently any system of belief or myth that would place the struggle in context giving it some kind of significance or reason is absent.⁴ The classical image of man is demythologised and a contemporary existential image of man is dramatised in the form of a meaningless struggle. In an unpublished essay on Gigantomachies written by Golub he stated that the "post mythic is the existential,"⁵

His intention then in stripping the classical image of its mythic context is to show a 'realistic' image of contemporary existential reasoning, his image of a demythologised technological society. His focus on "evil" behaviour - power, domination, corruption, hostility"⁶

disintegrates any dignified qualities in man and depicts the modern sense of individuality as empty of humanity. The dehumanised figures, raw and ugly are more animal than they are potentially human, and suggest a tendency towards self destruction. This image of man is

retained in his later political works which evolved in the late sixties, and the Gigantomachies are relevant for this reason to an understanding of his more overtly political work. In an interview with Matthew Baigell he said of the Mercenaries series

"But in another sense where they come from refers to how I arrive at the subject and content. In that sense, they evolve from the images of the 60's. The Gigantomachies, representations of violence, combat and survival, neither good guys nor bad guys but stressed situations".⁷

The earlier work then can be seen to engage man's generalised concepts of identity in relation to extreme existential struggle. But like the later work they also deal with the operations

of power in society; the struggle intended not as a subjective world apart from society but as an internalisation of the social as subjective. The gigantomachies are images of power in it's most elemental expressions. Though not specific to any particular event or activity in society they dramatise what Donald Kuspit refers to as "The will to power," the term Fredrich Nietzsche uses.

The will to power the degeneracy and chaos that Nietzsche sees as underlying and existing in tension with the order and harmony of the classical is made explicit in Golub's rape of classical form.⁸ His contradiction of the classical is a confirmation of it's inherent disorder, and it's manifested as the primary object of his "barbaric realism". This confirmation of the chaos he sees implicit in classicism is a pessimistic denial of the possibility of order, and of the capacity seen in classical art for an attainment of order and control. His figures by contrast, are vulnerable, dehumanised automatons, trapped in a disordered and chaotic struggle that has no hint of a conclusion. It's an image of regression and destructiveness devoid of the positive values articulated in classicism. Kuspit refers to this removal of the "ethical limitations" which contains the destructiveness of classicism as Golub's denial of transcendence, "Yet for Golub these limitations do not make man beautiful, do not really help him transcend his destructiveness. They only make him tragic".⁹

So it's a tragic image of society that he reveals in his destruction of the classical form, emptying it of 'it's classical calm' and amplifying it's inherent destructiveness. This image is projected as a reflection of the corruption of modern society, and of the will to power operating in every social activity.

The painting Thwarted (1953) begun this process of deidealising the classical, in this instance, the Belvedere Torso was the source. The Belvedere Torso, already fragmented and incomplete in it's present form is the ruined state of the classical to which he is attracted. The painting Thwarted articulates the fragmentation of the idealised form, showing the mangled state of the Belvedere torso as the more valid image for contemporary society. The ruins of the Belvedere torso corresponds to his idea of the ideal and the heroic as broken and impossible in today's society. This is the antiheroic and anti idealism of his realism, which he also asserts in saying that "Utopian ideologies wont go".¹⁰ But it's an assertion which denies the possibility of a futuristic hope, an absolute pessimism which seems nihilistic in it's total destruction of the classical, providing no hope or alternative. It defines man as totally destructive, an obsession with destruction which can be linked to his identity as a Jew. Two of his earlier works, Charnel House (1946) and Evisceration Chamber (1946) deal explicitly with the destruction of European Jews during World War Two. This is a significant point of departure that gives some context to the progress of his depictions of destruction and power. The chaotic disorder and will to power which he reveals in Gigantomachies can be understood as the destructive force beneath the order of society that became dominant and expressed itself in the Holocaust. Kusbit argues that "his whole art is a rebellion against the socially imposed destiny of victimization, a rebellion using as one of it's methods the exposure of the monstrous victimizers, and of the self victimizers who are in their own way unwitting victims - puppets of history".¹¹ But it is a rebellion using also a violent and destructive method which asserts it's own violence as a means of taking over the violence it depicts. In this sense it's a revenge on society, asserting it's own violence as

equal to that of the oppression it reveals. Rather than denying violence it seems he asserts his own statement in a violent manner which affirms the principal of 'the will to power'. Nietzsche looked upon art as a way of asserting dominance,

"And one employed festivals and arts for no other purpose than to feel oneself dominant to show oneself dominant: they are means for making oneself feared." ¹²

Golub's art seems to assert it's own dominance in the violence of it's statement, asserting perhaps as Kuspit suggests a Jewish rejection of the role of victim, by asserting a violence and strength equal to that of the oppressors strength. The broken deidealised figure in Thwarted can be seen in the context of Charnel House and Evisceration chamber as destructive images that satisfy the victims of the Holocaust in the ugliness and violence it returns upon the world. This is antithetical to the classical image of perfection, an anti-ideal instinct which operates by impoverishing the classical, makes it pathetic, and distorts it until it becomes a violent and ugly force.

As the Gigantomachies series evolves from this point of departure, the narrative of "the will to power" begins to assert itself. It's dialogue on violence is effective because his paintings are already a certain type of violent activity. There is no development in his art from this point on which departs from the act of violence as subject matter. Rather, the work is organised in such an order as to produce a certain type of narrative progression which is itself violently stimulating. The purpose of these paintings is to create their own narrative rather than report on events in their real life time and place. By this strategy the viewer is absorbed into the figures orgies of violence. This is made possible by the isolation of "the will to power" as the foreground devoid of any background, the only significant desire or reality that exists in the world depicted. His narrative then, offers a coherent and reductive

view of the world in which relations have been limited to precisely those from which a central coherence can be made to appear 'naturally' and 'realistically' to emerge. The only progression of the narrative is towards a violent act. The climax then or logical conclusion of any of these scenes is the violence of the activity. This is the dehumanising of his subjects, depriving them from a psychological perspective of any human dignity. They are naked and exposed, caught in the moment of a barbaric physical and psychological truth, "the will to power".

The elimination of any background is also crucial to his treatment of violence. In denying e.g. the classical mythic context of the narrative of violence he problematizes the very idea of violence, to see it as a subject in itself, comprehensible and easily isolated. The classical depiction of violence has its context which makes sense of the experience of violence in reliefs like the Pergamon relief. It can be related to a wide reality of non-violent experience and in this way the violence can be isolated and understood. The pacifying power of this meaningful context gives relief to the violence by the knowledge we have of a climactic ending, a possible conclusion which is absent in Golub's art. Golub's art by contrast is apocalyptic, denying any beginning, middle or ending, dramatising only a continuum of climactic violent moments. His depiction of violence is for that reason a confrontation and transgression of the viewer.

Though his intended effect to 'make domination, explicit' may have a moral purpose about it, his technique in Gigantomachies is overwhelmingly the manifestation of meaningless violent acts. In these paintings it is not possible to isolate the violence as a moment in a pictorial plot development. It is the entire reality he depicts, devoid of possibilities, and because it is devoid of any mythic context,

it is also lacking of any pacifying power. There is no disruption of the disorder and violence and because of the lack of narrative or myth that might move us away from the continuity of the violence it becomes easier to be absorbed into the violence rather than repulsed by it. There are no supplementary or non-narrative details that might prevent us from being arrested by what we see. It is questionable then whether the viewer is forced to reject the violence or enter into a fascinated identification with acts of violence. The question must be asked whether this melodrama of violence is instructive in inducing a resistance to the seductive power (the up front presentation) of the violent acts depicted or whether it advocates "the will to power"? Is the viewers proper response incorporated into the scene as Leo Bersani shows it to be in Assyrian battle art, or does Golub's battle art offer no constructive criticism of violence? ¹³ The later more specific depictions of violence which have defined aggressors as instruments of a corrupt power bring an element of control to his depiction of power and violence. Then we might be capable of looking for a reason, a wrong, and make a moral judgement. However this intention and possibility is fragile in Gigantomachies and it's social intent is ambiguous, unlike the later work.

In the Gigantomachies series there is an ambiguity about the viewers identification with the scene which can result in a fascination with the violence rather than the criticism Golub intends. Perhaps the ambivalence is an alibi for over indulgence and complacency and for an undisguised intoxication with 'the will to power'. It's a possibility that his simulation of the classical style is a celebration of 'the will to power' which Nietzsche describes as inherent in Classical art. "From scenting out 'beautiful souls' 'golden means' and other perfections in the Greeks, from admiring in them such things as their repose in grandure, their ideals despositions, their sublime simplicity - from this sublime simplicity a naiserie allemande, when all is said

and done, I was preserved by the psychologist in me. I saw the strongest instinct, the will to power, I saw them trembling at the intractable force....." I¹⁴

In his rape of the classical he idealises the violence inherent in it and creates an image intoxicated by destruction. The grand scale can inspire awe in the spectator rather than revulsion and the antiaesthetic of his style could be experienced as an estheticization of spectacle which induces fascination with the violence rather than rejection. There exists then a possibility that the viewer can enter into the violence seduced in admiration of the aesthetic qualities of the paint. It seduces by the beauty of the paint though the ugliness of the image should result ultimately in alienation from the violence.

A possibility in the face of any spectacle of pain as Freud suggests in Instincts and their Vicissitudes is a sadomasochistic enjoyment of that pain. I¹⁵ Golub in fact in his later work derives some of his images from sadomasochistic magazines with the intention of preventing the viewers consenting consumption of such violence. However, where is the viewers cue for a non-mimetic response to the violence of Gigantomachies, that might block movements of identification with the violence in the scene? What technique is employed to frustrate an imitative impulse? The ugliness of the style is a fragile technique as it could equally result in an intensification of the violence and simply contribute to an easier movement of identification. Kuspit, interpreted it as "It signals the impossibility of self-realisation within modernism reducing itself to the primitive will to power necessary for elemental survival". I¹⁶

This makes one question the social intent of this art, if not Kuspit's peculiar representation of it. Freud also proposes that the pleasure of sadism functions as a phenomenon of sympathetic projection. The sadists enjoyment of the suffering of others is that he projects himself

into the suffering position of the other. The value of the viewers projection into Golub's scenes (even in the later work) is problematic. The assumption of a negative response is central to the constructive effect of his art, an assumption of the viewers capacity for moral behaviour. Golub's implication of the viewer into the scene involves a certain risk in that the viewer might take a pleasure in the scene becoming absorbed and attached to the scene of violence and suffering rather than alienated by it. That the viewer will have a humane or morally liberal response to the scene can be undermined in the process of implication, the possibility of fascination contributing to a mimetic relationship to the violence depicted. Golub's images are ambiguous, at least in Gigantomachies in stimulating a non-projective, non-imitative participation in the spectacle of suffering and violence. Possibly his immobilization of a violent event can invite a pleasurable identification with it's enactment.

If his depiction of violence is to have a positive effect it should serve to make difficult an acceptance of that violence. But in Gigantomachies we are presented with no villains, no one who has some real point of view or at least some plausible case for us to consider, as Kuspit put's it

"a classless society in which there are no individuals only warring groups" ¹⁷ There are no sides so who are we to commit ourselves to and how are we to work out an alternative or superior course of action? What in fact is the intended effect, when there is no real figure to identify with as victim and consequently no call for responsible action, for sympathy or condemnation? It seems one is not immediatly directed towards forming a judgement, a situation Kuspit refers to as 'a limbo of involvement'. ¹⁸ But what is the nature of this "limbo of involvement?"

This "limbo of involvement" shows him in Nietzsche's terms as a 'tragic artist' accepting even having a "preference for questionable

and terrifying things". For Nietzsche such a preference is a symptom of strength "Pleasure in tragedy characterises strong ages and natures. It is the heroic spirit who says yes to themselves in tragic cruelty".¹⁹

Golub then paints a "Theatre of Cruelty" to use Anton Artaud's term, a spectacle of temptation which tempts the viewer to violence. Kuspit claims by this

"does he realise the assertiveness through which the self integrates its disparate parts, acquiring an elementary sense of significance".²⁰

So his manifestation of violence, his anti-heroic images are a kind of witness to self-discovery that Kuspit sees as of elementary significance. But it would seem that this "Theatre of cruelty" tends towards an undermining of any kind or possibility of equilibrium; It abuses any dignity or possibility of hope as a fraud. Tension is aroused and these frustrated Gigantomachies offer no possibility of control. It's so intensely violent as to be uncontrollable, an invitation to join in the "Theatre of Cruelty" rather than a provocation to moral consciousness. So as an art that is intended to have a responsible social role its intention is uncertain. It takes on the identity of a tyrannical formula which Kuspit sees as "an essential part of Golub's sense of 'the provocation of art' an instrument in search of the 'rawer reality' that science and institutional instability have seemingly divested us of".²¹

But to discover the "rawer reality" and restore it, is a provocation which seems intent on catalysing violence rather than deflating its power. His corrosive and violent technique tends to contribute then to the lack of cohesion rather than the possibility of greater control.

He uncovers the latent violence in society, the anti-heroic image that is for him the contemporary "historic reality". But he does this to such an extent as to eradicate any possible value that can be aspired to. There is no desired alternative hinted at in the work and everything is reduced to the pursuit of power. This seems like a horrible fascination

with violence rather than a condemnation of it, so that his intention in "Gigantomachies" to make domination explicit is difficult to accept as an entirely constructive approach to social criticism.

Peter Fuller's response to Golub's statement,

"These damn paintings get uglier all the time, uglier in human type, uglier in human intention", was

"Is this really to be our perception of human purpose in the coming millenium?".²²

This question becomes significant when the lack of control, order or even a hint of something better is apparent in Golub's art. By showing extreme levels of negativity an art work can signify the potential of certain attitudes and thereby warn against them. However, the barbarity of his images is so overt as to make difficult any possibility of transcendence and it is the only active force in the work. It refuses any pacifying influence, revealing the will to power as the force central to the nature of society in a way that fails to offer an alternative.

Nothing distracts from the continuity of the will to power. No positive emotion or reaction of grief is offered for the viewer to identify with. This can only be understood as a refusal of any humanising diversion from the inhumanity depicted. Kuspit advocates this as an "antidote" to the classical perspective.²³ But this antidote he suggests is problematic and not an obviously constructive influence. The violence is overwhelming and does not offer transcendence of it's cruelty, nor does it direct the viewer in a definite way towards forming a constructive moral judgement. So the pessimism and nihilism it contains is never resolved and tends to block any progression towards a more optimistic outlook. Without an alternative, there remains only the absurdity and violence of the conflict and a futility presides that can scarcely be understood as an antidote. His disbelief then in the possibility of transcendence

(the insufficiency of "utopian ideologies") is difficult to sustain when nothing is offered in its place except an aggressive assertion of dominance that seems to revel in the state of lost control. The primitive will to power could be interpreted from these images as necessary for survival rather than violence as an inhuman activity. This is a depressive, perhaps exaggerated conclusion which makes one doubt the humanity of his art and the social role he intends for it. However, as Kuspit points out "they establish in us a kind of limbo of involvement. Golub's pictures exist in the no-mans-land between abstract theoretical consciousness of the reality of violence, internal as well as external and physical experience of its reality. They disrupt our speculative awareness of violence and demand moral consciousness." ²⁴

It is true that Gigantomachies disrupt speculative awareness of violence, but it is not a moral interpretation of the violent scene. The images confront us with the 'raw-reality of power' implicating the viewer in the struggle and forcing a recognition of ourselves as inseparable from the struggle. But the demand for moral consciousness is ambiguous, and problematic. It could evoke our own aggressive and anti-social tendencies rather than a recognition of the futility of violence.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

- I - Roland Barthes S/Z
translated Richard Miller. N.Y. Hill & Wang p.55 (1977)
- 2 - Leon Golub letter in reply to 'Art & Politics Part II
by Barbara Rose. Artforum 7 no 7 (March 1969)
"Utopian ideoligies wont go. The politics of utopia
wont go either!" "Those art's that began with the
modernist dream of human freedom may find they serve
technological masters and the American empire".
- 3 - Lawrence Alloway : Golub Retrospective Exhibition of
Paintings from 1947 - 73. Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago.
- 4 - This interpretation is expressed by Joseph Dreiss in an
article Leon Golub "Gigantomachies" Pergamon Revisited
Arts Magasine 55 no 9 (May 1981)
"What Golub has done in this work is to remove the
comforting structures of the Hellenic cosmological system.
In this sense he has cut the subject loose any mythic or
religious context and left it free floating in a universe
empty of larger framework of meaning"
- 5 - Ibid: Quoted from Golub's article "Gigantomachies" p 5.
- 6 - Leon Golub - interview with John Hutchinson Circa No. 36
Sept / Oct 1987 p 30 - 35.
"ideologically I focus on what you might call 'evil' behaviour
power, domination, corruption, hostility".
- 7 - The Mercenaries: an interview with Leon Golub: Matthew Baigell.
Arts Magasine Vo. 55 No. 9 May 1981 p 169

- 8 - Any attempt to summarise Nietzsche's ideas of 'the will to power' which is one of his key concepts, will inevitably be incomplete. In Nietzsche's work, the will to power is the primary life source of which sexuality e.g. is only one form of expression. In the Greek games and in Classical form he saw a sublimated form of war. He believed that Greek culture was built upon this combative instinct and that the sublime in classical art is a muted expression of this instinct. He understood the will to power to be a sublimated impulse in every kind of activity, that it is the sole drive in man. Thus it would be sublimated in social ideologies, activities and art, and even transcends morality. It is the will of the ego to dominate, to increase in power and to overcome resistance. This is the chaos, the combative instinct which he understood to underly and exist in tension with the order and harmony of the classical
- 9 - Donald Kuspit : Leon Golub Existential / Activist Painters
 'Measuring the Immeasurable Past : Examples of Primitive Dream Work' p.35
- 10 - cf 2.
- 11 - p.38
- 12 - Nietzsche "Twilight of the Idols" The Anti-Christ essay 'German Foolishness.'
- 13 - Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit - The Forms of Violence
 Page 35. Narrative in Assyrian and Modern Culture.
 "And it does not seem far fetched to say that the lesson is one of affectless violence - of that "non sexual sadism" described in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" which we have suggested, expresses a fantasy of self displacing and

CHAPTER IV

'MERCENARIES AND INTERROGATIONS'

CELEBRATING AND DEMYSTIFYING THE MYTHOLOGIES AND IDEOLOGIES OF WAR;
 CONFUSING THE VOYEURISTIC FASCINATION WITH IMAGES OF VIOLENCE.

There is an obvious transition in Golub's work from the sixties. "Combat" pictures and the 'Gigantomachies' including the "Naphlan" pictures of 1969 to the seventies "activist" ones. Beginning with the "Vietnam" series he initiated a significant change in the subject matter together with a new technique based on photographic source material. The work that followed the "Mercenaries and Interrogations" series of the late seventies and eighties, has generated considerable interest in the art world because it touches on some significant issues relating to the possibilities of painting as a political statement for a contemporary artist. In his use of media imagery combined within the construction of the painting Golub tries to resolve some of the contradictions for him as a political artist, using painting, which is a form of image making entrenched within the romantic, expressionist tradition he seeks to oppose. He cultivates that opposition by continuing to paint and at the same time questioning the relationship between this current practice and with traditional values. This aspect of his later work, together with its direct confrontation of political issues, is regarded as a significant achievement in post-war American painting. His development of a large scale history painting based on photographic source material is seen to have transcended the restrictions of both Modernism and the traditions of social realism. He has developed a synthetic realism capable of engaging the complexity of ideas in current politicised art practice.

" For what Golub has done, based as his painting is on the specificities of the photographic message is replace that photographic - modernist - structuralist critique of the unities of conventional descriptive painting, back into the narrative spaces of the social realist tradition creating a new and richly particularised juncture for the political in contemporary painting" I

This summarises the convergence of ideas that is seen to be resolved in the technique of his media based images. The emergence of structuralist analysis in the sixties and seventies introduced new critical ideas to the debates concerning art and cultural forms of production as ideological practices. This discourse of description and analysis contributed to undermining the authority of Modernism but also the integrity of the social realist tradition. And its contribution to the type of art produced since the sixties which engages political concerns is significant. However a structuralist analysis can be said to be hostile to painting, seeing it as perpetrating the "myth of self-expression".² The type of work "that acted out the discourse of reproduction without originals," (such as that of Sherrie Levine) which "deconstructs the modernist notion of origin"² was presented by critics like Rosalind E. Kraus as the most advanced art. Painting however was seen to have failed in assimilating the advances in theory, and journals such as October, which advanced this type of criticism in America, contributed to the growth of photography as the primary medium through which artists engaged political concerns. The social realist tradition and painting itself had even less attraction to artists and the new media emerged as the favoured medium of politically motivated artists. There is a contradiction then in seeing Golubs paintings as compatible with a structuralist critique. A structuralist critique moves away from the work of art as a place for articulating the artists inner emotions. Its moves away from the idea of the private world of the artist as the origin of the art work, an approach which leaves evidence of the artists presence in the expressionist brushstrokes on canvas. The idea of a unique individual expression is not only devalued but even redundant in a structuralist

critique. And yet Golub's canvases have a raw expressive painterly surface, an expressive quality which would seem antithetical to a structuralist point of view.

In an interview with Jeanne Siegel he asserted the difference between his own art and that of other artists dealing with the media through photography. Though he adopts a similar attitude to the implications of the media in society and asserts also the necessity of an art that reveals "the virtual palpable and structural appearance of the use of force and violence in the mass world",³ he pointed out that, "I have a different take, a pretty damn aggressive one and on the other side of the media scale".⁴ He adopts a similar "photographic-modernist - structuralist" critique, but he reinterprets it through the conventions and materials of painting in a way that is not available to photography. Rather than painting beautiful or self-expressive paintings he deliberately pursues the 'Ugly' in a relationship with media imagery. And rather than a unique image from the mind of a creative genius, he seeks to transform the fragmentary nature of media imagery into the narrative spaces of his paintings. The "origin" of the work of art is presented thus in a different light to traditional art historical thinking. His realms of enquiry and explanation exclude any biographical context or idea of inspiration, anything that would detract from the structure or logic of the work. In this sense he would reject the anti-painting, criticism which describes painting as perpetrating "the myth of self-expression", that "the works surface thought of as existing in relation to its "depth" much the way that the exterior of the human subject is thought to relate to his internal or true self,"⁵

In Golub's realism, the discourse of the painting is the primary object on view. It's literal pictorial dialogue consumes the

actual scenes depicted making it necessary to consider the surface of the painting and the significance of its construction as much as our implication within the scene. The surface then is not fully perceived or understood in relation to its 'depth'. Golub's secondary mimesis that reflects on previous styles and photographic source material unfolds on the surface rather than exclusively in the depth of reference to the actual scenes. His remove from those scenes creates a distance from the subjects and leaves only reflections on previous representations. The description and reporting of these interrogations scenes reflects on previous images already known and experienced in the media. His technique forms a pastiche of these sources which is fused to form the paintings and results in a reading between different copies of reality. Rather than referring directly to the referent i.e. the actual scenes of interrogation etc. the paintings refer to other codes of reference. For this reason, the "secondary mimesis" that Barthes wrote of can be seen in operation in Golub's paintings which combine and transform diverse codes at work in society.⁶ He uses the language of media imagery, the vastness of that information source as a starting point for his painted image. That aspect of his work is interpreted as the bridge between the traditions of painting and the proliferation of the new media which is argued to have made traditional painting redundant. So while Greenberg saw the practice of painting as being threatened by the monopoly of capitalism, advertising, mass reproduction and the process of the media, the integration of painting and media imagery in Golub's art might be seen as a compromise or intelligent dialogue which preserves the specific practice of painting while integrating it with an attitude to and use of the information and process of the media.

The emergence of structuralist criticism highlighted also

the attack on the social realist tradition as aesthetically and cognitively inadequate, failing to reveal the complexity of forces in operation in society. With Golub the critical edge to his synthetic realism based on media imagery is its success in relation to the depiction of the complexity of those forces and the corresponding sophistication of its treatment in visual form. The images demand even in their ugliness to be read in a consciously critical frame of mind. Golub explained to Peter Fuller that he was trying to paint "the virtual palpable and structural appearances of the use of force and violence in the mass world", and Fuller remarked "For him this was as much a matter of technique as of imagery, he tried to paint in an 'up front' way which reflected the technological imperative of media and eschewed any hint or trace of belle peinture."⁷

So in addition to rejecting any notion of self expression, his paintings point towards the forces and conflicts that determine the way things appear in society, an approach that reflects the ideas of Althusser who is central to the development of structuralist ideas. "For Althusser to study ideology was to study the structure and operation of a system: the modes of combination and disposition of those apparatuses of family, law, politics, labour, communication, culture and education which represent the form in which the ideology of the ruling classes must necessarily be realised."⁸

Golub's paintings of world leaders, Mercenaries and Interrogations scenes are a kind of reportage on the operations of power as it is manifested through the individual and society. He looks at the form (the violence) in which ideologies are manifested and he reveals those conflicts of power and domination, the violence of his figures, as ideologically motivated acts. Thus his dialogue on the will to power focuses on the concealed relations of power in society, the

ideological structures (in Althusser's sense) which determine social relations (a point I will elaborate on later). This dialogue which is established in *Gigantomachies* revolves more around the individual but in the work of the seventies and eighties beginning with the "Vietnam" series his attention shifts to society and his social criticism with its ideological interpretation of power and violence becomes more obvious.

With the new work Golub makes explicit what is implicit previously. A distinction is made between the aggressors and the victims, those with power and arms and those without. Here instead of the seemingly meaningless conflict of *Gigantomachies*, the injustice of violence is seen in the contrast between American soldiers and Asian civilians. This brings together both the agents and agencies of power and their victims. As a result our attention is drawn to the consequences of violence as opposed to the continuity of violence in *Gigantomachies*. The confrontation this forces upon the American public in particular is in its revelation of the injustices and corruption of American imperialism. But in more general terms it refers to 'the will to power' operating in society and its structures, extending the dialogue of *Gigantomachies* into a more direct social criticism. Lawrence Alloway describes this as the antithesis of a painting like *Baron Gros Napoleon in the Penthouse at Jaffe*.

"Golub, picks up the detailed scenario of a picture like *Baron Gros Napoleon in the Penthouse at Jaffe*, in which realistic victims show by contrast Napoleonic heroism and composure, but reverses the values. The Assassins are based on a view of American imperialism as vacant of justice" 9

This is Golub's "anti-history painting," the antithesis of the grand public art of History painting. Rather than an art which represents the desired image of the state Golub provides an image of the way in which the public image of power conceals the nature of its real operations and relations. His process of demystifying the operations of power, is directed in this instance at the supposed opposites of institutionalised power, the mercenaries etc. What becomes obvious is their necessary dependance upon the institutionalisation of power; they are the perverted for of social and political relations as it operates on the fringe of society. In their activities he narrates the relations of power in society and the contradictions of its appearance. In 'Mercenaries' and 'Interrogations' etc. an encounter with the violent scene requires of the viewer that we reassess our understanding of the abuse of power in society. He points to the ability of those in power, particularly governmental, to obscure the injustice of their use of power. And he does this by directing our attention to the operation of governmental policy upon the minorities in society.

Politically justified violence is considered not to be unnecessary violence at all and the term is used only for injustices that are denied political significance or are represented as possessing the wrong kind. On the other hand the military and the police, because of their position in relation to the state, are justified morally, and therefore are not represented as undesirable organisations at all. So violence in the service of the holders of power can be represented in a positive light. However, what Golub tries to expose is that the machinery of power is never neutral, not necessarily justified in its use of power but rather, can make excessive injustices in "the will to power" over others. 'The will to power' beginning with the

'Vietnam' series, is seen to operate in society at large.

So with "Mercenaries" etc. he shows that the order and structures of power in America, can be seen as part of the machinery of oppression, and this is the hypocrisy of the American government he depicts, (in "Mercenaries" etc.) the activities of American forces in South America. In this way he dramatises the point that there is no such thing as non-political positions where organisations and attitudes adopted towards them are concerned. He forces a questioning of the right behaviour of American foreign policies and military strength. In this respect, these images are not the neutral violence of Gigantomachies: By drawing a connection between the oppressors (uniforms etc.) and the military or Governmental policy, he identifies a reason behind the use of violence, the violence is in the service of certain interests in society. An observation by Freud (1932) is relevant here.

"Thus we see that right is the might of a community. It is still violence ready to be directed against any individual who resists it; it works by the same methods and follows the same purposes. The only real difference lies in the fact that what prevails is no longer the violence of an individual but that of a community".¹⁰

In Golub's art, violence is purely a struggle for power. We begin to see that violence is not always where we say injustices are performed, it can be in the service of legitimate structures. So he shows that

"Far from being mindless, violence is usually the cutting edge of ideas and ideologies".¹¹

The social criticism of his art becomes more apparent as he begins to objectify in this way the more subjective dialogue of "Gigantomachies".

In this process of objectifying his dialogue on power in society he redirects the viewer into actual locations and conflicts

like those in Africa. Rather than the ambiguity and decontextualised violence of 'Gigantomachies' this is an attempt to extend the possible readings of the narrative, to give it a location within a social and historical context. Thus he moves away even further from the notion of artistic auteurship from the artist as the sole repository of meaning in the work. The structuralist criticism of the 'origin' of the work of art, as in the writing of Rosalind Krauss is uneasily applied to Golub's paintings because he has developed a kind of reporting of events, though not to the exclusion of emotional involvement.

"I'm painting what I think of as a tough reportage. I see myself as some kind of reporter - which does not mean that emotion doesn't have a place."¹² The contradiction in seeing his art as presenting a structural analysis of the operations of power in society is apparent again in this uneasy relationship between his art as a form of reportage and it's obvious emotional involvement. This is particularly evident when contrasted with Kuspit's interpretation of it as "authentic expressionism".

"Golub's activist pictures are not simply war pictures, but concern the sadomasochistic interaction between alien groups of people. (The sadomasochistic moment I think, is inseparable from authentic expressionism, which is self tortured art at it's most dramatic."¹³

This would seem to mystify the work of the artist, seeing it also as an expression of self torture rather than purely a witness to the sadomasochistic relations between people in violent situations.

But despite the emotional content or power of the work he doesn't give priority to the humanistic over the political and ideological. Any expressive painterly qualities or gruesome aspects of the work that would give it a kind of expressionist aura are employed to provoke the spectators response to their implicated presence within the scenes to the reality of power in it's demystified ugliness. To this end every aspect of the work is intended to contribute to the process of demystification,

so that any evidence of the presence of the artist (as in expressionist brushstrokes on canvas) is avoided in his technique. Anything that would sentimentalise the work as that of the individual artist in conflict with society is avoided. This is again Golub's anti-idealism in refusing a view of the artist and his political agitation as a conflict between the individual and society, a stance which would reveal the nature of the relationship as a simple contradiction of unfreedom. This might infuse the work with an idealised historicism which would negate it's 'critical realism' and it's possibility of political and ideological effectivity. This criticism is often applied to the social realist tradition.

"The social realist tradition with it's 'Humanism of the face' and stereotypical virtues and miseries, may have offered us recognition of our infreedom but not the knowledge of it's laws. The troublesome fictiveness of painting had a hard time picturing these complex relations which govern appearances." 14

This criticism refers to the tendency of the social realist tradition to assume that the correct epistemology would produce a significant art. Golub works instead to reveal the contradictions of his practice and to create an anti-ideal image which reveals the complex relations the ideological structures which determine social relations. This might explain his anti- "Utopian ideologies" stance. His materialist critique avoids images which represent Utopian social values preferring instead an uncompromising realism which reveals the concealed relations that ideology operates through. Thus he never gives the historical image any 'futurist resonance'. He concentrates instead on narrativising the consequences of oppressive power, the victims of institutionalised violence and on exposing those power relations as ideologically motivated acts. Though this may have been the same intention in 'Gigantomachies' it is more intelligible and explicit in the work beginning with the 'Vietnam' series. His treatment of violence changed then from a very ambiguous and possible disruptive technique to a more intelligible social

criticism of power relations.

The process of referencing employed in these later paintings works in a similar way to Gigantomachies. Again the dialogue is not self-evident, it doesn't work in a direct one to one correspondence. However, he talks of objectifying the discourse of power in this work, and they are more objective in that a difference is established between victims and oppressors identified through wounds, uniforms, weapons, ethnic and racial identities.

"Over the years I have tried to objectify the nature of my work and these images are intended to be as objective as possible. What does this mean? Objective refers to reality, to what is, to what occurs." 15

Yet his manipulation of existing cultural forms and particularly in this work a complex use of photographic references involves again a concealed latent content, a critical reworking of existing representations which is essential to any interpretation. Consequently the obvious subject of these images seen in the level of description conceals a submerged plot. Instead of an obvious opposition to the scenes of violence, he plays on the voyeuristic in our response to representations of violence. This ambiguous play with the viewers position as voyeur seeks both to conceal and reveal the relations of power. The intention is to retain this uneasy relationship between the viewer and the representation of violence despite the tendency of the media and success within the art world to diffuse and reverse the oppositional nature of images. So despite his intention to objectify in the work he retains a certain ambiguity in the hope of preserving the impact of the images.

This ambiguity is problematic in "Gigantomachies", the viewer's response and implication within the scene is not immediately directed towards a judgement. A possible resolution of this question of intent which John Bird applies to 'Mercenaries and Interrogations'

"As narratives they nevertheless resist any tendency towards resolution simultaneously connoting the mythologising of war in order to then demystify that celebration by their specificity: they are fundamentally contradictory." I6

While *Gigantomachies* was contradictory in this way, the later work seems to challenge more directly the viewers position as voyeur. It's specificity and frustration of a voyeuristic response, despite it's contradictions is more engaging than the fragile techniques employed in '*Gigantomachies*' to challenge our neutrality as passive consumers of images. Like *Gigantomachies* the same techniques apply so that we are unable to escape the violence of the image. Nothing distracts from the violence of the scene and the absence of perspectival space forces our gaze to shift from one figure to another. However, unlike '*Gigantomachies*' Golub introduces as for example in *Interrogations II*, a device similarly found in Manet's *Olympia* whereby there is an explicit acknowledgement of the presence of the viewer. This introduces a kind of play which contributes to a disruption of the voyeuristic controlling gaze. The paintings address themselves directly to the viewer, confronting and threatening our behaviour as consumers of representations. This confrontation arises in the ambiguity of our implication within the scene, an ambiguity which functions equally in Manet's '*Olympia*'. As T.J. Clark describes it

"What it contrives is stalemate, a kind of baulked invitation in which the spectator is given no established place for viewing and identification, nor offered the tokens of exclusion and resistance. This is done most patently, I suppose by the woman's gaze". I7

So the pleasure we might take in these scenes of violence and the aesthetic of Golub's paintings is made problematic and one discovers instead an "inconsistent response where the spectator is offered neither access nor exclusion." He sets up the relations of dominator/dominated,

fantisier /fantisied and frustrates the viewers role within these relations. This operates through the blatant relationship he establishes within these scenes to previous forms of representation. Their point of reference apart from images of violence in the media is in reference to pornographic imagery and it's processes of objectification and voyeurism. He reproduces the rhetoric of the body and violence found in sadomasochistic publication which are one of his sources. But this intimacy, framing and 'up front' presentation of violence is contradicted in Golub's images frustrating and bringing into question the viewers response through those devices. Thus he injects the question of collaboration into the unmediated flow of media imagery, particularly in respect to images of domination and violence, making explicit their motivation as economic, political and ideological practices. He confronts the viewer, unsettling them as consumers and spectators and implicating them as collaborators.

"Media rather casually continually reinforces awareness of what one would rather ignore or repress. To what extent do we complete the painting (of an interrogation or riot for example) by our complicity, our voyeuristic shock, our response to the invitation (to join in) of the painting? What kind of welcome is offered by the "actors" in the paintings drama, that is, to what extent do we accept the scene as natural how power is used and rationalised". 18

This uncertainty provokes a reaction and ultimately the necessity of judgement. It draws attention not only to the specific interest of American imperialism, but also to the production of images in the media and the relationship of the viewer to the flow of reproduced images.

So, in "Mercenaries" and "Interrogations" the ugliness and violence of the statement can be seen to engage the tendency of

the media to make the images and violence he depicts into a consumable and acceptable object, excluding the necessity of judgement. The ugliness he transforms the media image through and the frustration of a voyeuristic response is an effort to thwart this process whereby the media makes acceptability through consumerism an unconscious almost involuntary activity. To achieve this he reproduces the rhetoric of media imagery i.e. the "up front" use of pictorial techniques. He leaves the structures of media processes intact but he blocks reference along the terms in which the normal recognitions are enacted. The eye contact, as T.J. Clark describes it in Manet's "Olympia" is the device he uses for interrupting the two processes of voyeurism and a narcissistic identification with an imaginary self projected into the activity. Thus looking at these images can no longer be a neutral process. The contradiction of looking in on the scene and being looked back at by its protagonists causes the viewer to move between voyeurism and alienation. Any possibility of pleasure that these paintings might incite is troubled by these deliberately confusing internally and externally directed gazes. Thus in Interrogations II (1981) the two figures on the right stare out of the picture at us with an invitation to identify with and participate in their enjoyment of the torture. The voyeuristic fascination that is made available is simultaneously subverted as we become aware of the subjects position in the relations of power. This concealed criticism which emerges suggests also the pleasures involved as masculine ones. The pornographic fetishistic mode of representation implies that the spectator is made. Thus the dialogue of perverted power relations revealing the reality of American Imperialism questions also the construction of masculinity as a factor in the conflicts between dominator and dominated in society

In the work following Gigantomachias Golub's attention to detail and his contextualising of violence brings a greater

control to the violence he depicts. The protest of his art, it's social criticism is quiet clear e.g. the soldiers in the 'Vietnam' series wear American uniforms and the latin American pictures have a specific political concern. So as a form of reportage, their intended purpose as protest is clear and their function as a critique of power abuse is not obscured. However, Kuspit's analysis again points towards a more negative interpretation.

"Golub's art will have lasting appeal because it ends society's limitation of aggression (if only artistically). The work returns the aggressive pursuit of power to the individual". 19

Though it is true that these figures like the Gigantomachies offer little control or resistance to the violence, the contextualizing of their actions in respect to particular political concerns forces an interpretation of these scenes as incidents of power abuse and the perversion of the will to power in society. While it might appear from his aesthetic of aggression that he seeks to return the aggressive pursuit of power to the individual it is impossible to ignore an equally apparent questioning and frustrating of that invitation to violence. This intention might not be obvious but only because these paintings do not moralise in an 'up front' manner. While the presentation of violence might be 'up front' and ugly, the underlying intent is not necessarily equally ugly. To make his point he may have adopted an aesthetics of power but only as a necessary function of his critical engagement of the relations of power as it operates both in society and the individual.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4

- I - Leon Golub - Exhibition Catalogue Orchard Gallery - John Roberts.
- 2 - "The Origin of the Work of Art and Other Modernists Myths" Rosalind E. Krauss.
- 3 - Jeanne Siegel "Leon Golub / Hans Haacke : What Makes Art Political?"
- 4 - Interview with Jeanne Siegel. Ibid. Arts Magazine 58 no 3 (April 84)
- 5 - Rosalind E. Krauss.
- 6 - Roland Barthes S/Z trans. Richard Miller. N.Y. Hill & Wang p. 55 (1977)
- 7 - The Avant Garde Again Peter Fuller. Flash Art
- 8 - Introduction to 'Modernism Criticism Realism'
- 9 - Lawrence Alloway: Leon Golub Arts & Politics " Artforum" 13 no 2 (Oct 1974) 66 - 71
- 10 - ("Why War" exchange with Albert Einstein, September 1932) in The Standard Edition of the complete Psychological Writings of Sigmund Freud. (London Hogarth Press and the institute of psychoanalysis 1964)
- 11 - 'Violence in the Arts' John Fraser
- 12 - Circa - Interview with John Hutchinson
- 13 - P. 75 Leon Golub - Existential /Activist Painter - Donald Kuspit
- 14 - John Roberts. Leon Golub (exhibition catalog) Orchard Gallery
- 15 - John Bird - Leon Golub 'Fragments of Public Vision'
Leon Golub, Mercenaries and Interrogations (exhibition catalogue) London: Institute of Contemporary Arts 1982.
- 16 - John Bird.
- 17 - 'Towards a possible treatment of Manet's Olympia' T.J Clark.
Source - 'Modern Art and Modernism' A Critical Anthology

- I8 - Interview Matthew Baigell - "The Mercenaries"
An interview with Leon Golub, Arts Magazine 55 no 9
(May 1981) I67 I69.
- I9 - Kuspit - "Leon Golub - Existential - Activist
Painter" P. 87.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The impact of Golub's art is only effective now, having been obscured by the changing attitudes of New York's international styles for almost two decades. The history of post-war American art, always open for discussion, is certain now to feature Golub's endeavour with more significance than had previously been assigned to it. Golub didn't fit into the progression of the main stream during the fifties and sixties. He was never concerned with formal innovation or anything connected with Abstract Expressionism. His text 'A Critique of Abstract Expressionism' established his oppositional stance in a very definite and hostile way. As I have tried to show, his commitment to a social and historical approach to art and its function as visual ideology led him to develop a very different art which could not be adopted as an instrument within the ideology of Imperial America. He consistently attacks post-war American art for failing to engage its very problem and the primary function of his own art has been to confront this particular issue in a calculated and engaging manner.

His paradoxical use of the fragment sculpture of the Greek and Roman empires provided him with powerful symbols with which to address these issues. His photographically based images extend what is essentially the same dialogue, giving it a contemporary and more specific interest. So having defined his position, he systematically and effectively set about creating a body of work which would correct the mistakes (as he understands it) of post-war art in America.

He felt this necessary because despite that art's claim to aesthetic and ethical "purity" placing it beyond its historical conditions, it would ultimately end up accepting uncritically the existing ideology of imperial America. And so, he attacked the idea of the dis-affiliated artist exposing its inherent contradictions. However, his

own position is not without contradictions and contradictions which are not unrelated to those which he associates with post-war American art. The oppositional nature of his own art is curiously vulnerable to a similar kind of criticism to that which he applies to post-war art in America. This is forcibly expressed by Peter Fuller where he writes of Golub's paintings.

"Understandably, they also appeal to Charles Saatchi, who, as an advertising agent employed by the Tory Party among others was particularly well placed to appreciate Golub's 'up front' use of pictorial techniques. Along with a great many other 'implacable' paintings by Golub, Interrogations II in all it's ugliness, is now housed in the Saatch Collection in London's Boundary Road.

As far as I can see 'forced insertion' was hardly necessary for all the fashionable venues are falling over each other to throw themselves open for Golub's anaesthetic mercenaries and interrogators." I

As an artist whose art performed the role almost of a subversive his acceptance within the institutions of art creates an uncomfortable environment for his work. From Peter Fullers account, Golub's art seems to be implicated in some kind of ugly conspiracy and the oppositional nature of his work is blunted by it's demand and popularity on the international art circuit. This would seem to suggest that his art could be presented as Official American Art, as Abstract Expressionism once was.

However, perhaps the greatest difference between the Abstract Expressionist and Golub is that they tried to endow their work with some kind of Utopian meaning whereas Golub is anti-ideal, confronting directly the issues of American imperialism. So while Golub's art only takes on meaning when presented through the bourgeois capitalistic art

world (with all the accompanying contradictions for his art) It's unrelenting anti-idealism and barbaric realism would seem to block appropriation. Golub has never tried to transcend the art world and develops his art in order to operate effectively within it. This again is his commitment to reveal the intrests behind visual representation, to use his art as a challange to the interests of imperialism and colonialism.

Golub's art is consistently aggressive and confrontational. This confrontation of issues is what he demands of art, and because of his works explicit antagonism to imperialism etc. he has said "I would claim that my work, for example, cannot be totally appropriated by the art world. The nature of my work - it will not be caged! I insist that the work jumps it's surrounds. I have tried to make my work unwanted. I want it both ways. I want the work known to sell it and live off it. But at the same time, I want the work to be unendurable to block appropriation ".²

It would seem that he does have that position. Although his work may hang in the Saatchi Collection, it's aggressive control over political issues, power and domination makes it less vulnerable to manipulation. His aesthetic of aggression despite it's problematic nature is finally understand to be a necessary aspect of Golub's art rather than an excess. It preserves the oppositional nature of his work so that his statement is not blunted. Thus, the nature of Golub's art as a kind of reportage on the injustices of power abuse and the perversion of the will to power in society asserts itself most strongly. Any interpretation which would question the aggressive and pessimistic qualities of his work must ultimately acknowledge this.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

- I - Peter Fuller: The Avant Garde Again
The Post Avant Garde, Painting in the Eighties
Art and Design 1987
- 2 - Matthew Baigell: The Mercenaries An interview with Leon Golub
Arts Magazine 55 no 9 (May 1981) 167 - 69
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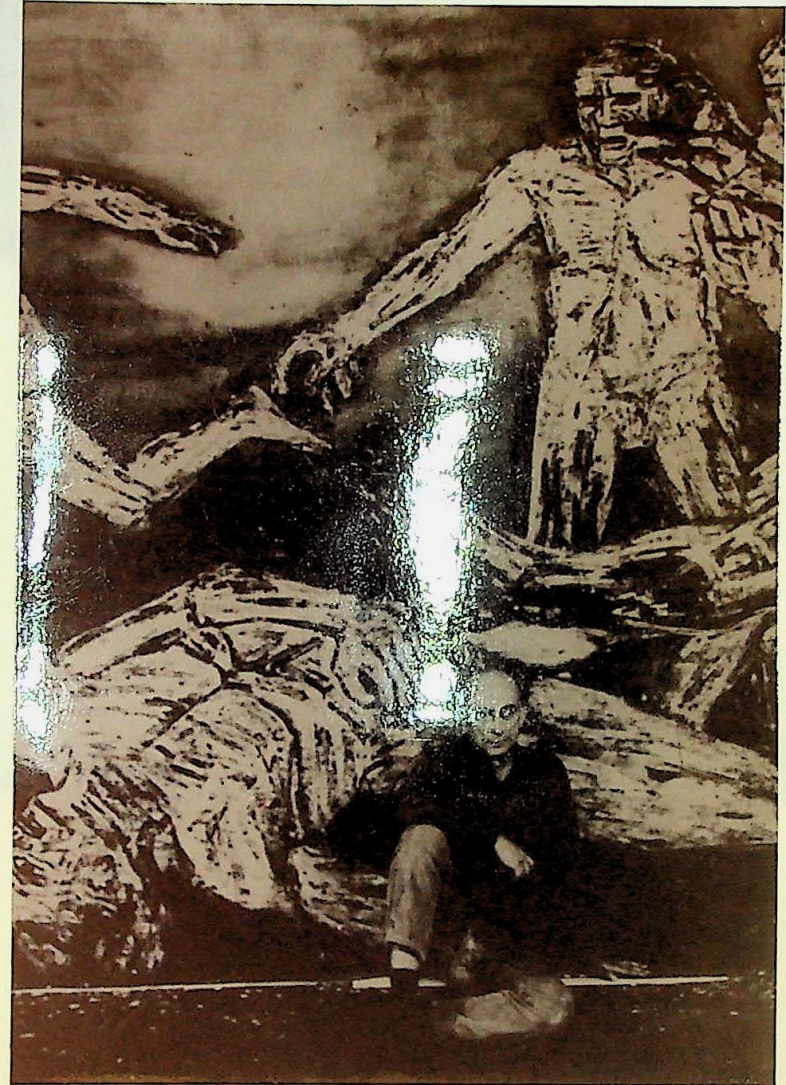
APPENDIX

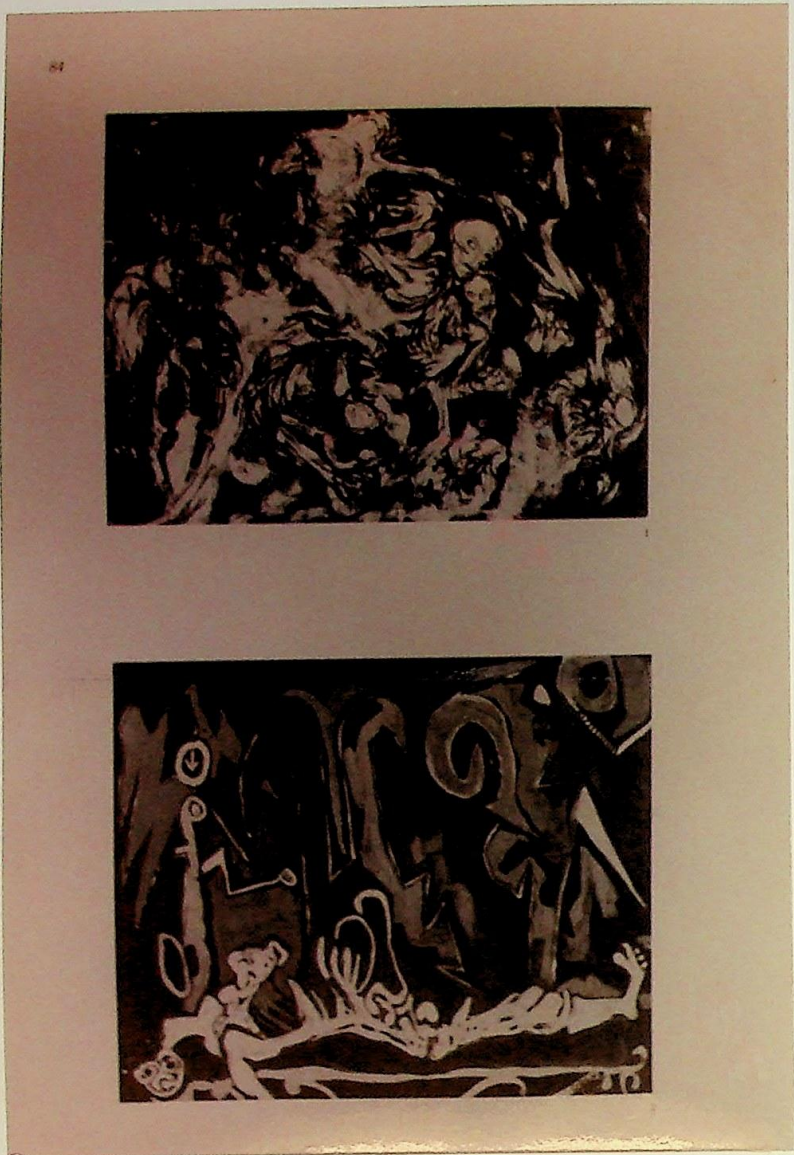
When Leon Golub and Nancy Spero had an exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery (in Dublin Feb/March 1988) I talked to Golub about some of the issues I have engaged in this theses. The most important point we discussed was in relation to the possible effect of his aesthetic of aggression. He told me that his intention is to protest against violence and yet he admitted that in doing this there is necessarily a certain enjoyment of violence in painting the image. This is because, as he paints, he enters the positions of victimiser, victimised, painter and viewer. He also said that although these images should make people repulsed by the spectacle of violence, he has no control over some people enjoying the violence of the images and perhaps even buying them for that reason. Despite his intention to make the violence he depicts unacceptable he is nevertheless aware of the possibility of the paintings having the opposite effect for some people. I explored this question at length and it was one of the more important aspects of the thesis. From the conversation with Golub, I am satisfied that the nature of the argument and the conclusions I arrived at are quite valid.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I922	-	Born January 23, Chicago, Illinois.
I934 - 35	-	WPA art classes
I938 - 40	-	Attends Wright Junior College, Chicago
I940	-	Scholarship to University of Chicago
I942	-	B. A. Art History
I942 - 46	-	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Cartographer, England, Belgium and Germany.
I946 - 50	-	Attends The School of Art Institute of Chicago
I950	-	Chairman "Exhibition Momentum" First Solo Exhibition, Contemporary Gallery, Chicago. Starts teaching at Wright Junior College (to I955)
I951	-	Marries Nancy Spero
I952	-	George Wittenborn & Co., first solo exhibition (Lithographs) New York
I953	-	Starts teaching at University College, North Western University, Chicago. Begins <u>Birth</u> and <u>In-self</u> series
I954	-	Artists Gallery, first solo exhibition in New York Begins <u>Burnt Man</u> and <u>Sphinx</u> series.
I955	-	Alan Frankin Gallery, Chicago, solo exhibitions I955 -64.
I956	-	Pasadena Art Museum, first solo exhibition - California.
I956 - 57	-	Paints on the island of Ischia and in Florence, Italy.
I957	-	I. C. A. London, first solo European exhibition. Begins <u>Athletes</u> and <u>Philosophers</u> series.
I957 - 59	-	Teaches at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.
I958	-	Begins colossal hands.
I959	-	"New Images of Man" Museum of Modern Art, New York
I959 - 64	-	Golub and Spero paint in Paris

- 1960 - Centre Culturel Americain, first solo exhibition in Paris. Begins second "Burnt Man" series.
- 1962 - Begins Combat series
- 1964 - Golub and Spero returns to New York
First retrospective exhibition. Tyler School of Fine Art. Temple University Philadelphia.
- 1965 - Begins Gigantomachies series
- 1969 - Begins Naphlam series.
- 1970 - present
Teaches at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
- 1970 - 71 - National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, solo exhibition.
- 1972 - Begins Vietnam series
- 1974 - Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, retrospective exhibition (the New York Cultural Centre 1975).
- 1976 - Completes first Mercenaries painting.
- 1976 - 79 - Paints political portraits
- 1982 - Susan Caldwell Gallery, first solo gallery show in New York in 20 years.
- 1984 - 85 - Travelling Retrospective organised by New Museum of Contemporary art, New York.
- 1988 - Leon Golub and Nancy Spero exhibit in Ireland
The Orchard Gallery, Derry.
The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.





2

3



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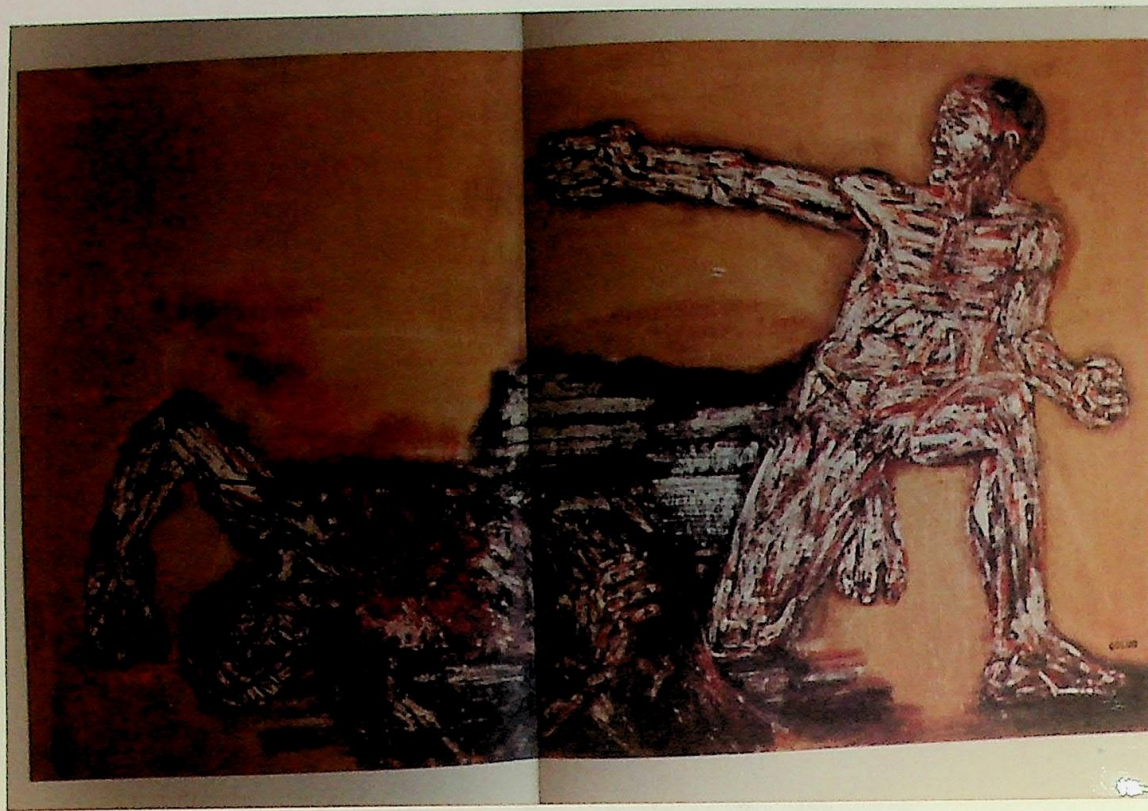
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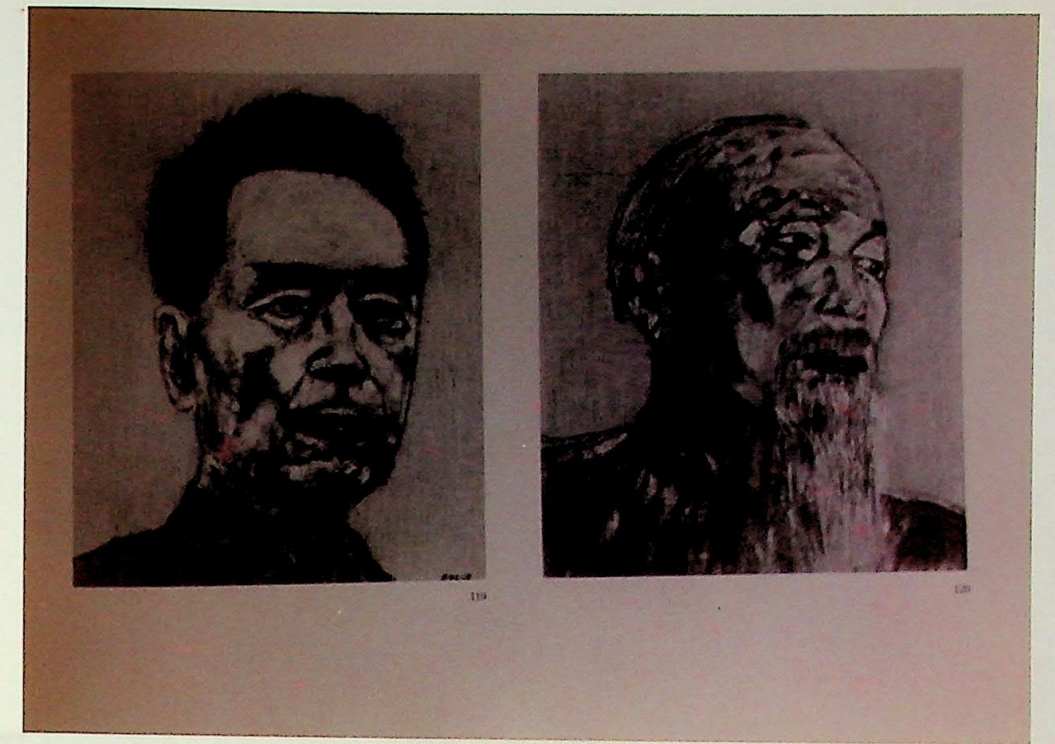
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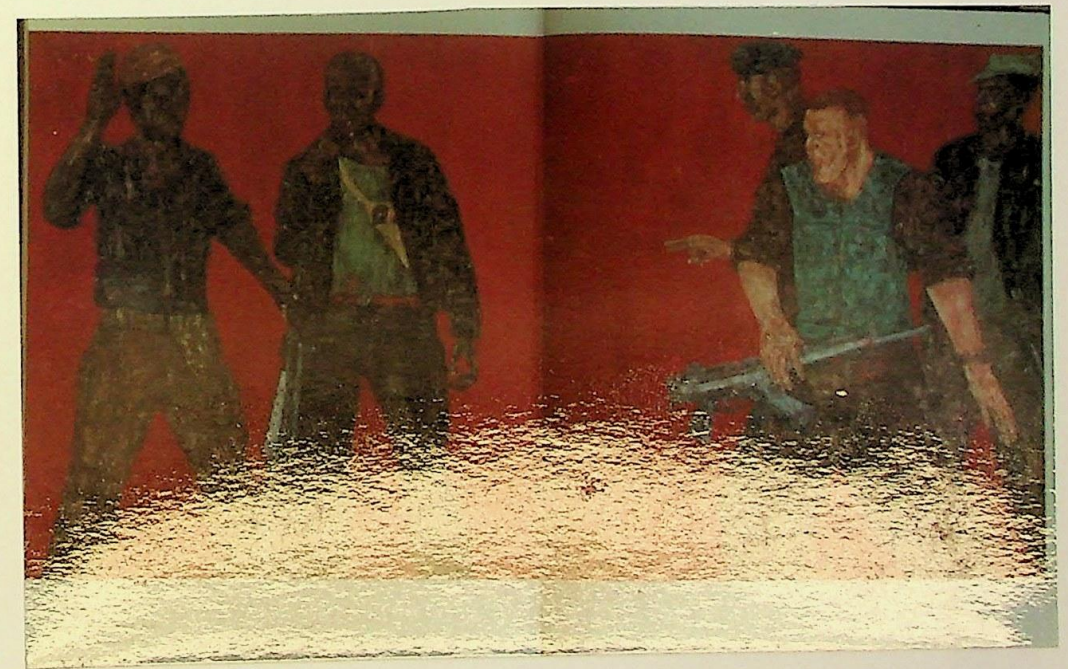
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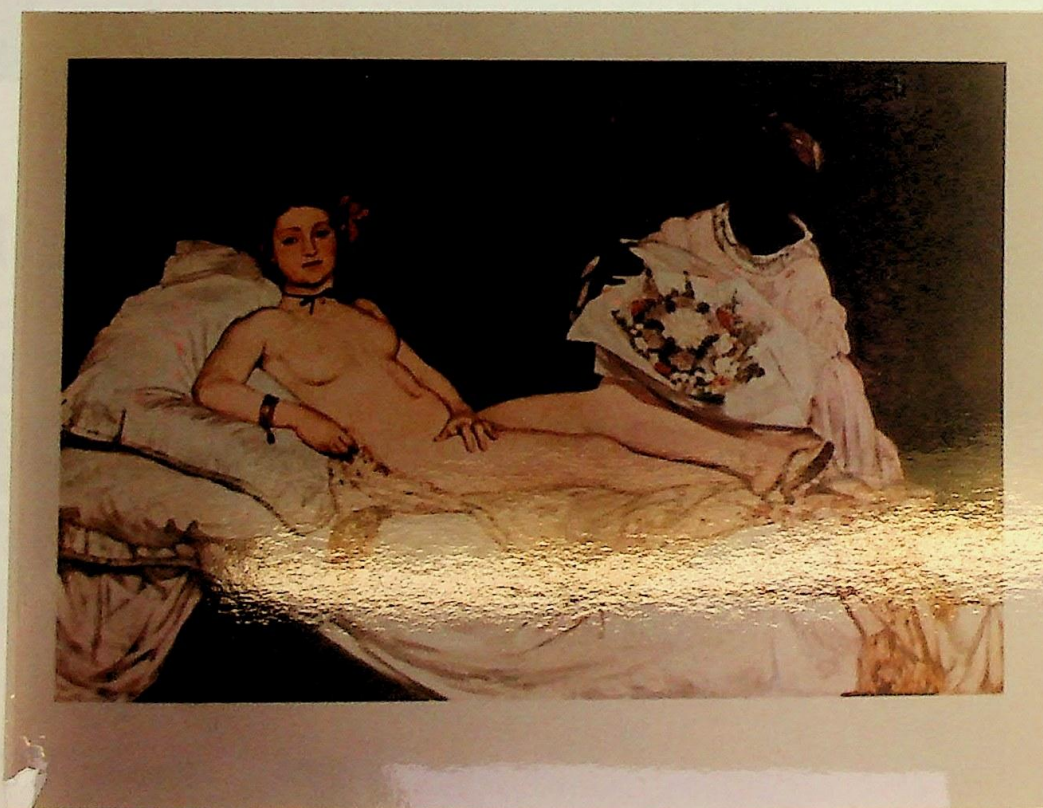
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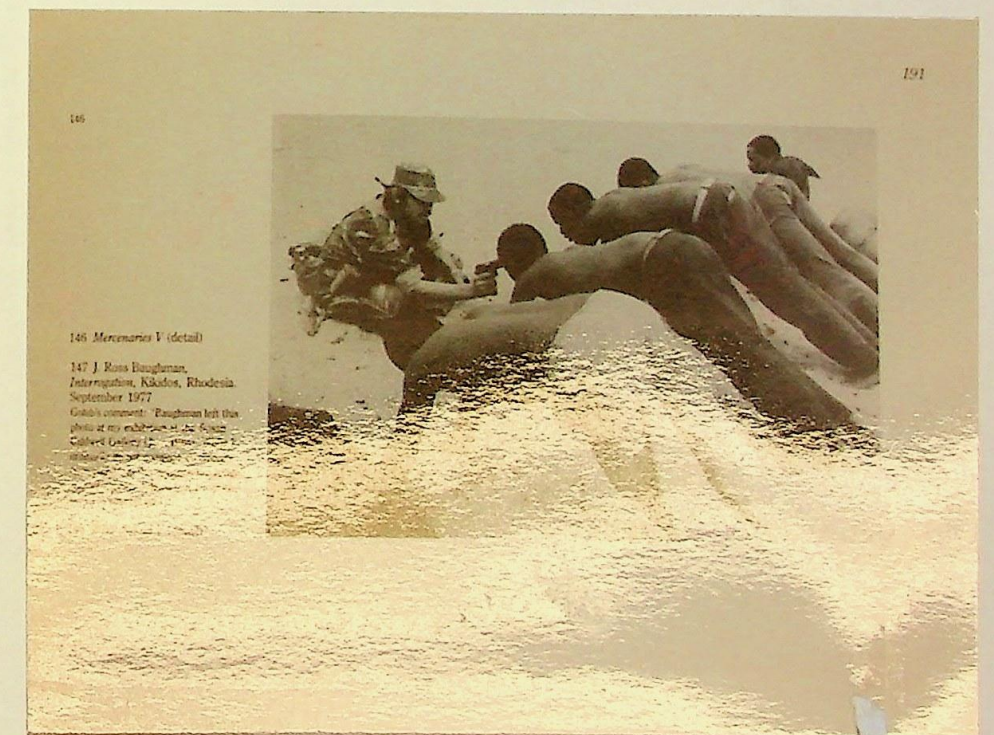
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I2



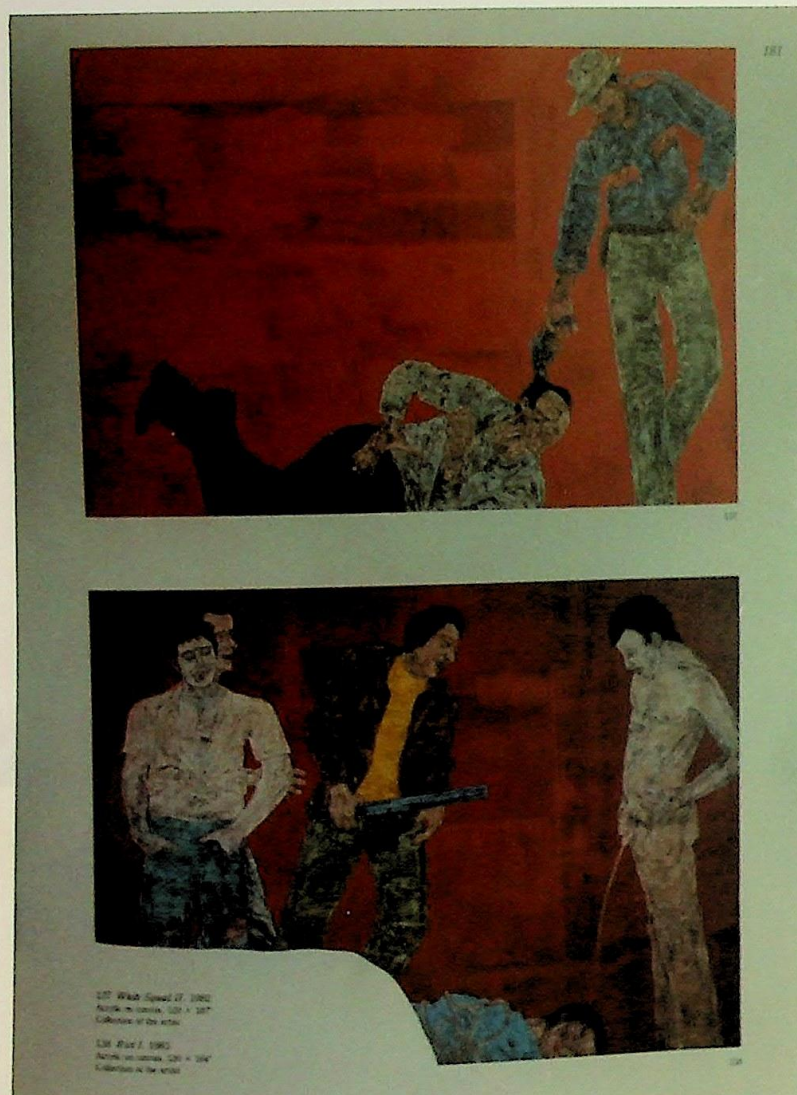
I3



I4

LIST OF ILLUSTRATION:

- | | | | | |
|----|---|---|------------------|--|
| I | - | Colub in studio with Gigantomachies III | | |
| 2 | - | Charnel House 1946 | 15 x 17" | |
| 3 | - | Evisceration Chamber, 1946 | 12½ x 15½" | |
| 4 | - | Belvedere Torso & Thwarted 1953 | 47 x 31" | |
| 5 | - | Gigantomachies I | 1965 120 x 233" | |
| 6 | - | Gigantomachies III | 1966 109 x 216" | |
| 7 | - | Napalam I | 1969 120 x 192" | |
| 8 | - | Vietnam I | 1972 120 x 336" | |
| 9 | - | Chou En Lai | 1966/77 22 x 17" | |
| 10 | - | Mercenaries IV | 1980 120 x 230" | |
| 11 | - | Interrogation II | 1981 120 x 168" | |
| 12 | - | Olympia Manet | | |
| 13 | - | Mercenaries V 1984 | 120 x 172" | |
| 14 | - | Source for Mercenaries V | | |
| 15 | - | White Squad II | 1982 120 x 137" | |
| 16 | - | Riot I | 1983 120 x 164" | |



I5

I6

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