

our struggle cannot be hung on walls

Black Mask was an anarchist group formed in downtown New York City in 1966. They created numerous public disturbances, many which focused on disrupting venues of arts and culture. In November 1966 they made an attempt to shut down the MoMA, and published their first of many leaflet papers regarding the action. An excerpt from which reads:

A new spirit is rising. Like the Streets of Watts we burn with revolution. We assault your Gods... We sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS... our struggle cannot be hung on walls. Let the past fall under the blows of revolt. The guerilla, the blacks, the men of the future, we are all at your heels. Goddamn your culture, your science, your art. What purpose do they serve? Your mass-murder cannot be concealed. The industrialist, the banker, the bourgeoisie, with their unlimited pretence and vulgarity, continue to stockpile art while they slaughter humanity. Your lie has failed. The world is rising against your oppression. There are men at the gates seeking a new world. The machine, the rocket, the conquering of space and time, these are the seeds of the future which, freed from your barbarism, will carry us forward. We are ready... LET THE STRUGGLE BEGIN.

On Monday, October 10 at 2:30pm, we will close the Museum of Modern Art. This symbolic action is taken at a time when America is on a path of total destruction, and signals the opening of another front in the world-wide struggle against suppression. We seek a total revolution, cultural, as well as social and political - LET THE STRUGGLE BEGIN.

A number of copies were also sent via mail. In response Black Mask received, and responded to the following letter:

Dear Friends,

(...)

Thanks for sending the stuff. But why oh why the museums??? If you want to assault the gods, attack the religion; if you want to end the slaughter, attack the war machine; if you oppose oppression, attack the state. Or is it really only the pretence and vulgarity – not the power – of the bourgeoisie that bugs you? If so, it's not enough to build a revolution on. The man-power it takes to overthrow a system won't come from the small minority of us that are concerned with culture; it'll come from the mass oppressed by power. And most of them don't give a damn whether the Museum of Modern Art is open or closed, or whether it exists at all; Their problems are much more vital, like whether they're going to die in Vietnam or from a cop's bullet in the back (...)

Love,

Louise Crowley

Dear Louise,

(...)

As creative men, we say "destroy the museums" yet we are no more interested in closing the Modern Art than your are, it is instead symbolic to us of the total suppression of men. Why does

the ghetto dweller attack the slumlord instead of the more powerful bankers behind them or the capitalist system itself? Because a man strikes at that which directly confronts him. We don't question this action, yet as revolutionaries we hope it is taken with knowledge of the total picture or that it will at least lead to a deeper understanding. Yet you question us, as creative men, for attacking the museums (...)

I assume that you question the relevance of a cultural revolution as part of a wider revolution. The fact that you think only a small minority is concerned with culture is part of a basic misconception, which equates culture with western-bourgeois culture. The Vietnamese are fighting against the destruction of their culture as well as their land. The African revolutionaries have always been concerned with the preservation of their culture in the face of colonialism. And in this country the black man is becoming more aware of his culture, among others, the birth of jazz being no mean achievement. As well as th Mexican, Puerto Rican and Indian seeking to preserve theirs.

Obviously none of these people are concerned with museums, but neither are we (other than seeing them destroyed). They are involved with a living culture which is what we hope to see rise throughout America, a living culture which comes from the creative spirit of man. With this we can change the stultifying classrooms, the inhuman city, the concept of work when it is unnecessary and everything else which is crushing life instead of allowing it to grow fully. This cannot be achieved without revolution, but neither can it be achieved without the creative force. Sure: Close the warplants or the pentagon or city hall or the precinct station - but don't stop there, let their culture fall too.

In a 2006 interview, Black Mask founder Ben Morea further describes the action against the museum,

We felt that art itself, the creative effort, was an obviously worthwhile, valuable and even spiritual experience. The Museum and gallery system separated art from that living interchange and had nothing to do with the vital, creative urge. Museums weren't a living house, they were just a repository. We were searching for ways to raise questions about how things were presented and closing down MOMA was just one of them.

The action was a success. We'd announced our plans in advance and they closed the museum in fear of what we might do. A lot of people stopped and talked with us about what we were doing and this action and others attracted radical artists to our fold.

- Max Eultiz, 2019 * Suggested Listening: "Peg" by Deli Girls (Deli Girls is an industrial noise-punk duo based in Brooklyn, NY)

"Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea and The Black Mask Group" Unpopular Books & Sabotage Editions, London 1993.

"Ben Morea: An Interview with Iain McIntyre in 2006" published in "Up Against the Wall Motherfucker! : An Anthology of rants, posters and more" Homebrew Publications, 2007.