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Glenn Beck on Fox News



Industry and Agriculture at Rockefeller Center

Recreation of Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads* (detail)

The Museum of Modern Art

COMMUNISTS! IN THE ART WORLD!

by Ben Davis

The great Glenn Beck has done it again, electrifying the art world with his criticism. Beck, who channels an end-of-days televangelist from his Fox News perch, has lately been all about exposing the sinister underbelly of contemporary art, taking on the National Endowment of the Arts for spreading San Francisco Values in its recent round of emergency funding. Beck was particularly angered by an NEA grant to Frameline, the San Francisco organization that funds the local Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, objecting to one of the two-hundred films shown in the most recent edition.

On Sept. 2, Beck really got to the heart of the matter though, bravely exposing the sinister web that connects nefarious, un-American "progressivism" from the early 20th century to the art world of today. Specifically, he conclusively demonstrated that the Rockefeller Family secretly funded Communist and fascist artists. Beck did this, moreover, via a close reading of the magnificent murals in Rockefeller Center, routinely seen on the *Today Show*, subliminally exposing our children to images of. . . heroic workers! Nelson Rockefeller, Beck reminds us all, even hired Diego Rivera to paint a mural in the RCA Building, and it featured Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin! (Later, of course, Rockefeller had the mural destroyed because of the Lenin portrait, but don't confuse us with the facts.)

Art world commentators were quick to respond to Beck's views. *New York* magazine critic Jerry Saltz **challenged** Beck to organize an art show that he would review -- Saltz even offered to get him a space -- while *L.A. Times* scribe Christopher Knight **called** him "nutty" and pointed out that it was Republican hero Ronald Reagan himself who made Rock Center a national landmark. But reading about all the controversy, it occurred to me that I want to *help* Beck. Yes, indeed, he is right -- the art world is teeming with radical, un-American ideologies that must be exposed.

"Don't let any of these people tell you anything other than the truth," Beck concluded on his show, "and that is early 20th-century progressives and the progressives of today. . . ." He loses his train of thought, then continues, "It makes *sense* that we're headed down this road. It makes *sense* that you feel a little uneasy, and everything seems to be a little hidden. It's not, if you look. All of the images I have shown you here, thousands of people walk by them every single day. . . ."

Well said, Glenn. Here is my shortlist of four hives of evil ideology in New York City, right under our unsuspecting noses.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART!

The Museum of Modern Art is an obvious target, given its connection to the Rockefeller Family and its obsession with that "modern art" stuff, always suspect. Still, it strikes me as astonishing indeed that we have an entire institution devoted to art made by anarchists like Seurat and Signac, Bolshevik-sympathizers like the Constructivists,



Pablo Picasso
Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)
 1907
 Museum of Modern Art



Pablo Picasso
Dream and Lie of Franco
 1937



Poster for 1949 World Peace Conference, with Picasso dove image



Pablo Picasso
Massacre in Korea
 1951
 Musée Picasso, Paris

or the Surrealists, an artists' cabal led by the admitted Communist Andre Breton.

The sickness, sadly, goes deeper still. Ask yourself, who is the cornerstone artist of MoMA, and of modern art in general? Pablo Picasso, that's who, the lifelong bohemian whose *Les Femmes d'Alger* has pride of place at the museum. And what is that work about? Prostitution and venereal disease! It's sick!

And it gets worse: As a Spaniard, Picasso was deeply affected by the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, painting *Guernica* and other works in protest of the fascist takeover of his homeland. That's correct -- the father of modern art was an example of what Joseph McCarthy (a possible Glenn Beck role model?) used to call a "premature anti-fascist" -- Picasso was opposed to fascism when the United States was still tendentiously neutral. Picasso's take on the Spanish Civil War was, quite literally, un-American.

But wait, there's more. After World War II, Picasso actually became a card-carrying Communist, joining the French Communist Party, an affiliation which baffled his formalist supporters and for which he was duly demonized in the press of McCarthyite America. Picasso's art became so associated with Communism that *Art News* demoted him in status to a "staunch poster designer and part-time propagandist."

"While I wait for the time when Spain can take me back again," Picasso wrote in *Why I Became a Communist*, "the French Communist party is a fatherland to me." There is probably some truth to the notion that Picasso's party membership reflected political naiveté -- it seems unlikely he was aware of the Stalinist role in undercutting the Spanish Republican cause. Mainly, the War had made him a firm anti-war activist, and Picasso considered the French Communists the "bravest" people he knew.

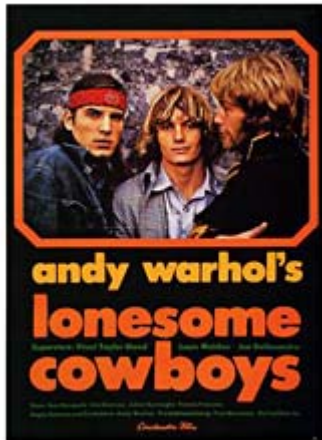
Picasso marched at the front of the Communist contingent of Paris' May Day Parade in 1949. When he served as honorary chair of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, Picasso was fined \$1,500,000 by the state of New York, which targeted the supposed Soviet front organization for misuse of funds. Picasso created the famous Dove of Peace design for the anti-war movement, and made a bitter *Guernica*-esque work to protest U.S. conduct in the Korean War.

While we're on the subject of suspicious artists ensconced at New York's most famous museum, doesn't Andy Warhol bear a second look? Are you wrong, America, to suspect Warhol's *Gold Marilyn* at MoMA -- the starlet's face with a gold-painted frame straight out of medieval devotional art -- of proffering idolatry? No, you are not. Warhol's so-called Factory was nothing more than a "factory" for promoting "alternative lifestyles." Given Glenn Beck's concern about gays and lesbians, he certainly should know that the FBI had a 38-page file on Warhol, and tried to prosecute him for interstate trafficking of obscene materials when he took his film *Lonesome Cowboys* to the San Francisco International Film Festival in 1968. Here, from Warhol's FBI file, is a [report](#) filed by two agents who dutifully went undercover to attend the screening:

"The characters in the film were a woman, played by VIVA; her male nurse, played by TAYLOR MEAD; a sheriff who resided in a small Arizona town -- population, three; and a group of about five cowboys with an additional new member called 'Boy Julian.' All of the males in the case displayed homosexual tendencies and conducted themselves towards one another in an effeminate matter. Many of the cast portrayed their parts as if in a stupor from marijuana, drugs or alcohol."



Andy Warhol
Gold Marilyn Monroe
 1962
 Museum of Modern Art



Andy Warhol Lonesome Cowboys



The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Stuart Davis
Untitled (mural for WNYC)

Good enough for J. Edgar Hoover to put Warhol on the watch list, good enough for Beck today, right?

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART!

Journey into the bowels of this beloved institution, and you will find that it too is in on the conspiracy. Look no further than the prominent place that the Met grants in its modern galleries to a mural by Stuart Davis. Perhaps best-known for his jazzy, colorful pictures of city life, this prominent American artist was in fact a political crusader, prominently involved in New Deal-era artistic activism. The Met mural is one of four commissioned by the WPA Federal Arts Project for WNYC. Filled with musical imagery, it is nothing short of a Pied Piper tune calling American artists away from the capitalist marketplace and towards the welcoming, Communistic arms of Big Brother government!

Indeed, to his colleagues, the respected Davis was one of the faces most associated with the Artists Union (now that's a suspicious pair of words!), the organization formed to defend the rights of the thousands of artists hired for government relief schemes during the Depression. He was elected its head in 1934. In a memoir of the period, Jacob Kainen recalls standing outside the 69th Regiment Armory, where artists on relief had to sign in every day at 9 am. "I have a vivid memory of Stuart Davis standing in line behind me, around 1937. Pointing to the stout, gray, balding man behind him he said: 'This is Joseph Stella. We both showed here in 1913.'"

Davis was early editor of *Art Front*, the militant magazine of the Artist Union. Lest there be any doubt that experimental art was connected to "progressivism," Davis also wrote voluminously defending the notion that abstraction was the art that was aligned with political progress towards a Marxist egalitarian society (the painter and critic Rosalind Bengelsdorf Browne credits him with defending the kernel of abstract art that would later flourish in the U.S. in times that were, after all, not particularly hospitable to anything intangible). Like many, the New Deal inspired Davis to rethink the idea of private patronage altogether, and try to set the foundations for a different, more grounded way of thinking about art's function in society.

Davis helped organize an American Artists' Conference in New York in 1936, issuing a national call along with a hundred other art-world figures, including Margaret Bourke-White, Isamu Noguchi, Lewis Mumford, Ben Shahn and David Smith, to all "artists who realize that the cultural crisis is but a reflection of a world economic crisis and not an isolated phenomenon." Among other things, the conference's statement decried, "Oaths of allegiance for teachers, investigations of colleges for radicalism, sedition bills aimed at the suppression of civil liberties, discrimination against the foreign-born, against Negroes, the reactionary Liberty League and similar organizations, Hearst journalism, etc." Davis gave the keynote address at the conference, titled "Why an Artists' Congress?" (Picasso, incidentally, was supposed to call in to address the Americans, but had to cancel as sick.) Sounds pretty suspicious to me.

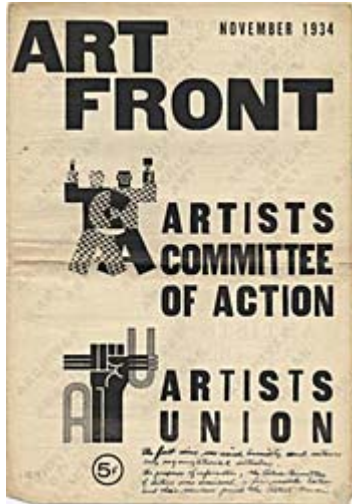
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY!

Right behind artworks as objects of suspicion are, of course, books. Public Libraries are inherent hot beds of radical thinking (private health insurance seems to be working just fine for us, so why not private libraries too?). But the real objects of concern at the New York Public Library are the well-known -- and frankly, very weird -- Edward Laning murals sited in the third-floor rotunda. Done in an elongated Baroque figurative style, the various panels are meant to illustrate didactically the "story of the recorded Word -- Moses and the graven tablets of the Law, the Medieval Scribe and his manuscript, Gutenberg and the Printing Press, and Mergenthaler and

1939
Metropolitan Museum of Art



S. Horn
Stuart Davis painting his WNYC mural
1939
Smithsonian Institution



The First issue of *Art Front*, November 1934



The New York Public Library

the Linotype," a subject picked by the artist with then NYPL director Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, who personally micromanaged the details.

This commission, sadly, represents the worst kind of socialistic government patronage of art! Laning's New Deal murals, pitched around 1937, were meant to advance the cause of expanding the horizons for government art support, a difficult task then as now, since government arts funding was widely attacked as a boondoggle. "If they could succeed in securing the main building on 5th Avenue and 42nd Street, the branches should fall into their hands without trouble," Laning remembers -- though the commencement of World War II ended this incursion, as it ended the government art projects in general.

As for Laning himself, he was selected for the NYPL task because he had proved his endurance doing the murals at Ellis Island. Like most artists of the period, he was "enthusiastically (if vaguely) socialist," and he attended the John Reed Club in New York as a young man -- though he found Marxism deaf to real artistic concerns. However, in recounting his artistic formation, Laning remembers a decisive moment being his discovery of Bolshevik thinker Nicolai Bukharin's *Dialectical Materialism*, saying he "read it from beginning to end with mounting excitement" as "the greatest exposition of Baroque esthetics I could imagine." Kinda puts a different spin on the celebration of the Printed Word in his NYPL murals, and its weirdo Social Realist-Baroque vibe, doesn't it?

And where did Laning learn his mural-making skills? Well, he was first exposed to the practice by. . . drum roll, please. . . Diego Rivera. He was introduced to Rivera by Ernestine Evans during the revolutionary Mexican artist's 1933 visit to New York. Laning stood with Frida and the gang, watching Diego work on *Man at the Crossroads*, the very mural that Beck has resurrected to dissect. Laning accompanied Rivera when he was ejected from Rockefeller Center, and credits his mastery of mural-craft to being able to watch Rivera up close when the famous artist painted a series of smaller panels at the Trotskyite New Workers School on 14th Street. After this, Laning participated in an artist's rally against the destruction of *Man at the Crossroads*, and helped lead a crusade to convince artists not to show at a Rockefeller Center exhibition following the censorship, which was largely successful. "All the talent is on our side," Evans told Laning.

It's all right there -- radical Commie sympathizes, in the heart of the City. The art world has in the past been a home for anti-war and worker's rights sentiment, "alternative lifestyles" and alternative thought, sometimes even of a "vaguely socialist" variety. It will have to defend that tradition if it wants to defend itself.

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY!

As Glenn Beck says, sometimes Communistic ideas are hiding "right in plain sight," where you would never think to look for them. And this giant piece of public sculpture is beamed to the world through media outlets *every hour of every day* as a symbol of America. But did you know that it was the work of a Frenchman? And have you actually read that poem on its base? Here are the final lines of "The New Colossus":

*"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*



Detail of Edward Laning mural in the McGraw Rotunda at the New York Public Library

Whoa. Did someone let Trotsky sneak through to write that? "Keep your storied pomp?" That sounds like hostility to inherited wealth to me! The "masses?" Lifting a lamp for the "homeless" and "wretched refuse?" Wake up, people! These are dangerous, radical ideas, and you are *right to be uneasy about them*.

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

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Detail of Edward Laning mural in the McGraw Rotunda at the New York Public Library



Keith Haring
Statue of Liberty
1986
Guy Hepner



Dan Lacey

*Glenn Beck with a Steaming Cow Pie on
Top of His Head*
2009