

**UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN  
CLUJ – NAPOCA**

**PhD THESIS**

**FROM PATHOS TO CYNICISM. ARTISTIC ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS HISTORY, FROM THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TO  
THE WAR IN IRAQ**

**SUMMARY**

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# **PART I – REVOLUTIONARY HEROISM AND THE ARTISTIC IMAGE**

## **I. INTRODUCTIVE SPECIFICATIONS**

The present work has as the object of study the expressive mechanisms used by various artists in order to give the viewer information on historical moments hold a crucial importance in forming the modern social conscience. The work does not have not claim to be exhaustive, we did not want to constitute an inventory of the works of art with an historical theme, thus the attention is being focused over the different types of artistic attitudes, and over the conceptual positions of modern European artists which have shown in their works events or characters of significant importance at an historical scale.

The fundamental hypothesis of this procedure resides in the fact that in the European art of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> we find a visual representation of history based on a heroic paradigm. The first consequence of this fact is that the great majority of the artists are concentrating on the exceptional character from at least two perspectives – figures with moral quality that stand out, and also the capacity of these characters to modify the course of history in a decisive manner. This paradigm of history is in perfect concordance with the entire mental climate of the period we are discussing here, meaning the one of revolutions, which between 1789 and 1848 reformulated the mythological structures that dominate the European political imagery.

The study will concentrate mostly on the art from the French environment, but this is not due to the qualitative superiority of this art, but to the fact that French art is especially representative for this discussion, and also because of the numerous innovations on a technical and conceptual level that we can find here.

The artists chosen to be analyzed were the most representative figures of the epoch, in whose works we can find the most important features as well as the most interesting particularities of the heroic paradigm of history. We will take into consideration the degree of integration of the artists in their era and their positioning towards the political event, but we will leave out, as much as possible, the committed artist status, this subject will be touched only when the engagement in politics produces changes in the opinion regarding the role of art reported to history or the historical role of art.

## **II. JACQUES – LOUIS DAVID AND THE IMAGE OF THE MODERN HERO**

The personality of Jacques – Louis David is impossible to avoid in any sketch of the history of modern European art, he was an “artist of his time” in the most complex sense of the expression. He appears as a paradox considering the fact that his work contains both images that

embody the revolutionary ideals and dictatorial propagandistic messages, but through this he perfectly inscribed in the new mentality, full of changes, of the times in which he lived in. The paradoxes continue even on a stylistic level where his work varies from very conservatory, and already considered outdated by his contemporaries, to works that some consider highly innovative.

He was a deeply involved character in the political and cultural life on France in these unstable times, next to these actions and through the complete corpus of his works he contributed to cementing a vision of the French nation. Hugh Honour calls him the definitive political artist, but the connection between his art and politics is much less direct than one might think and one can't affirm in a precise manner that he was an opportunist who served the interests of the political party in power, or a consequent revolutionary that was disappointed by the application of its ideals.

The works that will be treated more in depth over the course of the paper are the most relevant for this analysis, the first one being *Belisarius Begging*, which is neoclassical through the fact that it extracts a general moral from a particular historical fact, and an artist of David's magnitude manages to transform the narration in an allegory with a number of multiple meanings.

*Oath of the Horatii* was the work that consecrated him, both the subject and the presentation are confirming to the neoclassical canons. This painting got a lot of attention and admiration even when it was first exhibited in the artist's workshop in Rome, but it was in Paris where the meaning of the painting was considerably modified, the public placing a highly political under layer to it. Because of this, it can be said that the entire instigative message has its roots much more in the reactions of the viewers than in the intent of the painter. The work was initially commissioned in the name of King Louis the 16<sup>th</sup>, and it celebrated the virtue of loyalty towards the motherland (meaning the king), offering legitimacy to the Ancient Regime.

The painting offers the most convincing proof of scenographical mastery, offering the example of heroism born from civil duty and it is much more probable that David was taking into consideration the universal value, over a protestant manifestation targeting a specific regime. On the other hand it is understandable why the revolutionaries, in search for legitimacy, have tried to particularize the example that was offered with such mastery through the expressive force of David's work.

The Revolution is forced to build new rituals for itself and to carve in the mentality of the nation new icons, a very good example of this kind of action is the portrait of the journalist Marat, which is presented by David as a martyr of the French Revolution. In *The Death of Marat*, he is presented more like the artist would have liked him to be, than how he actually was in real life, thus through this painting, an immediate process of martyrdom is being started. Marat's immortality is being assured through the gratitude born from the way he is presented as a history-making hero.

After Napoleon Bonaparte takes over the power in France, the work of David changes into one that gives praises to the new leader. Girardet identifies four types of historical character:

Cincinnatus, Alexander, Solon and Moses, Napoleon preferring images that lack a strong military theme, thus belonging to the second category – the adventurer type, the image of youth and dynamism.

The first painting from this stage of Jacques – Louis David's work is *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* – a painting that works as a diplomatic and propagandistic tool. You can easily notice that on a conceptual level David's contribution is reduced, this rather being Napoleon's vision of "good painting", but in the same time it is an excellent example of offering legitimacy through an artistic image. In this sense you can see a big difference between this painting and Paul Delaroche's one with the same subject, which was obviously under less pressure from a political point of view.

With the *Coronation of Napoleon*, David already becomes the propaganda agent of the new monarchic absolutism, the painting having a celebrative and legitimatory function. In *Leonidas at Thermopylae* the relation between the painter and the sovereign is changed, the work presents itself as a personal preference of David, never fully understood by Napoleon, through which he shows his ignorance towards art.

### III. DAVID'S PUPILS IN THE NAPOLEONIAN ERA

In this chapter we will continue to write about the period of Napoleon's dominance from the prism of a new generation of artists, students of David, caught between his personality, the demands of the political regime, and the affirmation of the romantic ethos, the result being an artistic *mélange* characterized most of the times through indecision on both a conceptual and stylistic level.

The first artist to be analyzed is Anne – Louis Girodet, who is especially hard to fit into a style due to what we consider to be an intrinsic ambiguity. His work is characterized by a neoclassicism that he tries to overcome with the help of specific romantic formulas. A good example in this sense is the *Portrait of Citizen Belley, former representative of the colonies*, which shows a colored man in a completely neoclassical posture.

A work that takes Girodet away from David's canon is *The Apotheosis of the French Heroes Who Died for Motherland in the War for Freedom* – a hallucinating approach with a deep romantic character.

The second artist we will write about in this paper is Jean – Antoine Gros who participated in a direct manner in the Napoleonic campaigns, and the titles to his works presents themselves as a chronological succession of these. *Bonaparte on the Bridge at Arcole*, *The Battle of Aboukis*, *Napoleon on the Battlefield at Eylau*. These works are on the border of neoclassicism and romanticism and are preoccupied by building a positive image of Napoleon. *Napoleon Visiting the Plague Victims at Jaffa* makes direct references to the thaumaturgic powers of Napoleon showing off his immortal immunity and his healing touch, this being a new attempt to legitimize the new monarchy.

#### IV. ARTISTIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS HISTORY IN THE AREA OF THE ROMANTIC CULTURAL PARADIGM

The next chapter does not wish to analyze the romantic artistic occurrence, but one can easily notice a tight connection between the romantic artistic movement and the idea of history as a product of heroic action. The romantic expressions occur in the same time as the creation of the revolutionary myths, thus contributing greatly to the credo according to which history is being made here and now, and the artist show a great concern towards contemporary history.

Eugene Delacroix is not an historical painter so-to-speak, but through his production he participates in the historical events of the time. In the work *The Massacre of Chios* represents a moment from contemporary history in the heroic manner of Jacques – Louis David, but with a totally different atmosphere – somber and overwhelming. It is this way that he understands the historical painting, broken off the illuminist ethos, full of positivism in his works you can see a diminishing hope, or even the complete lack of it. In *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*, Delacroix brings and innovation through the use of allegory with reference to contemporary history.

The painter is much more involved in comparison with David, but in his case the heroic history becomes history as tragedy that in its turn becomes and engine for the historical melancholy. In this sense, Delacroix is a deep romantic, history being seen in a lyrical manner, but his numerous orders of historical subject show him as a great opportunist.

*The Entry of the Crusaders in Constantinople* is a work of neoclassical facture in the sense of generalizing the historical moment at humanity's scale. Delacroix shows too little interest by the didactic aim of the order, the work represents a resignation from the heroic paradigm of history.

A different work that will be analyzed is *Freedom Leading the People* where we will challenge the militant perspective of the author through the fact that that the author's vision over history is put into the service of painting and not the other way around. The erotic element present in an historical painting is something completely new, and the presence of the allegorical figure pulls the painting away from a simple chronicler representation.

## **PART II – HISTORY AS DISASTER AND HORROR IN MODERN ART**

### **I. INTRODUCTIVE SPECIFICATIONS**

We here wish to make a clear distinction between the art production that has the political area as a reference as compared to one that uses the political reference as itself. For a better differentiation we have as example two of the works of Honore Daumier, *The Pear*, and *Whose Turn is it?*, the first is a simple political pamphlet while the second overcomes the borders of the pamphlet, proving a more general vision, a paradigm of history. We will treat only the artistic production that belongs to the second category in the modern and contemporary period. Thus we wish to unveil through art, the history as tragedy, as trauma both individual and collective, and the important moments are shown from a chronological perspective. We wish to both sketch the theme through examples of major relevance and an analysis of different artistic ways of approaching history, this analysis stops at the interwar period, because the following period was treated in previous studies.

### **II. GOYA – THE TERRIFYING HISTORY FROM THE ERA OF HEROICAL HISTORY**

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes is another artist of major importance in art history, being both hard to categorize from a stylistic point of view and considered in some cases the first modern artist. In this paper we will accentuate on the works that showcase Goya as an artist of social protest, an area in which his originality is manifested most of all, through the way he interprets history as a subject of artistic expression. We will discuss the problem of the artist as an eye-witness, but even lacking this status does not detract from the historical relevance that his works offer as a critique of war in general.

Third of May is obviously the most propagandistic of his works in which we can find the same type of rhetorical ideology like in *Disasters of War* or *This is How It Happened*. Here history repeats the Christic pain and the Iberian Catholicism is presented in opposition with the secularization brought by Napoleon.

Through the series *Disasters of War*, Goya becomes an unavoidable reference for approaching the theme of history in European art both as a source of imagery and as concept, and even though through his art we cannot determine for sure the ideology he belonged to, this does not make his production any less relevant or timeless. It is not necessary that the artist be a hero, or a martyr for a cause for his work to be deemed to be taken into consideration.

### **III. DAUMIER – CARICATURES BETWEEN COMIC AND TRAGICAL**

The artistic production of Honore Daumier was dominated by the caricatures he published for over four decades in a period of great torment for France. His works constitute a detailed chronic of a critical manner over the period they comprise, the artist proving an uncommon capacity to reflect over history, more so in the sense of history as a tragedy. Throughout his corpus of works, Daumier shows a terrible sense of knowing the sense of history.

The works, even though different from each other are all especially relevant and represent the repercussions and the suffering felt invariably after and historic event, beyond the heroism that has produced of justified it.

Daumier is an innovatory artist both due to his positioning towards events and due to the formal aspect of his painting. In the same time he is capable of referencing established models, for example those in the religious art, where he concentrates on episodes of suffering caused by men. In the case of allegory he proves the capacity of creatively combining traditional elements with ideological and formal novelty.

### **IV. THE GENERALIZED HORROR – THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES OVER THE GERMAN ARTISTIC PRODUCTION**

The First World War has radically changed the map of the world with long term consequences, and in the same time the traumatic episode of the war modifies the structure of the European politic imagery. What actually happened was that the faith in the civilizing capacity of the systemic bases that stood at the fundament of social relations was completely shattered.

The pre-war idea of unstoppable progress, expressed in the visual arts with maximum vitality by the Futurists, saw in the war a chance of sanitation that was supposed to bring in a new world, is being transformed after the war in realizing the horror and the tragedy due to all the pointless deaths. The First World War was a first opportunity to show the destructive capacity of technology, the romantic hero is being opposed to mass death, anonym and impersonal, thus creating a tragic paradigm with cynical accents towards human history.

From a formal point of view, the Expressionism is more and more toughly challenged by the artists of the Weimar Republic. Art wishes to be greatly involved socially, as instrument of immediate political action, thus creating *Neue Sachlichkeit (The New Objectivity)* which is characterized by a more direct relation between the work and the consumer, and by a deep feeling of pessimism.

We will thus analyze the work of the most representative artists of this period in the German space, deeply affected both at an economical and moral level by the loss of the war. The extended presence of engraving has causes both economical and symbolical and is an important characteristic of the art from this period.

One of these artists is Otto Dix whose attitude towards the conflict is contradictory, something we can also find in his art. He is in the same time outraged and fascinated by the experience he lived through as a soldier, it is thus wrong to consider his work to be anti-war. What can be noticed is a disappointment due to the persistence of the militant discourse in Germany even after the end of the War.

In works such as *The War*, heroism is still a part, afterwards we can find the reoccurring theme of the relationship between soldiers and prostitutes as a plea against the moral and psychological consequences of the conflict. The works are a social critique that transforms the hero soldier into a grotesque and useless presence, Otto Dix's drama is not the war itself but its inutility in a corrupt world, the war represents a metaphor for the moral and spiritual decay of humanity.

Max Beckmann was not so enthusiastic about the perspective of war as other German artists, he sees in Germany a nation composed only of victims. His works speak of the immanent evil of man, a major lack of faith in the fundamental values of the human being and of the human society. He mixes Christian figures with contemporary types brought up at the level of general and timeless human expression. The Hell engraving series is a cycle similar to Goya's that produces a timeless image of humanity.

In *The Way Home*, one cannot see the return of the victorious or at least dignified hero anymore, and in *The Grenade* the dismembering of the visual structure of the painting shows a strictly formal path to accentuate the message of the work.

Kathe Kollowitz is one of the most remarkable figures in the graphic world, she stays from a stylistic point of view an assumed Expressionist and almost a militant in images for the weak. The accent in her work falls on the survivors and on the consequences of the war, thus history as tragedy (not unlike in Goya's work) is now transformed in history as a trauma because of the more direct and personal involvement. Her attitude was still a dual one, she did not oppose to the idea of war itself, being especially proud of her son who died as a soldier.

## **PART III – HISTORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY IMAGERY**

### **I. INTRODUCTIVE SPECIFICATIONS**

In this part of the paper we will pencil the most representative types of artistic attitudes towards history from the last four decades, the way in which the artistic postmodernism reported to the strictly contemporary historical events. The obviously militant works of art were included only in the case in which the political attitude implies a historical conscience or reflects a general concept of history.

### **II. THE HISTORY AND THE ART OF POSTMODERNISM**

We will name “the ataraxia of the work of art” the prescriptive consequence of Greenberg’s conception whose development involves a devaluation of art even more so as the reference to anything but itself is discernable. This ataraxy remained forever a utopian ideal, the American Abstract Expressionism being the highest expression of this.

The postmodernism is wrongfully looked at as the end of history, Auschwitz is the chronological start of postmodernism, thus offering this art an image at least pessimistic.

The chronological landmarks of this analysis are the Vietnam War, respectively the War in Iraq, both offering two tendencies: to respond in an artistic manner to the needs of the society, and offering awareness through art. The great majority of the works are a mix between these two, but we will still argue that between Vietnam and Iraq the tendency of analyzing image mediums primes above obtaining an emotional feedback from the viewer.

### **III. THE HISTORY AS IREPRESSIBLE AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE TERROR**

In this period the terror of history is much more publicized than ever, offering a deeply pessimistic vision over a history that became absurd.

Gerhard Richter makes the most relevant cycle in this sense – *18<sup>th</sup> of October 1977*, that shows in 15 paintings with explicit semantic connotations the events of the German Autumn. These make references to a repetition, a return of the events in the absurdity of history. The history painted by Richter has no more possible landmarks, and the unfolding of history is no longer allowing the discerning between right and wrong.

The work *War Cuts* is the expression of the will to not express an opinion that is worthless in any case in the current historical conditions. Thus tragedy pushes to artistic expression, but he cannot find a unique conceptual tone for answering this provocation, the only certitude being the terror of history.

Luc Tuymans is an artist who with the occasion of the Venice Biennale in 2001, provokes the viewer's awe through the political problematic of a country such as Belgium, that can have feelings of culpability and historical guilt. The two portraits of the kings Baudouin of Belgium and that of Patrice Lumumba need reflection for perceiving the horror, painting coming too late for saving anything anyway.

Wilhelm Sasnal dedicated his attention towards the catastrophe and his art presents the drama of the Holocaust from the posture of a Pollack, oscillating from a formal point of view between abstract and figurative.

*Narutowicz* is the portrait of the first elected president of Poland, who was assassinated less than a week from his election by a painter with the occasion of the inauguration of a national gallery of art. Painting his portrait represents a sort of assumption of guilt, respectively a symbolic redemption.

Ori Gersht is an Israeli photographer whose works are based on the esthetics of absence, not unlike Tuymans. His series *Afterwars* presents the result of the conflict over the habited landscape, taking the concrete case of the city of Sarajevo. A different series, titled *White Noise*, shows abstract, or moved images and are photographs done on the railway that leads to Birkenau. These landscapes were unseen by the Jews that were being transported by train, thus showing the fear of the unknown. In the series *Ghost Olives* there are close shots of old tree trunks from Palestine, and even though they do not have a strict historical reference, the viewer instinctually makes a connection with the history of the place.

Anri Sale is a Albanese filmmaker who lives in Paris, this provokes a sort of ideological schizophrenia also found in his art. *Intervista – Finding the Words* is about the gap between generations, especially after the fall of a system, and *Nocturnes* is a metaphor for the political situation in the Balkans after the communism.

Dan Flavin is an abstract artist, whose works and references can be understood due to the titles and the period in which they were created. In between *The Monument of those Killed in the Ambush (to P.K., who reminded me of death)* and *Untitled (to a man, George McGovern) 2* you can see the translation from passion to cold argumentation.

Yan Pei – Ming is a Chinese man established in Paris, characterized by a bichrome painting of a subtle orientalism. He regards history as pressure and producer of tragedy. The redundancy of his art reflects the redundancy of the propagandistic discourse that wishes to model the perception of history for the entire Chinese people. Yan Pei – Ming lived two histories, the one of his childhood lived in China, and the one as an emigrant in France, and the portraits of Mao, all with a superlative title exist just because of the fact that he left the country.

Marina Abramovici, being a Yugoslavian, her indifference towards history is completely implausible, even though the historical theme is not central in her art. Through the performance *Communist Body, Fascist Body*, in cooperation with Ulay the absolute is eliminated from life and from history.

## IV. IRONY AS AN EXORCISM OF HISTORY

Steinhardt names in *The Journal of Happiness* irony as a mechanism of shaking off a totalitarian regime, but it is necessary its adoption as a personality structure, with the condition of constancy and the truthfulness of the attitude. The comic and the irony are seen as a sort of ritualistic healing from the fright produced by history, and the following artist we will analyze refuses to take history seriously just to be able to face it.

Sigmar Polke shows cynicism towards the American civilization that presents a more or less obvious imperialism and treats themes such as the collective hysteria, the fear, and the historical reality of terrorism in works such as *The History of Everything. I Never Really Think About Anything Too Much* speaks about the serene and natural violence, and in *The Hunt From the Taliban and Al Qaeda* the concept of transforming the real in virtual is being exploited. He ridicules the exaggerated and useless spying, by dissolving it in the ridiculous absurdity of the disproportions, totally lacking in heroism. With the work *Sadam's Basement, My Basement*, the irony is used to express the lack of faith in the channels through which the visual information is transmitted to the wide audience.

Komar and Melamid are a couple of dissident muscovite artists that manage to protest through humor. When everything is ridiculous, nothing can be dangerous anymore. Their work constitutes a sacrilege towards the official doctrine of Soviet art. They prove an attitude towards history that is in every way particular, Russian.

The project *Zone of Urgency*, curated by Hou Hanru with the occasion of the Venice Biennale in 2003, used irony as an adaptation to historical events. The artists in the project come mainly from South East Asia, and the central theme was the modifications that take place in the structure of the urban space, due to the evolutions of the last decade. The most relevant work for this particular chapter is *Anti-terrorist Variety* which consists in four video-projections shown in the same time in the same room, and each showing a hilarious solution for avoiding situations like September 11. Stressing the ridicule makes an appeal to finding concrete solutions and makes a critique over the inflexibility that generates terrorism.

Maurizio Cattelan is an artist that is looking to create stupefaction through his art, and the value of his work stands specifically in the careless oversell of the paradox. The work *Now* represents J.F.K in a coffin – thus he becomes the symbol of the American democracy that is about to disappear, thus killing the utopian history.

## V. SNAPSHOTS OF HISTORY

During the Vietnam War the film and photography dominate as mediums of artistic expression due to the feeling of immediacy that they offer, but they have very quickly become a show, the entire conflict being spectacular in the literal sense of the word. Even though Susan Sontag claims that the reproduction leads to the world becoming insensitive to the image, but this is not at all true in the case of this war, or the one in Iraq.

Robert Capa imposes new standards of professionalism and insanity in this profession. In the face of his works you are being confronted with an unconditional trust, and his best snapshots are the ones that exclude any possibility of staging.

Henri Huet raises the reporting photography at an artistic level. His images reference the unnatural, the absurdity of the war. In *Bong Son, Vietnam 1966* the world is shown as being completely turned upside down because of the violence.

Larry Burrows and Robert Ellison are the first who produced colored war photography, and the team formed by Dana Stone and Sean Flynn, shows off less familiar aspects of the war, since they participated at more unconventional military operations.

Other photographers have been Huinh Cong La, willing to take any chance for a photo, or Kyochi Sawada, a Pulitzer Prize winner.

Of all the photographers mentioned here, all but two have died during the conflict, while they were doing their job, resulting in a totally special involvement in the event.

During the war in Iraq a group of photo-reporters associated in an agency named VII make *The War in Iraq: the Coordinates of the Conflict – Photos by VII*, they present the same kind of shots as in Vietnam, the accent falling on terror. The series starts off with the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York, and then the campaigns in Afghanistan, and the one in Iraq, concentrate on rural afghan life and the continuous violence in Iraq, respectively.

## **VI. ART, POLITICAL PROTEST AND HISTORY**

During this chapter we will take in discussion art as a political protest especially in the American space and we will treat both singular artists, and artistic associations with a protesting goal. The most important moments for this type of art are the war in Iraq and the election campaign in 2004 that provoked massive reactions of protest from the artistic community. With the occasion of the second event mentioned, the results took the shape of pure political art, or will create protest in which's assembly problems connected to a general vision of history are being raised. From a formal point of view, the best represented at the protests of the last years are the graphic arts, and as participation the National Republican Convention of 2004 in New York has provoked an artistic activity with protestant message without precedent since Vietnam.

Richard Serra, even though he is mostly a sculptor, he now resorts to colored lithographs such as the one that shows a prisoner with a hood on his head at Abu Gharib, which very soon becomes an iconic image. The work shows the erasure of any trace of identity of the person who becomes an inert mannequin, being mocked, that strongly contrasts with the initial principles of the conflict.

Hans Bruckhardt belongs to the expressionism of the New York School and he was always a deeply involved artist in the political events, and his longevity offered him the occasion to cover a great chunk of contemporary history in his art. Comprising references from the Spanish Civil War until the Golf War in 1991, he offers an unmatched corpus of works concentrated on violence. The most important works belong to the period of the Vietnam War, as

it is for example *My Lai*, a monument-painting, gestualist, but with naturalistic treated figures – he mounts human skulls on the canvas, making a direct reference to the communal burial pits. After the Vietnam conflict ended, the artist remains alone in the tendency to transpose history, his art questions Baudillard's pessimism, considering the need to give a voice to the human suffering.

Ed Kienholtz goes further than transforming the dramatic historical fact in merchandise for the consumers of sensational, he considers that the essence of all conflicts are the heroic battles and the sacrifices. *A Portable War Memorial Commemorating V Day 19*, an installation as an act of protest, regret and disgust in the face of a history that produces real heroism just to bring it back at the state of an empty gesture.

In the period between the 60's and the 70's one can notice a tendency of using the flag of the United States in ways in which they can modify the initial symbolic significance. The stress falls on the U.S.A. with strong imperialist tendencies in strong contrast with the democratic credo on which this country was formed. Some of the artists that approach this theme are: Jasper Johns, with a flag that looks like made out of camouflage, under which it is written MORATORIUM. Another artist is Sam Wiener who warns us through a truism that should not become commonplace: *Those Who Forget the Past Are Deemed to Repeat It*, and Dread Scott is asking (himself) *Which is the proper way to fly the U.S.A. flag?* – a work that was condemned explicitly by the American Senate and on some level provoked the instauration of a law to protect the flag.

Other relevant artists for this type of art are Robbie Conal – *Watching (Gandhi)*, that is part of the itinerant exhibit *Yo! What Happened to Peace?*, Shepard Fairey - *Hug Bombs*, or Duane Hanson, a Pop Art American sculptor who with *Scene from Vietnam* makes a social critique ironical and acid over the conflict.

Allan Kaprow, considered to be the parent of happening, makes a transition from Art as an object to Art as process and action. With his work *The Sweet Wall* he realizes an artistic protest addressed to the attempts based strictly on force to model in an artificial manner a world conforming to different totalitarian and utopian ideologies.

During the Vietnam War, different artistic associations or common projects with a protestant goal have appeared in the United States, these were extended and united various artists towards a common goal. Between the 27<sup>th</sup> of January and the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1967 in New York Angry Arts Week was organized, where the Collage of Indignation was displayed – this constitutes a monumental panel in whose realization participated approximately 150 artists.

Another artistic object was *The Tower of Peace*, raised in Los Angeles this was made out of 400 little panels with an anti-war theme and in which's realization contributed artists from all over the world.

*Art Worker's Coalition* was a leftist political organization that through the work *And the Children* showed on a highly acid tone the cruelty and the total lack of point of the war.

After the year 2000 these types of organizations have started to reappear also in the U.S.A. at unprecedented rates, these function mainly in the base of a politic protest. One of these

is *Artists Against the War*, that in the work *We the People Say No to Bush's Program* have used a work of Leon Golub's, himself a great political artist that passed away in 2004.

Well known artists such as Susan Rothenberg, Ed Ruscha, Jasper Johns, and others make works in the benefit of the civic organization *America Coming Together*, and with the group *Human Wrongs. Literature and Art of Protest* Hans Hoacke shows in 2003 the work *Stuff Happens*.

The presence in such a large number of these sort of groups brings the attention to the tragic lessons which U.S.A. forgets too fast, making the same mistakes of imperialist attitude, and the situation now is deeply similar with the one from the Vietnam era.

## CONCLUSIONS

The approach we took in this paper, faced us with a remarkable variety of attitudes that artists have adopted, more or less coherently, more or less consciously, more or less consequently, in front of history as a phenomenon, as a chaining of events and relevant human actions. More than that, we could observe significant differences, from one historical period to the other, but also in the setting of the same timeframe, in the ways in which artists have conceptualized history, have visually constructed or illustrated an understanding, if not philosophical, then in any case reflexive, over the historical trajectory of the humanity.

The tones we could discern in the expression of these artists, analyzing different works of art and placing them in their historical context in the most ample and complete sense of the term (respectively that of the modeled and modulated economically, politically, socially, culturally, and stylistically), have proven to also cover an ample specter of attitudes. Thus we could observe the pessimism lacking and real shadow of hope in a better historical future, the cynical pessimism, but deeply ironic, shown by some of the most prominent contemporary artists, and on the other end of the spectrum, we could see several types of historical optimism, sometimes easier to see, other times, rather diffusely expressed in works of art of different modes and different mediums.

All in all, we consider that from the inventory we did of the artistic attitudes we can delimit and name three great paradigms of history that throne, during the modern and contemporary eras, over the positioning of artists in front of the historic trajectory of humanity. The first of these paradigms is the heroic one. In the case of this mode of conceptualization and perception, the history is seen and visually represented as being the product of exceptional actions of personalities that are completely out of the norm. Revolutionaries and strategists, legislators, and national leaders, all these personalities have been considered and portrayed, over most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as characters of providential nature, capable to push humanity towards progress, nation towards salvation, or those who follow them towards glory. Invincible or overwhelming, these characters are the true catalysts of history, which is nothing else but the product of their heroic and brave actions.

The second great paradigm concerning the reception of humanity's history that can be seen in the artistic production of the modern era and will be continued in the contemporary art in a significant manner is the tragic paradigm. In this type of conceptual – attitudinal positioning, we are no longer facing the heroes and the glamorous history of acts of incontestable bravery, but with victims and disastrous consequences of the trajectory of history over the regular people. History becomes torment and punishment, it is composed from acts of cruelty, rather than gestures of bravery and heroic giving.

The third and last paradigm that governed over the positioning of artists towards history is the cynical one, which appears to be specific to the production coming from the conceptual and contextual area of contemporary art. The period after the two World Wars had faced, on one side a materialization of ideologies in doctrines, in the base of which, at least on the level of pretext, the world has been divided in two antagonistic geopolitical blocks, on the other hand, it has seen a massive collapse of the real trust in political ideologies. The factors that have led to these evolutions are numerous, from the mass-media to the dynamics of worldwide economics, from the atrocities committed in the name of an ideology or another to the development of a consumerist mentality. What is certain nonetheless is that all these also had a strong impact over art and especially over the attitudes that artists develop and show in concerning the historical phenomenon or the concept of history.

These three options are thus, the main ways in which the great majority of artist have used to approach history in the approximately the last two centuries in the European and North-American cultural areas. Of course these three paradigms that we have sketched here must not be considered torn from one another. Characteristics that belong to one may appear in artistic productions that mostly are registered in another. Nonetheless, a sinuous, but certain evolution, we believe can be detected.

Thus, the short period that passed between two important terminals of mankind's history that we took as chronological and conceptual landmarks during this research work, respectively the French Revolution and the conflict that took place at the debut of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Iraq, tends to know two great changes of accent from the paradigm point of view in the sense of the facts presented above. With the notable exceptions that we think we have shown sufficiently in this paper, the heroic paradigm is the dominant key of artistically interpreting history, during the revolutionary era, meaning the time between 1789 and 1849. Even though the influence of this approach is maintained afterwards too, the pessimistic tragic paradigm slowly gains more importance. The First World War will essentially favor this last artistic positioning towards the historic phenomenon, which becomes dominant for an ample series of remarkable artists of the period between the Wars and immediately after. In the end, the contemporary era will bring with itself the almost complete dislocation of the heroic paradigm, and a visibly enlarged importance of the cynical one, which becomes even more important and consistently illustrated that the tragic paradigm. Products of history itself, these paradigms are used by artists both to give a sense to the evolution of mankind and to influence in a boomerang movement, the history that generated and formulated them.