



Ivan Messac, *Black Panther, Tigre de papier*



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As the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art prepares its next exhibition entitled *Années pop, années choc, 1960-1975* with the Mémorial de Caen, it is of interest to look at the work of artist Ivan Messac and more specifically at his political paintings from the late 1960s that will be shown there. One in particular, which recently was made part of the Foundation, clearly attests to the artist's commitment to reveal the political and societal issues that agitated France in the 1960s.

A committed artist

Born in Caen in 1948, Messac grew up in an intellectual environment. He was cradled by his parents' creative hobbies, as well as by the examples of his grandfather, a writer and activist, and his uncle, a journalist and literature enthusiast.¹

In 1960, his family moved closer to Paris and settled near Nanterre. This new environment is of importance for the artist because it motivated the artistic direction he would take a few years later². Evolving in a politicized environment, in a city like Nanterre, a "communist" and "armed on the cultural

¹ A pacifist, but also a Resistance fighter during the Second World War, Ivan Messac's grandfather was also a renowned novelist who today rests in the Panthéon: BELLET, Harry, *Ivan Messac, De la peinture avant toute chose*, Paris, Somogy éditions d'art, 2005, p. 10.

² Ivan Messac evokes the encounters he had within this intellectual milieu, encounters which nurtured his future: see *Ibid.*, p. 11.



front" city³, the artist grows closer to the engaged student circles, in an atmosphere of protest that prefigures May 68.⁴

"I like to say that I am both a child of the Beatles and of Marxism: at the beginning, I did not see painting as a site of political commitment. It was the climate of the city I lived in that had a lot to do with this shift: Nanterre."⁵

As an autodidact, Messac never attended any school of Fine Arts. He rather preferred to study philosophy at the University of Nanterre because, according to him, it was "a much better education for painting".⁶ It is in this context that his work – devoted until 1967 to the creation of psychedelic gouaches – took on much more social dimensions starting in 1968. Initially using Indian ink⁷, he subsequently executed flat paintings with pop colours. In them, he played with shadows and lights using stencils, a technique emblematic of his work between the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Messac, being close to the capital, developed his interest for politics by regularly attending debates organized at the ARC from 1967 onwards⁸. He then made his first forays into the Parisian artistic life. At the time of the debate on the "Red Room for Vietnam" in February 1969, he was introduced to the *Salon de la jeune peinture*. Becoming a member of its committee, he showed work there, that same year 1969, alongside artists such as Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, Henri Cueco, Jacques Monory and Bernard Rancillac⁹. Responding to the domination of abstract art after the Second World War, narrative figuration displayed its desire to chronicle everyday's reality and the society of the 'The Glorious Thirty' by way of interrogating them¹⁰.

Being conscious of the "power of images" and desiring "to evacuate any ambiguity", the artists of this movement attempted to "maintain between them and their work a certain distance"¹¹. They implemented this in drawing from what mass communication put at their disposal: publicity, cinema, comic strips, or photography¹². These tools became one of the main components of their language. For

³ *Ivan Messac, Pop politique, 1967-1972*, exhibition catalog [Paris, Galerie T&L, 16.03 -08.04.2022], Paris, Galerie T&L, 2020, p. 11 (remarks collected by Tancred Hertzog).

⁴ On March 22, 1968, nearly one hundred and fifty students, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupied the faculty of Nanterre. Viewed as the starting point of the future revolts of May 68 in Paris, the student movement then blocked the entire country for several weeks, see : DREYFUS-ARMAND, Geneviève; FRANK, Robert; LÉVY, Marie-Françoise; ZANCARINI-FOURNEL, Michelle (dir.), *Les années 1968. Le temps de la contestation*, éditions Complexe, 2008, p. 40.

⁵ *Ivan Messac, Pop politique, 1967-1972, op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶ *Ivan Messac, Pop politique, 1967-1972, ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷ Two works on paper are also part of the collection of the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art. They are *Je passe, vous repasserez* (June 1968) and *Sur le Quai* (1968). Both are available online.

⁸ The ARC, an acronym for *Animation - Recherche - Confrontation*, was created in 1966 and developed within the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. It was at the heart of cultural debates that questioned the criticized models of the museum and its public (as attested for example by Pierre Bourdieu's famous book *L'amour de l'art*, 1966). Its goal wasn't conservation but rather exhibition. It wished to be the bearer of a new program of cultural animation whose aim was to "reach a new public", as stated in ARC's first manifesto. In a period when the Parisian contemporary art scene was declining to the benefit of New York, ARC intended to revitalize the Parisian scene and to promote new artistic currents and mediums. See : TÉNÈZE, Annabelle, *Exposer l'art contemporain à Paris. L'exemple de l'ARC au Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1967-1988)*, Thesis, École nationale des Chartes, Paris, 2004, available online:

<https://www.chartes.psl.eu/fr/positions-these/exposer-art-contemporain-paris-exemple-arc-au-musee-art-moderne-ville-paris-1967#content-chapter-1>, accessed on 11.12.2022.

⁹ The *Salon de la Jeune Peinture* seeks to counter the shortage of exhibition spaces for young artists from 1950 on. In the 1960s, it became an instrument of struggle and of political debate. What is to notice from that moment on is the return of a more militant painting practice as evidenced by the project of the "Red Room for Vietnam" in 1969. See : PARENT, Francis; PERRÔT, Raymond, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture, une histoire 1950-1983*, Arcueil, éditions Patou, 2016.

¹⁰ Organized in 1964 by Hervé Télémaque, Bernard Rancillac and the art critic G rard Gassiot-Talabot, the exhibition "Mythologies quotidiennes" is a foundational event of narrative figuration.

¹¹ *Idem*.

¹² *Idem*.

that matter, this very aspect is what strongly stands out in Messac's work. With his paintings and drawings, the young artist gives an account of the 1960s, the decade's injustices, aspirations and social struggles that derived from it. Like other artists close to narrative figuration, Messac highlights the "fog of illusions" that the affluent society had turned into after years of reconstruction¹³. Thus, with his "pop" pictorial style and the societal subjects that he treats, Messac grew close to the main artists of the movement. One strong evidence of this is his 1969 work *Black Panther, Tigre de papier* (fig. 1).

Tiger and Panther

This painting reveals two distinct problematics. They are illustrated by subjects that both oppose and respond to each other. On a red background, a beret wearing figure carries a rifle on his right shoulder. The figure appears to be surrounded by other individuals, one of whom is facing him and wearing a similar beret. Easily identifiable both by the title of the work as well as by his "uniform", the main character clearly makes reference to a member of the Black Panther Party, a political group founded in 1966 in the United States to defend the rights of African-American communities. According to the artist's testimony¹⁴, the figure is to be identified as one of the party's founding members, namely Huey P. Newton (1942-1989)¹⁵. The carrying of the weapon, a sign of intimidation and provocation, refers to the capture of the Capitol in Sacramento, the capital city of the State of California, on May 2, 1967. Following a government legislative decision to curtail the rights of African-Americans¹⁶, thirty members of the Black Panthers gathered in front of the Capitol on that day to enter it with weapons (fig. 2). The image Messac seems to be referring to could be related to a photograph of Huey P. Newton, rifle on the shoulder, an image that was regularly reused in the American press (fig. 3).

The preoccupations of the opposite figure on the green background appear quite different, to be away from the act of protest. Armed with her supermarket cart, her attention is focused on consumption. The image, probably found in a magazine or advertisement of the time, evokes the stereotype of the housewife, also a "victim" of the affluent society, not unlike the members of the African-American community, victims of social discrimination in 1960s America¹⁷.

Even though they are represented as opposites, the two subjects somehow still come together, and this not without a touch of irony. On the one hand, the Black Panther Party inspired by Marxism-Leninism, represented by the sickle and the hammer, opposes capitalism with force and conviction. On the other

¹³ *Idem*.

¹⁴ According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac, 10.11.2022.

¹⁵ The Black Panther Party (BPP) is a revolutionary African-American liberation movement of Marxist-Leninist inspiration. Formed on October 15, 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in California, it went national in the mid-1970s. The composition of the party is based on a governmental model, with a president (Bobby Seale), a minister of defence (Huey P. Newton), a political program and a set of rules. In addition, the participation of women in the BPP was important. Figures such as Angela Davis or Ericka Huggins made their mark and became true icons of the party. See: LAURENT, Sylvie, "Black Panther," lecture recorded on September 26, 2018 at the Claude Lévi-Strauss Theater, in the cycle "Les Grandes révoltes" at the Université populaire du musée quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1h0tz0pH7w>, accessed on 11.11.2022.

¹⁶ In the spring of 1967, Denzil Dowell, an African-American citizen, was murdered by the police. As a result, the Black Panthers formed an armed group of "Police Patrols" to defend African-Americans against police violence. A few weeks later, a law was drafted by the Republican politician Don Mulford, with the guidance of the National Rifle Association (NRA), to ban the carrying of loaded firearms in public. Prior to this piece of legislation, it was perfectly legal to carry loaded firearms in public in California, as long as they were not brandished in a threatening manner. It all seems too evident then that this bill had the intention to stop Black Panther patrols. Suffice to say, in this regard, that the media dubbed it "the Panther Bill". See: JARRET, Matthew, "Black panther Capitol March", in *Forgotten History*, published 15 January 2021, online: <https://www.forgottenhistory.me/domestic-affairs/black-panther-capitol-march>, accessed 12.12.2022.

¹⁷ According to the artist, most of the images he uses for his works originate in documentation taken from the press, magazines or advertisements of the 1960s-1970s, which he unfortunately did not keep. According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac on 10.11.2022

hand, the American society is led by the nose by its own capitalist ideals, thus sweeping away the communist symbol with the back, so to speak, of a shopping cart.

The title of the work is crucial in this mirror game. Indeed, *Tigre de papier (Paper Tiger)*, which is derived from the famous expression by Mao Tse-Tung in an interview in 1956¹⁸, is in fact a personification of imperialist America, both able to roar and to be harmless, easily tamed. In this painting, the *Tigre (Tiger)* – a reflection of the United States, victim of overconsumption – is set against the *Panthère (Panther)*, a being that struggles and fights fearlessly to defend its rights. This work, carried by this double title and by these echoing subjects, is a critical reflection of the societal problems emblematic of these years.

Social struggles through *Angela*

Black Panther, Tigre de papier can easily be linked to another painting in the collection, the artist himself making the connection¹⁹. Also made in 1969, *Angela, Angela* (fig. 4) is similarly composed like a mirror and similarly addresses issues related to social struggles of the time.

Alluding to the female icon of the Black Panthers, Angela Davis²⁰, the title equally suggests that the young woman who is getting out of the car could be the one called Angela²¹. This double evocation shows the importance that the artist gives to this figure. *Angela*, then, is associated with the leader of communist, feminist and minorities' struggles. She is equally linked to the image of the post-May 68 woman, a signifier of the liberation of morals, as she is wearing a mini-skirt, a symbol of sexual liberation. In that sense, this work differs strongly in regard to the housewife represented in *Black Panther, Tigre de papier*.²²

In *Angela, Angela*, Messac addresses several issues. Indeed, on the right side of this composition, the artist focuses on representing the struggle of minorities, as it is symbolized by the repetition in a mosaic pattern of Ericka Huggins's silhouette, an icon of the Black Panthers in the vein of Angela Davis (fig. 5). Often used in the press as well as on the banners of Black Panther Party supporters demanding the release of political prisoners²³, the image of Ericka Huggins's raised fist symbolizes the fight against the inequalities faced by the African-American community in the 1960s.

While illustrating the struggle of women and minorities, a third issue specific to this period and to the protests that came out of May 68 is here addressed by Messac. Indeed, the crouching figure represents for the artist a personification of, what was at the time called, the "Third World"²⁴. In that sense, the

¹⁸ LU, Jack, « Chine : les tigres de papier », in *Outre-Terre*, n° 37, 2013, p. 344, available online <https://www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre2-2013-3-page-343.htm>, accessed 18.11.2022.

¹⁹ According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac, 10.11.2022.

²⁰ Born in 1944, Angela Davis is a communist, pacifist and feminist activist who defends human and minorities' rights. In the 1960s, she was established as a female role model within the Black Panther movement.

²¹ According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac, 10.11.2022.

²² VENET, Anna, « Le jour où la mini-jupe est devenue l'emblème de la révolution sexuelle », in *Numéro*, n° 235, 31 August 2021, available online: <https://www.numero.com/fr/mode/mini-jupe-andre-courreges-mary-quant>, accessed 07.12.2022.

²³ Between 1967 and 1970, Angela Davis, Ericka Huggins and Huey P. Newton were all three charged with homicide and imprisoned in the aftermath of shootings in which police officers were killed. Protest campaigns for their release erupted everywhere and the proclamations "Free Angela", "Free Ericka" and "Free Huey" became far-reaching slogans. The emblematic images of these three personalities, executed with stencils, are reproduced repeatedly on the banners of the protesters, on posters and other leaflets of the Black Panther Party. See: BLAKE, J. Herman, "The Caged Panther: The Prison Years of Huey P. Newton," in *Journal of African American Studies*, 16, 2012, p. 236. VINCENT, Anais, "Free Angela and All Political Prisoners," in *Hommes & migrations*, 1302, published September 13, 2013. Available online, at <https://journals.openedition.org/hommesmigrations/2517>, accessed 13.12.2022; HUGGINS, Ericka, *Passionate About Inspiring Transformation*, available online <https://www.ericahuggins.com/bio>, accessed 13.12.2022.

²⁴ According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac, 10.11.2022.



woman on the left of the painting bears a completely different meaning and contrasts with this image of poverty. In this context, *Angela* could even be associated with the dominant class. She could thus symbolize the divide prevalent in the affluent society of the 1960s, where the class struggle deriving from Marxist ideals, is coupled with the various social struggles, such as women's and minorities'.

With these two works, Messac establishes himself as an artist who paints a picture of the anti-establishment society in which he evolved, thus following his comrades into the narrative figuration tradition. Like them, he uses material from the media to depict daily life and the political reality from which the social struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s arose, as is demonstrated by other works by Messac conserved at the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art²⁵. This is for instance the case with *Modello pour la fresque de Nanterre* (1969), which describes the revolutionary climate of May 68 and the student struggles. But also with *Loin des Réalités* (1969), which shows the confrontation between the Western and Eastern blocs, and *Viet Nam 70* (1970-1971), a denunciation of the Vietnam War and the burden borne by the Vietnamese population (fig. 6 to 8).

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²⁵ According to an electronic exchange with Ivan Messac, 10.11.2022.



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Illustrations

(Fig. 1)



© Photo credit: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève. Photographer: André Morin © 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich

Ivan MESSAC (Caen, 1948)
Black Panther, Tigre de papier
1969
Acrylic on canvas
81.2 x 116.2 cm
FGA-BA-MESSI-0007

Provenance

Artist's studio
Galerie T&L, Paris, 2022

Exhibitions

Aspects du racisme, Paris, 20.10 – 20.11.1970
Ivan Messac, Pop politique 1967-1972, Paris, Galerie T&L, 17.03 – 08.04.2022
In preparation: *Années pop, années choc, 1960-1975*, Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 23.06 – 31.12.2023

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(Fig. 2)

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

VOL. 220—NO. 35,896 Founded 1857 SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, MAY 2, 1967—48 PAGES—4 SECTIONS Stocks Final Price: 10c. Per Copy: 10c. Per Page: 10c. Per Column: 10c. Per Column: 10c.

CAPITOL IS INVADED

Press Corps Draws Ire Of Legislator

An angry Assembly Speaker Pro Tem Carlos Bee expressed immediate reaction to the television and radio coverage of the invasion of the Assembly Chamber by a group of armed Negroes today. Bee, of Alameda County, shouted: "Negroes—no more, will you please those cameramen, they have no permission to be in this chamber."

Assemblyman Leo had no way of knowing whether the men had gained into the chamber without permission.

Senate-Speaker Tony Beards, who was in the chamber, pushed his way to the group at the rear of the chamber and forced them out the door.

Reports 'hacker'

The Assembly speaker then contacted a low circulation Alameda County newspaper. The Assembly's "hacker" had just occurred. He said people with "rifles" forced their way into the chamber and they were afraid. He then changed his statement of "rifles" to "weapons."

Beards' counterpart in the Senate, Assemblyman Leo B. Ryan of San Mateo County, denounced the invasion.

Seeks Explanation

Assemblyman Leo Ryan of San Mateo County denounced the invasion.

See Page A4, Col. 4

State Police Halt Armed Negro Band

The state armed Negroes entered the State Capitol at noon today and it made their way to the back of the Assembly Chamber before they were dispersed and marched away by the state police. The Assembly was in session at 10:30 and Speaker Pro Tem Carlos Bee ordered the men removed from the chamber.

Outside the chamber, the police took away the weapons. The men argued they could carry the weapons as long as they were not concealed.

Not Concealed

Apparently the fact the weapons were not concealed was the reason the men were able to get as far as the Assembly Chamber before they were dispersed.

After the state police opened the area they returned the weapons to them because the protesters had broken no law.

Following their release by the state police, the men left the Capitol and returned some over-parkers who remained outside during the incident. They then drove off.

Four or five coursons of the Black Panther group later drove into a service station at 18th and L Street. Several police officers took the demonstrators to the city jail.

Armed In Station

They were arrested in the lot of a service station. Some were arrested for having loaded weapons in their cars, an officer said.

A service station attendant, Dudley Welch, said: "They brought their cars in for water. The police came in right after them. They weren't carrying any money."

"Two officers pulled out their revolvers and told several of the demonstrators to stay where they were. Then more police arrived. The demonstrators just talked. They didn't put up any resistance."

There were a total of 100 demonstrators.

11 MIGs Are Destroyed By US Jets

SANJON (AP) — U.S. fighter-bombers inflicted the heaviest aerial destruction of the war on North Vietnam Monday, destroying 11 MIG7 interceptors in the air and on the ground, the American command reported today.

As the North took another pounding in the intensified air war, heavy fighting flared across South Vietnam from the central highlands to the Mekong Delta. American infantrymen suffered their heaviest losses in the daily fighting, which in some places killed and wounded.

Air Support

The ground forces were supported by fighter-bombers that attacked Communist positions in the south with a record 855 sorties Monday.

In a delayed report, the American command announced the loss of three U.S. Air Force F105 Thunderbolt during a mission over North Vietnam Sunday, including the shot down by MIGs and one from unknown causes. The last crewman was listed as missing. This brought to 533 the number of American planes reported lost over North Vietnam, including 15 shot down by MIGs.

Beard radio claimed the North

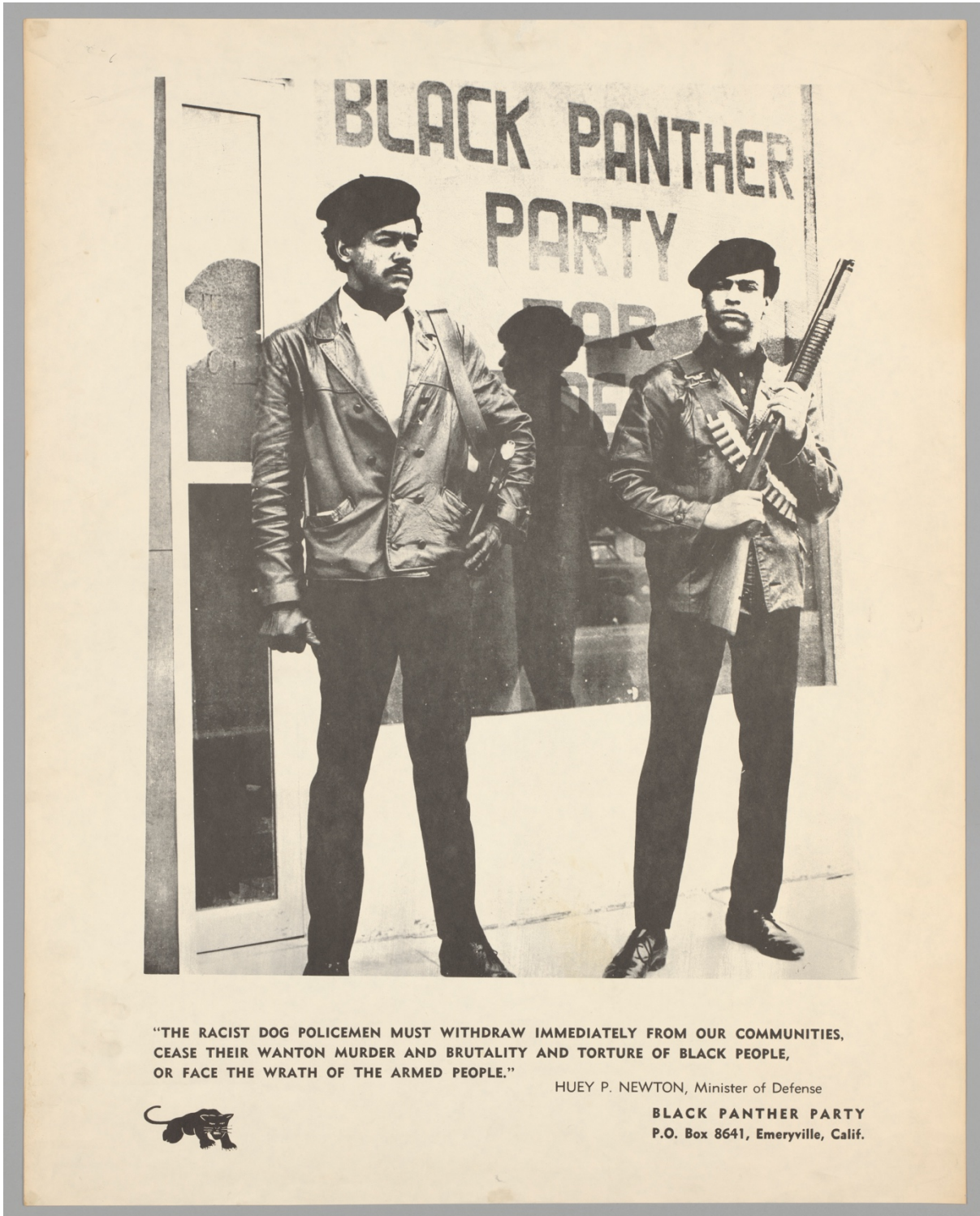


Negroes armed with loaded pistols and rifles and shot in the Capitol after some forced their way into the Assembly Chamber about noon. They identified themselves as members of the "Black Panther party." See Page A4, Col. 4

The Sacramento Bee, May 2, 1967, vol. 220, n° 35'896. Available online:

https://www.newspapers.com/image/618635954/fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IWR5b3R5ZnNkIiwiaWF0IjoxNzY0MzE1MDAzLCJleHAiOiE2NzE4MjE0MDc0MDN9.eud-uykurFzj_DM3rFaR-03UPNWDn5o8z49dbtzHZs

(Fig. 3)



Huey P. Newton et Bobby Seale, standing in front of the Black Panther Party headquarter in Oakland, state of California, 1971, lithography, 73.7 x 58.4 cm. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. (Royalty-free)

(Fig 4)



© Photo credit: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève. Photographer: André Morin © 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich

Ivan MESSAC (Caen, 1948)

Angela, Angela

1969

Acrylic on canvas

81.2 x 116.2 cm

FGA-BA-MESSI-0006

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La Résistance des images, Bruxelles, Patinoire Royale, 25.04 – 31.07.2015

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(Fig. 5)

BLACK WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE PEOPLE - ANGELA AND ERICKA

FREE ANGELA



IT'S CALLED TENTH AND GREENWICH (WOMEN'S HOUSE OF DETENTION)

key Fourth Floor
key Four
Four
dorothy
is that your light sugar
how they treating you sugar
make me some kind of sign so i know it's
you
Cause you so far away
Dorothy
i miss you
baby is you gonna ever come back and
dance with me

guess what
they got a new kinda hair spray
i know you'd dig it
You got a con waiting
On the shelf for you
Sugar
I'm waiting too
baby is you gonna ever come back and
dance with me

guess what
eloin
there's a boy
would you believe it
he turned two
i gave the hats out at the party
i miss you
baby is you gonna ever come back and
dance with me

guess what
I'm getting on my feet
i did Big Rudy a favor
he's taken a shine to me
he gives me a few little things to do
the pigeon had an egg
i miss you

NOTE: This letter was written by Angela Davis to Ericka Huggins, prior to Ericka's release from Niantic State Prison.
Marin County Jail
San Rafael, California
May, 1971

dearest Ericka, Sister, Comrade,
All your messages have been beautiful and inspiring, it's been a long time - over two years - since our last meeting. I recall, however, as if it were yesterday, that cold, rainy

evening, submerged under sadness and rage, those agonizing hours we were stationed in the parking lot outside Sybil Brand (Los Angeles) anxiously awaiting your release from jail. The outrageous assassination of John and Bobby had come so unexpectedly, engendering an atmosphere of shock, incredulity, and unquenchable anger. But our paramount concern was you, Ericka. Your husband, closest comrade in struggle, your love, the father of Mai, your new-born child, had just been slain by the bullets of our foes. You had been immediately arrested on a manifestly fabricated charge - conspiracy to murder, or something equally ridiculous. We were hating with your fists.

While we despised your approach - you were now walking through the jail's iron gates - our silence was throbbing with inexpressible pain. And as we were desperately searching for words to convey our unyielding solidarity, it was your strong, undaunted voice that broke the silence. You were asking us why we appeared so thoughtful, dejected, that we forgotton the spirit of the long struggle ahead would require? Your unflinching determination as you clenched your fist, you said, "All Power to the People," prompted me to think to myself, this must be the strongest, most courageous Black woman in America.

It was then that I realized that the guardians of this deplorable order would never be satisfied until they contained your strength. You were isolated you from our people, and a few months later the news of your arrest in New Haven reached us, we were appalled, though in light of your magnificent work in the New Haven Black community, as before in Los Angeles, I was not terribly surprised.

Just recently I read in the Newsletter covering the progress of your trial that on account of F.B.I. agents' treachery to subpoena, their heavy involvement in the case would remain obscure. Coupled the attempt to conceal the role of the F.B.I. in the events preceding your arrest with the announcement a few months later that J. Edgar Hoover had "demonstrated the greatest threat to the internal security of this country" and the real conspirators should emerge with striking clarity.

As long as sisters and brothers like you and Bobby continue to articulate the deepest instinctive feelings of oppressed people and to illuminate the path towards concrete expression of our grievances and our demands for revolutionary change, our adversaries will not fail to raise about threats to their internal security, and actually, this is the way it should be.

This is all I'm trying to say: We know why you have been locked up behind the walls of Niantic State Farm for over two years and we know why Bobby has been thrown into dungeon after dungeon, from Chicago to San Francisco to New Haven. Black people - not simply Blacks, but people of all colors and all nations - are swiftly becoming conscious of the critical importance of freeing you and Bobby. I've been trying to keep abreast of developments in your trial as well as less available details of the happenings in your life at Niantic State Farm. The interview in this week's issue of the B.P.P. Newspaper with the two sisters recently released from the prison was tremendously moving. Their utter respect for you, for the ideas and ideals you represent, the leadership you have given the sisters at Niantic, all this was unmistakably clear - the same radiant presence I recall so vividly from the days we worked together in Los Angeles. I thought the idea of the stateless collective positively powerful, the mere notion of sharing among prisoners militates against all the internal hostilities of officials invariably attempt to engender.

You must know that I've been in total isolation since I was extradited from New York to San Rafael. I miss the sisters terribly, but the great deal of the discussions, the latest organized demonstrations, their warmth, their intense sense of the concrete reality of the struggle. I miss the picture of you and other revolutionary heroines who came from contradictory backgrounds and passed on cell work to me. I miss the great deal of the work we did together.

So much work remains to be done before we can progress - pending the demand that prisoners in their present form be abolished. It is an inevitable by-product of a racist, capitalist society and the only way to achieve a truly people-oriented monolith - which women however are inevitably constituting - sufficient attention has not been devoted to women prisoners.

I have often heard the rumor that as compared to men's prisons, women's institutions are "humanely benign, the greatest problem being the tendency to "babify" the women captives. This is a myth which must be immediately smashed. It's true that some middle-class women, if they are arrested at all, are given preferential treatment, but for the vast majority of women prisoners - who are Black, Chicano and Puerto Rican - the notion of mildness in the midst of coercion is a blatant misrepresentation.

In the Women's House of Detention in New York, at least 35% of the prisoners were Black and Puerto Rican. On my floor, approximately 50 of us - two corridors - would take meals together. At no time during my imprisonment were there more than six white women - and four of them had been arrested for political offenses! Though there were a few openly sympathetic Black matrons (who, for example, would smuggle in to us political literature much in demand), treatment in general was far from delicate.

At the time of my arrest the whole building was astray with talk about demonstrations around all sorts of issues. The grievances advanced by the men in the Tombs were all equally reflective of conditions in the Women's House. As a retaliatory measure, the jail officials ordered all the women on a number of floors locked up in their minuscule cells (9'x5' for two persons) for well over a week. (During this period they had shut me away in the psychiatric ward and later in total isolation.) All personal effects, down to cigarettes, toothbrushes and clothes were confiscated. Items were removed from the banks. The sisters were left in their cells with nothing but the nightgowns they were wearing, the bare, cold, plastic-covered mattresses and the hordes of roaches and mice. This is not to mention the women who were taken to 4-A (the disciplinary block) or the sister who was so badly beaten by male guards that she had to spend two or three weeks in Bellevue Hospital. This is supposed to be mild treatment? That myth must definitely be shattered.

And the innocents - not just the victims of politically-inspired frame-ups - but the innocents whose sole crime is their color and their accidental birth into a racist universe. A sister who stood two cells away from me (her name was Helen) had been in the House of D. for 18 months on a murder charge about which she had absolutely no knowledge. After 18 months of imprisonment with an exorbitant bail tantamount to no bail at all, the prosecutor decided to dismiss the charges for lack of evidence and the result of a man's having confessed to the offense. Elated, Helen returned from court that day announcing that she would at last be able to walk under the sun once more. Her next court date, a week away, would mark her final day in the House of D. The entire floor celebrated her victory. The next week, amid tears and joy, she left us saying she would return soon to scream up at us from the Greenwich Village sidewalk below.

That evening, however, her victory had proved to be short-lived, for the court had brought her back with the rest of the sisters and with her the story of a new D.A. in the case. He wanted her to plead guilty to a lesser charge, "attempted manslaughter", after which he would credit her with time already served as the sentence. He was afraid, it seems, that once all charges were dismissed, she might sue for false arrest - for the 18 months the State had stolen from her life. Two months later when I left, Helen was yet in the cell two numbers away, still resolutely refusing to plead guilty for something in which she had played no part. She will be tried for murder and will doubtlessly be acquitted, but how can she ever be repaid for those long monotonous months of her life.

An inordinate amount of work around women's prisons remains to be done. As you well know, sisters behind these walls are urgently in need of outside encouragement and support. The Women's Bail Fund organized by a coalition of women's organizations in New York, whose inception was signalled by a massive people's demonstration outside the House of D., was a tremendous incentive for consistent political work inside. When I left, the entire jail was being organized, floor by floor, corridor by corridor, so that decisions concerning the women who got out on bail would be made collectively. Those who had leave would have to commit themselves to ongoing work with the Fund.

Many more of these kinds of projects are needed: campaigns to uncover in their entirety the abominable conditions prevailing in women's institutions, from the inhuman circumstances of prison existence in general to the fascist techniques to which officials have recourse in attempting to create political neutrality and homogeneity.

Ultimately, we must all be liberated and as you have repeatedly insisted, only a strong people's threat can set us free. You must be liberated, Ericka, Connie Tucker, imprisoned in Florida's Klen territory because she has been a constant advocate of the rights and revolutionary ideals of Black People - she must be unchained. Marie Holt, sentenced to death at the age of 19 in a racist small Southern City - she must be rescued. And all our strong sisters, wherever they may be, must be enabled to enjoy the relative freedom of the streets in order to more vigorously embrace the tasks which lie ahead.

You, Ericka, have sketched the dimensions of that task better than anyone - I found this quote on the cover of an underground newspaper:

"We must build a new world. All other generations have passed this responsibility on and it is time to stop the clocks and seize the time, Change, destroy and rebuild. It is time for us to build a new world free of selfishness, racism, narrow nationalism and the desire of any one group to claim this world as their own. The universe belongs to the people - to live, to create - for each other."

The urgency of transforming this ideal into reality has been impressed upon us by all our fallen comrades - John, Buncky, Li'l Bobby, Jonathan, William Christmas, James McClain, Sam Napper. They must live again through us and our struggles. Through our children and our unborn, they must enjoy the rewards of victory - the victory towards which they have already made infinite contributions.

All my love to you, Ericka, to Bobby, to all the sisters at Niantic. Seize the Time!
Angela

Abstract from the «Black Panther Party Newspaper Service», vol. VI, n° 20, 12 June 1971, n.p. (<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/black-panther/06%20no%20no%2001-20%20jun%201971.pdf>).

(Fig. 6)



© Courtesy Galerie T&L, Paris © 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich

Ivan Messac (Caen, 1948)

Modello pour la fresque de Nanterre

1969

collage and viyl gouache on paper

40 x 195 cm

FGA-BA-MESSI-0009

Provenance

Artist's studio

Galerie T&L, Paris, 2022

Exhibitions

Ivan Messac, *Pop politique 1967-1972*, Paris, Galerie T&L, 17.03 – 08.04.2022

In preparation: *Années pop, années choc, 1960-1975*, Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 23.06 – 31.12.2023

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Ivan Messac, Pop politique, 1967-1972, exhibition catalogue [Paris, Galerie T&L, 16.03 –08.04.2022], Paris, Galerie T&L, 2020, listed, p. 51, col. repr., p. 15 (detail) and 22-23.

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(Fig. 7)



© Photo credit: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève. Photographer: André Morin
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich

Ivan Messac (Caen, 1948)

Loin des réalités

1969

Acrylic on canvas

79.8 x 79.8 cm

FGA-BA-MESSI-0008

Provenance

Artist's studio

Galerie T&L, Paris, 2022

Exhibitions

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Dublin, National College of Art, 20.08 – 20.09.1970

Ivan Messac, les années narratives, La Seyne-sur-mer, Villa Tamaris, 27.01 – 25.02.2001

Ivan Messac, Pop politique 1967-1972, Paris, Galerie T&L, 17.03 – 08.04.2022

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(Fig. 8)



© Photo credit: Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève. Photographer: André Morin © 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich

Ivan Messac (Caen, 1948)

Viet Nam 70

1970-1971

Acrylic on canvas

129.8 x 96 cm

FGA-BA-MESSI-0010

Provenance

Artist's studio

Galerie T&L, Paris, 2022

Exhibitions

Ivan Messac, les années narratives, La Seyne-sur-mer, Villa Tamaris, 27.01 – 25.02.2001

De toutes les couleurs, Paris, Galerie Hervé Lourdel, 01.02 – 01.03.2002

Ivan Messac, Pop politique 1967-1972, Paris, Galerie T&L, 17.03 – 08.04.2022

In preparation : *Années pop, années choc, 1960-1975*, Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 23.06 – 31.12.2023

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