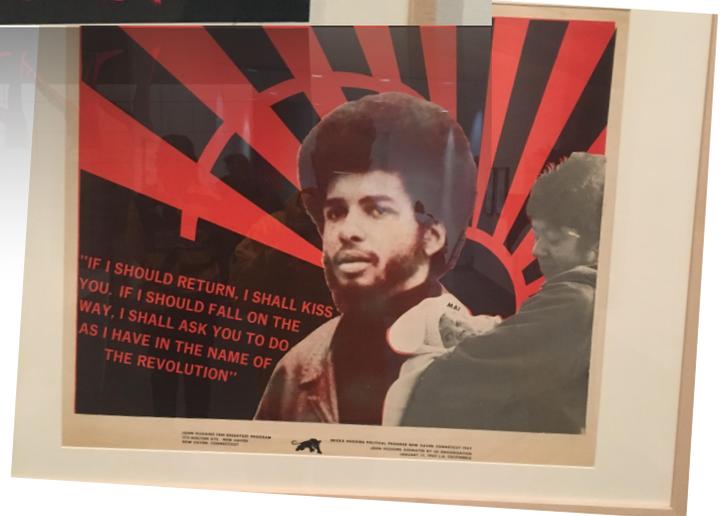
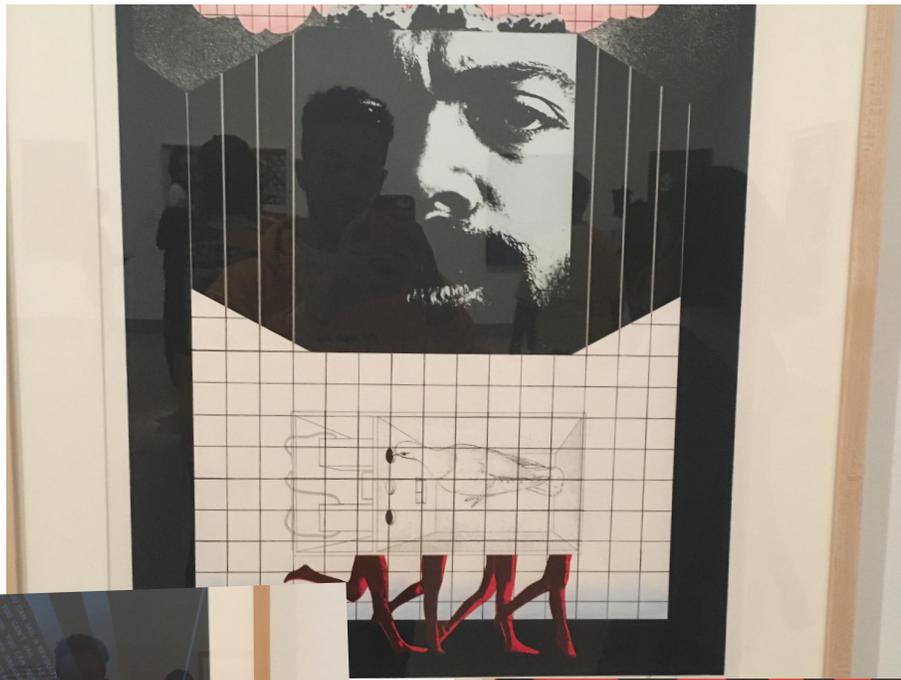


Themed Museum Tour: The Importance of Symbols & Faces in the Movement for Black Power

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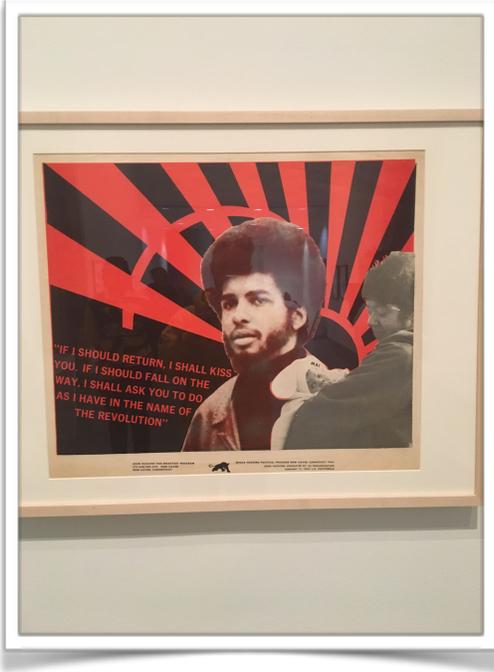
What Role do Faces & Symbols Play in a Revolution?

The "Soul of a Nation" exhibit in the Brooklyn Museum focuses on the struggle for black pride, power, independence and freedom depicted through different artworks from 1963 to 1983. Internal struggles of the average Black American as well as external struggles against systems of oppression bleed through the photography, paintings, collages, sculptures and drawings of the exhibit. There is also a focus on the Black American identity as being separate and even oppositional to the established, stereotypical, and ruling class American identity. While these artists are Black Americans and depict other Black Americans in their artwork, the art communicates that this is representing a completely different nation entirely.

Within the gallery, faces and symbols are used to illustrate the theme or message that the artist is trying to convey. Sometimes without any written word, the face and symbolism used gets a message across to the audience. This is not only because the people and symbols depicted are well known, but because what they stand for is. Within a revolution, leaders and images attach themselves to a cause and hold much more importance than what they seem to be at face value. Artists know this and use these revolutionary icons to further their cause.

“If I Should Return”

by Emory Douglass



Emory Douglass’s use of John Huggins, member of the Black Panther Party, in his artwork is an act of revolution in itself. Using a member from a party that was condemned as extreme by the federal government is a bold move. The symbolism present are the sun rays coming from both the baby and Huggins’s heads and the black panther sticker at the bottom of the artwork. The rays are similar to the Japanese War Flag and

represent dissension and revolution throughout modern history. The rays are placed around Huggins to show his revolutionary and warlike spirit. They are placed around the infant to show that the spirit will continue on in the coming generations.

“You Can Jail A Revolutionary”

by Emory Douglass

Emory Douglass continues with this same theme in this piece. This time, he utilizes the imagery of Fred Hampton, a more prominent revolutionary than John Huggins and lets his quote communicate his message. Without the quote, a sense of revolution is still understood by the use of the sun rays again and the expression of both pictures used. They both have a spirit of argumentation and give a sense of a call to action. Without the quote, the imagery of Fred Hampton and his expression communicates to audiences the message.





“The Devil and His Game”

by Kay Brown

The faces of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X are used as symbols, with the artist Kay Brown falling back on their legacy to communicate a message. Martin Luther King is seen as the opponent to America, with the victor winning the lives of black children. Malcolm X is not involved in this game, probably because he doesn't wish to beat the oppressors at their own game, but rather break the rules. This is all communicated without

a word, and relies on the audience's prior knowledge of the people and symbols displayed in the piece.

“The First 100 Years”

by Archibald J. Motley Jr.

Archibald Motley utilizes symbols to communicate his point. The message of his piece is like a photograph of war: it simply exists to depict the true conditions. To do this, Motley uses images of lynchings, the devil, the Klu Klux Klan, attack dogs, segregation and the Statue of Liberty, among other symbols, to prove to the audience that the conditions of Black Americans have been unfortunate in the years after their emancipation.

The meaning behind the symbols have to be known to truly understand the message. Like other artists, Motley uses these impactful symbols to communicate a message that he isn't explicitly telling us.





“The Liberation of Aunt Jemima”

by **Betye Saar**

Saar utilizes the the historically racist depiction of black mothers and housemaids. Without prior knowledge, there is no story to be told, and the racist depictions have no clear meaning. Saar, like the other artists, relies on the audience’s prior knowledge of racist representation to communicate a message. This is also done with the black fist rising from the bottom, a sign of black pride, justice, and revolution.