

Communism

Eva Berendes, Lali Chetwynd, Declan Clarke, Susan Kelly, Goshka Macuga, Paul McDevitt, Aleksandra Mir, Seamus Nolan, Hito Steyerl, Veit Stratmann and Klaus Weber

Curated by Grant Watson

Opening & Performance: 20 January, 2005 at 6pm
Exhibition: 20 January–27 February, 2005
Seminar: 29 January, 2005 at 1pm
Monday-Saturday 11am–6pm
Admission free

Project Gallery
 39 East Essex Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2
Open Mon–Sat from 11am
Info/Booking Line +353(0)1 881 9614/13
www.project.ie



In cooperation with the Goethe-Institut Dublin. Supported by the British Council

Not everything is always Black or White.

A phone conversation between the author of our poster collage, Aleksandra Mir (New York) and the creator of the original Che Guevara poster, Jim Fitzpatrick, (Dublin). January 3, 2005. 2pm EST.

Aleksandra Mir: A couple of communist neighbors in the Swedish neighborhood where I grew up in the 70s had your poster on their wall. Long before I could even begin to understand who Che Guevara was, I was blown away by the visual power of this image. It fed my hunger for visual culture and taught me a lot about composition and colour. Today, as a practicing artist myself, I still find it to be the ultimate graphic ever created. For the last few years I have had it up on my own wall here in New York City, although with the slight alteration of a now defunct Concorde flying above Che's head. Could you describe the technical approach to your original graphic a little?

Jim Fitzpatrick: It's essentially just making a line drop-out of a photograph. At the time (1967) I was doing a series for an Irish magazine called Scene. The editor commissioned me to do quite a radical series called 'A voice in our times', relating to the Vietnam War. It was very satirical. I used people's own words against them. I used London Johnson words on Vietnam. Today you hear a lot about Blair as being Bush's "poodle". But I did Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister at the time, as Harold Johnson's "poodle". The dog with his head out. Then I decided I wanted to be a bit more radical, and I did the Che Guevara image. Initially I was working in a very Art Nouveau-ish style, like Beardsley, and the first image I did of Che was psychedelic. It looks like he is in seaweed. His hair was not hair, it was shapes that I felt gave it an extra dimension. That was the image I produced for the magazine and that was done before he died and that is the important thing about that image. At first it didn't print. It was considered far too strong and revolutionary. I was very inspired by Che's trip to Bolivia. He went there with the intent to overthrow the intensely corrupt government, helped by the Americans at the time, and that's where he died. I thought he was one of the greatest men who ever lived and I still do in many ways. And when he was murdered, I decided I wanted to do something about it, so I created the poster. I felt this image had to come out, or he would not be commemorated otherwise, he would go where heroes go, which is usually into anonymity.

I thought my original psychedelic work was very artistic, very beautiful, but it didn't communicate the way the red and black did. It hit you in the face. For reference, I was looking at a photograph that I had seen in the German 'Stern' magazine, a strong political magazine with left-wing views. It was a photo taken by Korda, but I didn't know that at the time. I had bought the magazine to try to learn a bit of German, and because I liked what it did, and in terms of graphics it was pretty far advanced as well. So I did a number of graphic versions from the photo. The first was a square, b/w. The second that I re-photographed, had poster proportions, 20 x 30. You had made a second generation of your own image?

Yes. I made a paper negative on a piece of equipment I used to have that was called a "Grant". Have you ever heard of it?
 No?
 It was like a giant light box. Nobody who worked in advertising, or with a printer in those days, before the age of computers, would know what it was. Essentially it made a big paper negative of anything you wanted. You put your image underneath it. I drew on acetate so the light could go through. You put a sheet of photographic paper on top of that, closed it, turned on the light box, developed it in developer and fixed it in a fixer. It was very smelly and very messy. The third image was the black on red, because I had decided to do leaflets, everything, and hand them out to everybody. The red and black image was made in two flat colours, two separations. I re-drew the photograph, that's what I call a line drop-out. I wanted it to look photographic but I drew it by hand, on Litho film. I wanted it to look stark so put it on a red background, but if you saw the artwork, all you saw was a flat black with a center cutout for the face. If you ever did silk-screening you know you work in black and white and then you print it in any color you like, basically. So that was printed then in one color black and one color red, and I decided that the star should be yellow, so I painted that in with a magic marker.

By hand, all of them? What was the original edition of the poster?
 Yeah. I think I printed 1000 and gave most of them away for free. I decided to get them into shops, not to make money, just to get them around. To be honest I don't even have one of them myself, for they all went all over the place. I was over in London a lot and I distributed them there. There was a huge demand for them. One lot went to Spain and they were seized by Franco's police. Did you sent them around haphazardly, or did you have designated recipients?
 I would like to say it was well organized, but it was quite haphazard. Friends of mine going to the continent would get a batch, a lot of odd people ended up distributing the work. What I was trying to do in a way was to get people to notice that this man had been murdered. It was a big story at the time but it faded away. I felt this was somebody exceptional. The poster was published in Private Eye, a famous satirical magazine that is still going. They passed it on to a guy called Peter Meyer, who was an art critic for Studio International, the most influential art magazine of its day. He was quite excited about it and along with other artists he invited us all to participate in an exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London to commemorate Che Guevara. It didn't happen at the Lisson in the end, but in a space called the Arts Laboratory. This was happening at the same time that Yoko Ono was having her first exhibition, she'd met John

Lennon. She was chopping her clothes off with a scissors. The exhibition was titled 'Viva Che'. So for this show I did a number of works, first I silk screened a black and white and painted in the red by hand, to make it an original, and that was acrylic on board. They were going to sell the original to raise money. I also made an oil painting, a very big, black and white, on canvas. That was more painterly, a heavy impasto for the whites. You made a painting from your poster?
 I made a painting of the poster.

Where is that now?
 I'm gonna tell you now. Nowhere is the answer. The first psychedelic image I had made of Che was also part of this show. None of them ever came back or were returned. I was told they disappeared in Eastern Europe on tour somewhere. You would have to be a detective to find out what happened. I have some of the names of the people involved if you want to follow up on it.
 We'll do that next year. We'll track down your originals (laughs). You made love to, the oil painting was magnificent. God knows, I don't know what happened to it all, it wasn't just me, lots of other artists were also working on their own images of Che Guevara.
 But before you had these invitations, you just went about printing and distributing on your own? How did you finance and organize that?
 I did it right out of my own pocket. I also had friends who were printers, one who today is one of the richest capitalists in Ireland, and very proud he printed it for me, but I had to pay for it. I just got a good price.

So after the first edition of the initial 1000, how did it gain mass distribution after that?
 It really took off. There seemed to be a huge demand for it. I decided on that basis to form a poster company called Two Bear Feet. I produced the poster and a couple of psychedelic variations on it. My favorite was a black on silver foil board. So it was quite spectacular and I only did about a hundred that I gave away to my friends and people I was trying to impress. At that stage I was an artist looking for work and I handed it out. I made all these images copyright free. Not because I didn't know who the photographer was who took the picture at the time, but because I believed in the cause. I wanted anybody and everybody to copy it, change it, do whatever they bloody wanted to do with it.
 So you didn't approach it as an illustrator, you were right in the middle of things, as an activist?

Yes, very much an activist. I was doing a lot of work for a left wing political party called The Official IRA. They were the original IRA who downed arms, called a cease fire and then became a political party. They were very much spied on by British intelligence, army intelligence here, by just about everybody. I got stopped on the street quite a lot in those days. I always thought, "What are they looking for? What are they going to do with posters?" I had made a number of posters for a group called People's Democracy in Northern Ireland, before everything went haywire, I worked for them for free. I did a lot of work free, I still do.

But you still always maintain a commercial practice next to that to support those activities, is that how it works?
 Well, I do Celtic work, and I do album covers, I work for a band called 'The Darkness'. I've done Sinead O'Connor, and all the Thin Lizzy's, but The Darkness is one of the biggest bands in the world. They've sold more than 10 million copies.
 So can you talk a little bit about copyright in general, because it appears that you embody two very different ideas about it. I made anything on my web site free, you can download anything you like in high resolution for free. But I do point out that I own the copyright of the images, and that I don't mind people like yourself or ordinary people downloading them, printing them out, but if I find a big American company or English company stealing the images, I'd sue their ass off.
 So you are adamant about copyright when it comes to commercial exploitation of your work, but you want to promote the idea of copyright free when it has a political purpose or popular distribution?

Absolutely.
 That's interesting and that echoes Korda's sentiments as well. Korda has said that I was the one who made his photograph famous. I actually have in my possession a signed photograph, the Che Guevara photograph, signed by Korda. I am very proud of that. I had no wish of stop him from earning money. Do you know the story of the Che Guevara image itself?
 Yeah, I've done quite a lot of research on it.
 So you know the story of the Italian publisher Feltrinelli. (Giangiacomo) Feltrinelli stole the photograph, and he made a lot of money from it. And he never gave any money to Korda. I don't want to get into the politics of it cause I was threatened by him a long time ago. He is dead now. But he was one of the Brigado Rosso, Red Brigade leaders. You know all of this?
 I know some of it. You are filling in some of my blanks and maybe I can fill in some of yours. Tell me what you know.
 I was threatened by him for distributing the poster in London. He claimed to be the copyright owner.
 Of the Photograph.
 Of the Photograph. But he wasn't.
 No he wasn't. But he threatened you, and you had made a posterized color interpretation? And he saw this as an infringement to his own interest in the photo?
 Yes, I was over in London trying to find distributors for my posters. There was a magazine called Oz, that was eventually banned by the British authorities and there was

the company called Big O. They were the best and biggest poster company of their time. This is the summer of '68 and they had a lot of really radical work in their range. I wanted my work included in their range, and they said, we are already taking on the photo version and Feltrinelli has the copyright. I said, no he doesn't, the photographer does. So they took me on and he called and threatened to sue me and to kill me. I said, "Do I have a choice, can I take my pick?" He said, "Every man has a choice". I chose Death, it's cheaper.
 The photographer, Alberto Diaz Gutierrez (Korda), was the top Cuban chronicler of the revolution and Castro's personal photographer in a way.
 Feltrinelli stole the photo from him, this was reported in a Dutch underground magazine, but now I think the story is, Korda gave him the photo but never expected it to be used or his name obliterated.

Either way, Feltrinelli had walked into his studio in Havana, got the photo and distributed it widely with enormous success. Korda never received any royalties.
 He couldn't.
 No he couldn't, for many reasons, and there are many people offering commentary at the moment of what those reasons could have been. Some say he was grateful to Feltrinelli as well, for making the image known in the name of the cause. But the bottom line is, he was not really in a position to seek royalties. Castro considered intellectual property "capitalist bullshit" and Cuba was not a signatory to the Berne Convention on intellectual property at the time, so he was not in a position to even ask. But then almost simultaneously you were doing the poster. Both the photograph and the poster were under the same publishing house in the UK, did you get any royalties out of that?
 No, to be honest they only took a small number and I never got paid by any of these people. I just kept producing the posters, I was enjoying it. And I was feeling that... I know that sound crazy, but I was feeling that here was this Irish Argentinean that only people like myself would know about, that started to appear in all the shops, and then I started seeing all the variations...

Wait, Che Guevara was Irish?
 Yes, he told me this, and I Lynch it up. I can give you the genealogy. It was Isabel Lynch from Galway, his father's grandmother. So he was third generation Irish. And so you identified with him as an Irishman?
 Absolutely, yeah. And I'll give you a laugh too. Two of my heroes at the time were Che Guevara and John F. Kennedy, almost apart in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The two of them poles brought in the world to an end, you know. Not long after, Bobby Kennedy was murdered too, and I later did a different poster of him as well. He was standing up against the Vietnam War and became one of my heroes. I've often thought of making more people in the style of the Che Guevara, but somehow after I had created it, I felt that that was a final and shouldn't be applied to other people. Right now there is a comedian called Ricky Gervais, who uses the exact same pose as Che on the cover of his CD and all his ads, he's a fat guy with a sort of rubber nose. I wouldn't bother me, he's a very good comedian otherwise, but I don't find that it adds anything. Over the years, I have seen so many pastiches of the image, applied to so many other people. They don't bother you, you find them more to be silly gestures because they don't have the same strength as the Che image originally had?
 Indeed, a couple of years ago, a church in England ran Che Guevara as Jesus, Jesus drawn in the same style that I had given Che, if you can imagine?

Jesus as Chef?
 Yes, I mean, it is a very simple style. I had been doing that style long before I did Che Guevara, simply because I wasn't a very good artist. When I was 15 or 16 I would trace an Elvis Presley or whomever from a magazine. By now the image has been used for many causes, many of them worthy, a lot of them very unworthy. There was one variation that I particularly liked, a black image, and in the form of a green and red vibrating off each other. Very cleverly done, and then Paul Davis, an American artist did a cover for Evergreen magazine. And that itself became a great poster. There were Cuban versions of that poster as well, there was an exhibition of Latin American art in Dublin and there on the wall I saw this wonderful Che Guevara poster. But they used his face as part of the shape of Latin America.
 Yes, I can see that happening. So you were seeing all these variations coming out of the photograph or out of your posterized version?
 Out of my posterized version. Another one was my poster but rendered in 'real life', Che Guevara painted in flesh. Now, to take you fast forward, in the Saatchi gallery, you know the Saatchi collection?
 Yeah.
 It's all British Sensationalist art. Like Damien Hirst, you know that sort of stuff.
 Yeah.
 Shark, etcetera.
 Absolutely.
 There is an artist called Gavin Turk, heard of him?
 Yep.
 He has done my image, in other words, my version of that image, black on red, on canvas, it's in the Saatchi collection and its worth a couple of hundred grand, which I think is quite funny as well.
 And what about Andy Warhol. I've seen his version attributed to your design.
 Yeah, Warhol did his own version. At that stage, everybody knew that image.

In 1902 Lenin published a book entitled 'What is to Be Done?' which marked the moment when he orientated his revolutionary thinking towards the formation of a tightly organised vanguard party. The book's title was inspired by Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel of 1863 in which, amongst other things, a group of textile workers organise in response to their exploitation. A contemporary artwork of the same name poses this question for today, and its inclusion in the exhibition Communism, in part, frames this question in relation to the term communism itself.

The word communism is generally ringed around with caution, identified as a failed ideology and probed as proof positive that any system outside the current neo liberal hegemony is unthinkable. In opposition to this, certain strands of political theory, particularly those associated with the Italian Autonomia movement, perceive communism (or acts undertaken in the 'common name') to be present everywhere, only unrecognised, invisible or captured and oriented towards profit. Understood as such, this 'communism' is present in the 'explosion of behaviours' and ways of living that have emerged since the second half of the nineteenth centuries. It is asserted in processes of production and reproduction, as labour takes on new forms under the present conditions of capitalism. These acts in the common name are alive in the network of intelligence which capitalism has both fostered and subsumed and in the threads that connect these forces in a web of language across the field of biopolitical activity.

In relation to this, 'What is to Be Done?' functions as both a question and a vector. It indicates a passage from theory to practice and seeks a conjunction of the two. It is seemingly a question with a perennial significance and one that recurs at a time when imagination and collective action are required to break a given impasse. In this spirit the artists in the exhibition Communism have been asked to consider the word and to materialise a work in response to it. This process has elicited a variety of results, including small-scale experiments in social practice, re-imagined historical events, public activities, modest but practical proposals and future prototypes.

Artists Projects

Susan Kelly has taken Lenin's original question 'What is to Be Done?' and represented it today by gathering audiences' responses on slips of paper. This work has toured Russia, Finland and the US and has also appeared on the Internet. At Project, past suggestions and blank slips will be displayed on furniture taken from Rodchenko's design for the 'Workers Reading Room' of 1925. Klaus Weber has produced a to-scale model of a future building, made from mirror and glass. Called 'Psycho-Biomatic-Mirror-House, Draft for Commune' it is mounted on a small table and will contain a living plant with holo-niogenic properties. The sculpture is accompanied by a series of photographs of the artists' friends emitting water from different orifices, to form a human fountain. Aleksandra Mir has designed this invitation, which doubles as a mail art work and includes an interview with Jim Fitzpatrick the original designer of the Che Guevara poster. Eva Berendes has produced a four meter high spray painted curtain, which will be suspended from a triangular track attached to the gallery ceiling, forming a screened off area at the centre of the exhibition. Using this space as a theatrical backdrop, Goshka Macuga and Lali Chetwynd will stage a performance with two elements running simultaneously: one, a Lenin impersonator delivering a speech in German, the other a recreation of the Dadaist Cabaret Voltaire, with costumes and masks designed by Chetwynd. Veit Stratmann's sculpture 'chairs' will be positioned in Project's foyer. This work consists of five sets of three, wheeled, office chairs joined back to back. They allow people to sit and move together around the building on the basis that they act collaboratively. Seamus Nolan will set up an open workshop in one of Project's storage spaces at the front of the building. Here abandoned and reclaimed bicycles will be reconfigured into working machines. In collaboration with the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, artists Declan Clarke and Paul McDevitt will install a concrete table tennis table on O'Connell Street as an invitation to leisure on Dublin's main thoroughfare. Table tennis bats will be available free of charge from the Dublin Tourism Information Centre on O'Connell Street.

Film Screening

Hito Steyerl's film 'November' addresses the theme of revolutionary gesture in a supposedly post-revolutionary context. The film shows clips of a martial arts movie that Steyerl made with her friend Andrea Wolf, as well as material connected to Wolf's working with Kurdish separatists, work which eventually led to her being shot by security forces in East Anatolia. 'November' will be screened in Project's Cube from January 21 to January 29.

Seminar in Collaboration with the Hugh Lane Gallery

On January 29th Project Arts Centre and the Hugh Lane Gallery will co-host a short seminar on the topic of communism and the issue of immaterial labour and cultural work. If artists produce the ultimate model of precarious casual working conditions, free labour and flexible subjectivity, how can you conceive of cultural work as critical, or the artists' existence as in any way autonomous under these new conditions? The seminar will explore what is meant by the terms immaterial labour, affective labour, flexible collective intelligence, and free labour. It will also address more generalised changes in work and working conditions and what currently constitutes artistic, creative and cultural work. Are the ways in which artists make a living today, and prevalent forms of relational art practices simply ideal models of Post-Fordist production? Finally, in a neo-liberal flexible economy like Ireland's where the marketing of culture has played a large role in the 'economic miracle', how can you conceive of critical, political, or affirmative (collective) art practices? The speakers will include Eric Allez, Maurizio Lazzarato, Hito Steyerl and Alberto Toscano. Following the seminar Hito Steyerl will talk about film 'November', which will then be screened in the Space Upstairs. The seminar will take place at Project and will start at 1pm, entry is free but please book early to ensure a place.

For information or booking email dairne@project.ie

we were the first country to start bringing down the British empire, which was the biggest empire in the world, but if you remember.
 But in that pub, to walk around among people and chat? How was his visit officially presented?

It wasn't an official visit. He was stuck. He was on an overnight flight from Moscow to Cuba. He touched down at Shannon airport. The Soviet airline had a refueling base there. It was fog so his plane couldn't take off, so I think they took a day off.

The Soviet fueling station makes it quite reasonable. Aeroflot had a base in Shannon. We are supposed to be a neutral country. Americans now use Shannon as a stop-over for their planes going to Iraq. Both sides would refuel there. It's not the hub that it used to be anymore, planes simply overfly it now, in those days you couldn't. It wasn't a momentous meeting, but as a kid it was fun to say to your friends you had met Che Guevara. And they said, "Who the fuck is that?". But the personal experience gave me the impetus, that when he went to Bolivia, I'd follow his escapades.

I wanted to get back to the image as such. You said when you first found it in a magazine, you didn't know about Korda. But today there is such an explosion of Che trivia, and it didn't take me long to learn, through I don't know how many accounts, about the exact circumstances of the photograph. Havana, 5th of March 1960, Korda was covering a memorial rally in Havana for the 100 plus crew members and dock workers who died when the arms cargo ship La Coubre exploded in Havana harbour, a terrorist bombing...
 It was blown up by the CIA.

Cuba blamed the anti-revolutionary forces aided by the CIA. At the rally, Castro spoke from a balcony and Che stepped up next to him for a few seconds, enough for Korda to shoot him. He has been described in this moment as "wild-haired", "detached" "visionary", "with an expression of stony defiance". That already the image this man already conjured up in real life, on a purely performative level, that must have been a remarkable image of a revolutionary icon to watch, just willing to be snapped.
 Che was pure theatre, it's an Irish characteristic.
 This is so amazing to me now when I am reading about all these layers following the photograph, because it is like the photograph was already a second layer to his personal charisma, and that was art already. Korda titled the photo, "The Heroic Guerrilla" but that wasn't published for another 7 years, until Che's death in the Bolivian jungle. So when he then got executed by the same forces he was defying in that posture, it makes the image so much more powerful, almost like a promonion.

The reason there was such an interest in a live photograph of him, is that the American's were determined to photograph him when he was dead. There was a photo in circulation, I was tempted to use the photo of him dead, he had his eyes open, he looked like Jesus Christ, but I felt it would almost be profane to interfere with that picture. But this was the image that his executioners wanted the world to see. His hands were cut off, he was laid out. For everyone to see, and that image was plastered over the walls in Bolivia as proof of his killing. But instead what took off so intensely was the distribution of the heroic Korda shot. I think this is the understanding now, that his photo, but also the cultural ferment of the time, the rallying masses of the student revolts and the Vietnam War protesters, who needed and image and wanted Che to "live", immortalized him as a martyr of the revolution, as someone who really died for an idea. I can only imagine that your poster design must have amplified these sentiments and distribution many times over, as you contributed a whole new layer of sensually, clarity and power to the photo.
 You wouldn't be aware of this because of your age, but the image, was essentially a very rebellious image. It wasn't just the fact that he looked like a risen Christ. Because he certainly did. You say, "steely determination" in his eyes. But he looked like a hippie. Long hair, that was an insult to authority. We all wore long hair to piss them off. And did we piss them off? I was stopped in the streets in Cork and in Dublin and told to cut my hair off! This was a symbol just as much as the man himself. The hair became a symbol. That has to be taken into consideration as well. Remember too, he was a symbol just as much in Eastern Europe as in the West. And in Eastern Europe, that's where all my stuff disappeared, they disliked him and thought he mocked authorities, just as much as he mocked the authorities here and in England and in America. They disliked the image, for they realized how powerful it was. Could a rally around a communist hero still be anti-communist?
 Could you talk more about this?

The image of Che Guevara became a symbol of universal rebellion.
 It opened the ideology.
 Oh, totally! Absolutely. It started off, I believe where it really started off, in Paris in 1968 revolution led by Danny the Red, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, he was shot but he survived. He was someone I admired greatly as well, but he is someone who started using the image during the street riots in Paris, and then it spread to a group called the Provos in Amsterdam. These are beyond radicals. And all of us were really focused around the opposition to the Vietnam War and that became an opposition to our own governments. In France it became an opposition against the leadership of Charles de Gaulle, it became an opposition against the government itself, opposition against the opposition. It became an opposition, for the sake of opposition. The opposite parties weren't voicing these people's anger.

You saw all this happen, and what were you thinking? I was enormously pleased. I thought the world needed

changing. It has changed, not exactly the way I like it, but it has changed a lot in the direction I'd like it to go. But the wildfire? Economy of the image, really, really served you and your ideas? You thought it should be applied to all those causes simultaneously?

I let the ideas loose, it didn't belong to me anymore. But obviously if you have those views that I have, no matter where you put it, it will always serve those views. I just came back from Russia, and a Che Guevara T-shirt there today would be just as offensive to authorities now as it was in our time.

Today it seems that the image still holds a lot of ground as a symbol for actual resistance. You say on your web site that both FARC in Columbia and the Zapatistas in Mexico are using it. I am not proud of the FARC, they've killed an Irish kid, Tristan Murray. But the most interesting place is in North America. Eight years ago I was in the ghettos of Los Angeles and saw the Che Guevara images appearing. I saw this band, the Black Eyed Peas, use one of those murals in the background for a video. The single went to number one here and in England.

But I no, hold on, that IS revolutionary! This is Black and Latino America taking a symbol of anti-Americanism and plastering it on the walls of their ghettos, in America. In a music industry context?
 No, I am talking about the ghettos!
 OK.

Latino ghettos are covered with the image of Che Guevara, and you go up to Belfast, you'll see the same image. But where I think it matters most, is where it is happening now, and that is in America.

I haven't seen any of that, but I have no relationship with ghettos, so I wouldn't know. But it's pretty much consistent with what you are saying, that the openness of the idea allows for that. But to get to the flip-side of all of this, because there is also a really dark side of the openness here. And that is that revolutionary images of the past are also more and more introduced into corporate structures these days. And this is where Korda made a point of his limitations in 2000 by suing Lowe Images, the British advertising agency that used the image for a Srinimol campaign. There is a really distinct moment here where together with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in London who helped him to fight this case, and that was art already. Korda titled the photo, "The Heroic Guerrilla" but that wasn't published for another 7 years, until Che's death in the Bolivian jungle. So when he then got executed by the same forces he was defying in that posture, it makes the image so much more powerful, almost like a promonion.
 The reason there was such an interest in a live photograph of him, is that the American's were determined to photograph him when he was dead. There was a photo in circulation, I was tempted to use the photo of him dead, he had his eyes open, he looked like Jesus Christ, but I felt it would almost be profane to interfere with that picture. But this was the image that his executioners wanted the world to see. His hands were cut off, he was laid out. For everyone to see, and that image was plastered over the walls in Bolivia as proof of his killing. But instead what took off so intensely was the distribution of the heroic Korda shot. I think this is the understanding now, that his photo, but also the cultural ferment of the time, the rallying masses of the student revolts and the Vietnam War protesters, who needed and image and wanted Che to "live", immortalized him as a martyr of the revolution, as someone who really died for an idea. I can only imagine that your poster design must have amplified these sentiments and distribution many times over, as you contributed a whole new layer of sensually, clarity and power to the photo.
 You wouldn't be aware of this because of your age, but the image, was essentially a very rebellious image. It wasn't just the fact that he looked like a risen Christ. Because he certainly did. You say, "steely determination" in his eyes. But he looked like a hippie. Long hair, that was an insult to authority. We all wore long hair to piss them off. And did we piss them off? I was stopped in the streets in Cork and in Dublin and told to cut my hair off! This was a symbol just as much as the man himself. The hair became a symbol. That has to be taken into consideration as well. Remember too, he was a symbol just as much in Eastern Europe as in the West. And in Eastern Europe, that's where all my stuff disappeared, they disliked him and thought he mocked authorities, just as much as he mocked the authorities here and in England and in America. They disliked the image, for they realized how powerful it was. Could a rally around a communist hero still be anti-communist?
 Could you talk more about this?

Well, so here is something really depressing I am going to tell you about. I have a recent article here from Utne reader that is reporting on recent events that has to do with the copyright. It's from September 2, 2004, and they say an Atlanta company, Fashion Victim they're called, that is using Honduras sweatshop labor to produce Che Guevara T-shirts, is now suing a Minneapolis company that has been doing the T-shirts for over two decades. They say that they have legally acquired the North American rights in 2002, from Korda's estate who, I must assume, with good intentions is trying to control the copyright by... simply controlling it. But here is the final twist to the story. What I wanted to ask, where do you fit into this?
 I'll tell you where I fit in. They approached me to do the image. I said I didn't have the copyright and wouldn't take royalties. And they agreed all royalties would go to "disarm.org". And they would make sure that all royalties would be used to buy medicines and ship medicines to Cuba, to break the US embargo. I have that in writing from Fashion Victim. They then researched it further and got in touch with a company that claimed to represent the Korda family and dealt with them from then on.

It says here that Korda's family sold the copyright to David McWilliams' company, Fashion Victim, that has its T-shirts produced in Honduras.
 Slave labor.
 Yes. So this is the final twist to the story. And whatever that means, it means that that's the circulation of images. Copyright holders die, their families take over, the world changes and we are facing paradoxes. But what I am interested in, is that the whole industry of the Che imagery, the mass industry of the paraphernalia now, from mouse pads to ashtrays to T-shirts, is mainly using the silkscreen process, which means they are mainly referring back to your posterized version of the image and not the photograph as such. So your creativity is always going to be part of that whole industry. Where does that leave you?
 It leaves me on the outside looking in, where I've always been.

A perfect answer.
References:
www.utne.com/webtech/2004_164/news/11375-1.html
www.jimfitzpatrick.com
www.aleksandramir.info

