

SPECIAL PROJECT

Sue Coe's MALCOLM X series, a major component of P.S.1's Fall 1986 presentation of Special Project Exhibitions, starkly expresses the artist's horror and anger over contemporary moral and political issues. Born in London, England in 1951, where she attended the Royal College of Art, Sue Coe has been living and working in New York City since 1972. Her dark vision vividly communicates a political awareness dedicated to the necessity for change.

The series, predominately drawings with a number of oils on canvas, is literally iconoclastic. Malcolm X is not subject to an artistic hagiography but is about the assassination of an image by the media, the victimization of America's dissidents by the media. Coe sees the present moral condition as patently repressive, our participation as witnesses subverted and occluded by a machinery geared toward the denial of truth and the manufacture of social lies.

Coe's anguished, lurid imagery confronts the viewer directly as she reaches for a truthfulness of engagement and observation. Although the artist has received considerable international recognition, and was recently included in the Art Institute of Chicago's 75th American Exhibition among such established media stars as Schnabel, Longo, Borofsky and Salle, she does not perceive that recognition or success as a reward. The involvement of others in her work is such that when a painting with the subject of rape was removed from a museum exhibi-



tion as pornographic, women demonstrated the next day to avow that as an issue, rape is important and the work was not pornographic. With this action, Coe found what she considers the healing force of art, something that is not a factor in the marketplace of the art world.

Critic Donald Kuspit states that Coe has established a new genre located somewhere between history painting and the political cartoon, a radical art with antecedents in social realism, Max Beckmann, Goya and Daumier. As a revolutionary feminist, an outsider, she wants the world to change for everyone. Coe objects to a merely political designation, stating that her work has "the kind of content that any thinking person would address, not necessarily someone with a political ideology."

The exhibition is presented by P.S.1 with the cooperation of the artist and her agent, Sally Baker, and of Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago and New York.

Ed Leffingwell

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