

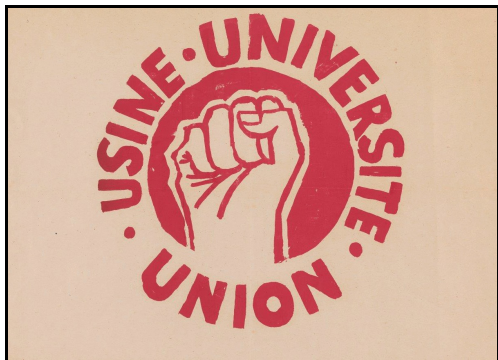
THE APPRAISAL FILES

Chapter 26 *The Mirror is Made of Paper*



An appraiser is often called upon to render an opinion in an area where he might not have what would be considered to be 'expertise'. As a purveyor of a public service, an appraiser exists to provide guidance on values requested by a client in order that they may satisfy the demand of statute (the tax code, say) or business (insurance underwriters) or personal need (family division, or curiosity about the old heirlooms). The caveat here is to remember that no appraiser can know all things, and so one must be careful to claim anything approaching universal knowledge about art, antiques, gems, books, etc. etc. Each property type requires specialized training, and some require highly developed skills and tools, such as the evaluation of gemstone and coins.

My personal specialty is modern and, especially, contemporary art. But as an appraiser I do accept engagements where I feel my background and experience can be put to good use and, at the same time, expanded by the research and study that it will take to reach solid and supportable conclusions regarding significance and value. Business also demands that you step into the realm of challenges; your competitors may not hesitate to do the same.



Workers And Students In Union

So it was that when the call came last December to explore new worlds I accepted the offer to appraise almost 200 French posters from the student-led protest of the 1960s, collectively known as *Mai 68*. "Yes, I would enjoy that." was my response. Thus began the next appraisal adventure.

My new clients were donating the collection to a West Coast institution. I was provided with good digital photographs of each poster and an Excel spreadsheet with some basic information such as titles, and dimensions. In these days of Covid-life, where remote work has

become the norm, I proceeded with the understanding of all parties that I could manage with the tools provided. If necessary, I could always fly 300 miles to see the collection.

I live in the San Francisco Bay area and, fortunate one, my main research library is at the University of California, Berkeley. It's actually a group of libraries, with millions of volumes in the Doe, Gardiner and Bancroft collections alone. Browsing the online catalogue I could see that *Mai 68* is a subject they were up on, with many of the primary and secondary texts in the stacks and available. I jumped in and began educating myself about the events surrounding the creation of the posters.



Banned for the Crime of Imperialism: Nixon & De Gaulle

As a child of the '60s, I knew a little about the French student revolution, which took place while I was in college. Americans were then protesting the Vietnam war and the social injustices that were part of the American cultural fabric. Even naive children like myself began to see that what was woven into this fabric were advantages for the educated white population, and biases and prejudices against the black, colored and lower income people of our country. The System was rigged, and it was now sending hundreds of thousands of young men and women to fight and die in a war the French had already lost. (DeGaulle himself feared America would become so bogged down in an unwinnable war that the defense of Europe would be put at risk). The publication of the Pentagon Papers was still three years away, but we knew that Nixon and his cronies were selling us all down the river, and they would stop at nothing to protect their power and keep a foot on the neck of American political consciousness.

The French acute awareness of the their own state. wore the face of France. WW II. In 1968 he for almost a decade with treated the students as collar workers - *les* drones who should to work for the low mind-numbing tasks in Renault.



Demonstration Against Renault at The East Train Station (Paris), March 11th 7PM

students were coming into an subversive aims of President Charles DeGaulle. He was its savior in the trials of had been running the country his own set of insiders who truant children, and the *blue-travailleurs*- in the factories as accept their fates and be happy wages they received at often the factories of Citroen or

Student outrage at campus conditions, unchecked Capitalism, Imperialism, and the Vietnam war, lit the fuse for protests at various universities, especially, the Sorbonne in Paris. In May 1968 civil unrest broke out into demonstrations, building occupations, and strikes organized by the trade unions. For almost a month there were pitched battles against the police and its repressive special tactics squads (the hated CRS, *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*) until the French economy ground to a halt as 10 million workers refused to follow orders and stayed off the job in a general strike. There was deadly violence from both sides. Despite Socialist-negotiated accords, the spontaneous nature and cross-purposes of various unions, anti-unions, and Communist factions led to a new wave of protests and brutal police action in the Latin Quarter. The government feared a civil war, perhaps another revolution. De Gaulle, it was later revealed, actually fled the country to Germany. Less than a year later, he and his fellow Gaullistes were ousted from the marbled halls of the Élysée Palace.

The *affichistes* - poster makers - cranked out hundreds of silk-screened posters to inspire and incite the demonstrators. Sometimes with raw imagery alone, but most often with textual complaints or cries and images, the spontaneous events of the day were plastered on the walls for the world to see. Though the execution of the artwork was by necessity somewhat blunt and crude - for instance most posters had but one color - many became famous for their inspired designs.



We (The People) Are The Power

An important illustrated text of the posters is *Les 500 Affiches De Mai 68* (Balland, Évreux, 1978). The volume was edited by Vasco Gasquet, an artist who was involved in the poster campaign at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Gasquet helped boost the printing efforts by bringing in a silkscreen machine, thus enabling much faster preparation and printing than the first lithographs. Soon after the machine arrived the city of Paris, indeed the entire nation, was filled with these incendiary and pointed paper barbs. *La Lutte* - the struggle against exploitation, was no longer confined to the university classrooms or to the union halls but lived, like the American protests, in the streets and in the evening TV news.

As I was doing my research at Cal, I sometimes took a lunch at the nearby Moffit Library building. Quick snacks are available at the Free Speech Movement Café. As I was standing in line I noticed the Newspaper Display Wall near the entrance. There, in several large bronze and glass-fronted display cases, are displayed front pages of leading newspapers from around the world: Manilla, Tel-Aviv, Berlin, etc. Today's editions all had dramatic headlines of the massive Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As I neared the door I looked up and saw a plaque on the wall commemorating Mario Savio, one of the Cal student leaders of the Free Speech Movement. Suddenly lunch seemed less interesting than understanding that not only was I researching an important collection of French protest material, but that I was doing so on the Campus that was once the leading edge of the student anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States in the 1960s, and also that the world was again, at this very moment, protesting another crazy and despotic war.

In 1965, when I was a freshman at the quiet provincial University of Montana, Missoula, UC Berkeley was THE hotbed of political awareness. Through friends I became aware of a growing connection to Berkeley. One that was leading to anti-war protests on my campus and even in the city. My own political consciousness was struggling to find light and, in all candor, it took years for me to see that light. But I read about and was amazed by Mario Savio standing on a police car hectoring a crowd. I read the reports of clashes with the police and of Army reserve helicopters spraying protestors with tear gas on Sproul Plaza. I also read about the deaths.

Today the Berkeley campus is quiet, and the armored vehicles are half a world away in the streets of Kiev. Many of the world's generally, peaceful Russian aggression. We don't tomorrow's newspaper to give The web and social media like the front. We can no longer at home or around the globe.

One of the most protests was the decentralization DeGaulle's Minister of opportunity and made the most and an amazing amount of to design the curriculum. new campuses to be developed. perimeter of the city on the rue grounds formerly occupied by One of Faure's first important a person who was, as they say, the right moment.



Be Young And Just Shut Up

leading cities have seen great and, demonstration against the newest have to wait for the evening news or us the stories of conflict and injustice. Reddit give us instant updates from claim any ignorance of the problems

extraordinary results of the *Mai 68* of the national university system. Education, Edgar Faure, saw an of it. New branches were established freedom was given to administrators Paris - VIII was one of the first of the Placed just outside the southwest de Vincennes, the school was built on the French Army, who got the boot. hires was the scholar Hélène Cixous, the right person in the right job, at just

A scholar of Deconstructivist and other avant-garde teachings, Cixous was credited with developing, in 1971, the first center for feminist studies in Europe. The campus, which later moved to St. Denis, has attracted a bevy of influential scholars, thinkers and writers, including Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan.

The paving stones hurled by the students in 1968 have yielded the results they wanted, only it took another generation to come to fruition. Referring to the sand they found under the cobblestones they dug out, the student mantra was "under the stones is the beach". As it turned out it was not a vacation that was found, but a revolution in French education that was begun.

In the late afternoon as I left the Doe Library and walked down the steps, I looked over at the Moffit building and saw that someone had tagged a support column with a bright yellow *tryzub* or bird-trident symbol above the call: SAVE UKRAINE. Student awareness is, once again, aroused.

I'm usually looking into the past to develop my appraisals, sifting through the proverbial dusty pages of history for clues. Sometimes I'm able to blow away that dust and find in the historical record a mirror which reflects the future and even helps illuminate the issues of our present day.

If I needed another reminder of the struggles around us, I got it on the drive home. Exiting the freeway, I came to a stop in front of the main gates of the Chevron refinery complex (officially cloaked as the 'Richmond Technology Center'): a group of people were picketing the gate, holding up signs decrying safety issues and working conditions. Their placards showed images of union strength and worker solidarity. I honked as I swung past and received waves and fist pumps in return. The news, as always, is in the street.



© Fred Page, March 2022

PAGE ART^{INC.}
FINE ART APPRAISERS & CONSULTANTS
Est. 1985