Art is the Expression of Our Struggle

The Second Tricontinental Art Bulletin (April 2024)



Creating as a Collective Subject

Forty years ago, out of the embers of a twenty-one-year military dictatorship and following the legacy of peasant leagues and revolutionary Christian movements of Brazil, the **Landless Rural Workers' Movement** (MST) was born. Over forty years of the struggle for land, agrarian reform, and social transformation, the MST has grown into one of the world's largest social movements, with 450,000 families living in hard won settlements. Beyond securing victories for the Brazilian working class, the MST has carried the banner of internationalism and helped to build international platforms, that include our own institute, and processes for people's broader struggles.

To commemorate this anniversary, in collaboration with the MST, ALBA Movements, and the International Peoples' Assembly, we launched an open **call** for artwork. The call was inspired by four themes: the MST and solidarity among peoples, forty years of struggle and resistance, we cultivate the land and the land cultivates us, and forty years of liberating the land and the peasantry. We received over 140 artworks from artists across generations, aging from nineteen to seventy-four years. On 23 April, ***40 years of the MST*** was launched as an online exhibition. Meanwhile, forty artworks – one for each year of MST's existence – will be curated into an exhibition at the movement's seventh national congress, which will gather 20,000 people in Brasília this July.



Artwork by Tarcísio Leopoldo and Vanessa Dias Diniz.

Seven of these artworks are also featured in our latest dossier, ***The Political Organisation of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST)***, launched for the International Day of Peasant Struggle on 17 April. On this day, we remember the bloody massacre of nineteen MST members by the military police in Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996. For this bulletin, we spoke with Tarcísio Leopoldo and Vanessa Dias Diniz, members of the MST Culture Collective's Cândido Portinari Visual Arts Brigade who created the cover art for the dossier. The collectively produced artwork brings together many visual elements that symbolise forty years of struggle: A large sunflower on the left, and farming and drawing tools on the right, cradle the MST's flag at the centre like an embrace. The lines of the open book flow into rows of planted crops. There are wooden houses typical of the movement's encampments, where children learn in 'itinerant schools' constructed wherever the MST is mobilised. In the foreground, peasants are farming and children are playing, running towards a future that lies beyond the page. These symbols are not just representations of a struggle, but effective mobilising tools to build personal identification and to massify the struggle.

'Art', Tarcísio told us, 'is the expression of our struggle, and we, as militant-artists or artist-militants, constantly question whether our art and our symbols adequately express our political project'. For him, it would be inconceivable for cadres of a political organisation not to represent the symbols of daily struggles and the processes of mass organisation, solidarity, and internationalism in their creativity. Likewise, this process could never be an individual endeavour. 'We, as *militantes* of a social movement, always see ourselves

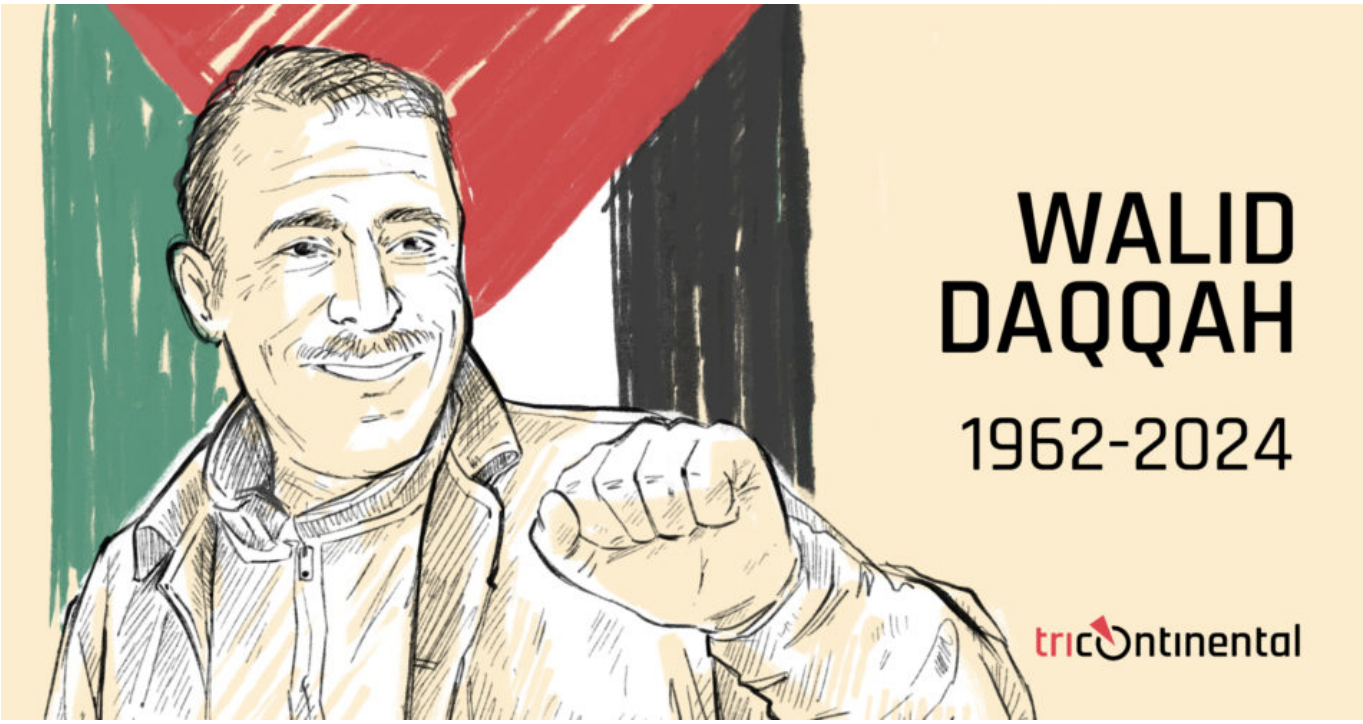
as a collective subject; even in individual works, it carries significant weight — it is not just an isolated, individual matter. Rather, [the artwork] already brings with it the accumulation of collective debate, the historical process, the struggle, and possesses this character'.

For this artwork, Vanessa sketched the first draft digitally, which Tarcísio finalised using watercolours, all the while maintaining a collective dialogue. To draw inspiration from a collective political process and return the fruits of that creative labour is one of the most revolutionary things that an artist can do. It defies the capitalist logic of individualism and the commodification of art and culture, and it helps rebuild collective life. Our exhibition and dossier were launched during Red April, a month when the MST organises actions across the country, from marches and occupations to political education and solidarity activities, under the banner 'Occupy to feed Brazil'.

Prison Has a Smell Like the Smell of Death

On 7 April 2024, Walid Daqqah, revolutionary writer, thinker, and one of the most enduring Palestinian prisoners of the Israeli occupation died of cancer and medical negligence at the age of sixty-three. Last year, when his thirty-seven-year prison term expired, he continued to be imprisoned, an act that we, at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, and over forty publishers in the International Union of Left Publishers **condemned**. Daqqah had forebodingly said, 'Prison has a smell like the smell of death, and death has the smell of death and nothing else'.

Daqqah's voice continues to be carried through his novels, essays, and letters that have inspired the international solidarity movement with the Palestinian people, thousands of whom continue to be locked in Israeli jails. A beautiful stop-motion animation based on Daqqah's life was made by women and girls of the **Union of Palestinian Women's Committees** in collaboration with the **Animation Factory**. You can watch it **here**. To honour the life of Walid Daqqah and Palestinian Prisoners' Day on 17 April, our art collective made this portrait, drawn by Dani Ruggeri.



Like the MST in the struggle for agrarian reform, the fight for Palestinian liberation has consolidated over the past eight decades around its own powerful symbols. The poppy flower. The sling. The flag. The key. The keffiyeh. The orange. The watermelon. The thob. The olive tree. V for victory. Each of these symbols are an expression of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and return. Learn about their meanings in an **interactive infographic** by our friends at Utopix, with artwork by Kael Abello, who is also a member of Tricontinental's art collective.

We Broke the Blockade, Even If Only in the Cultural Order

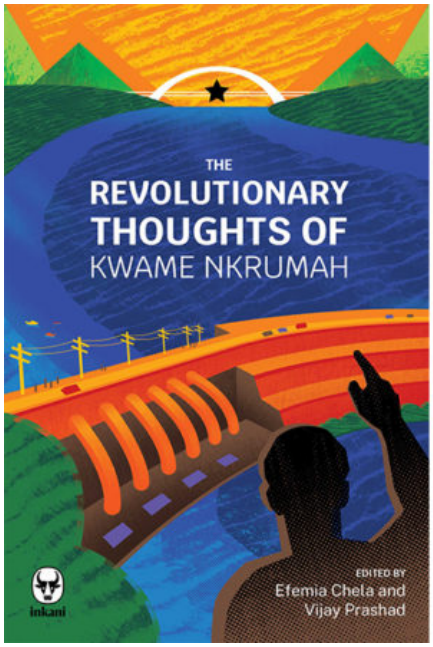


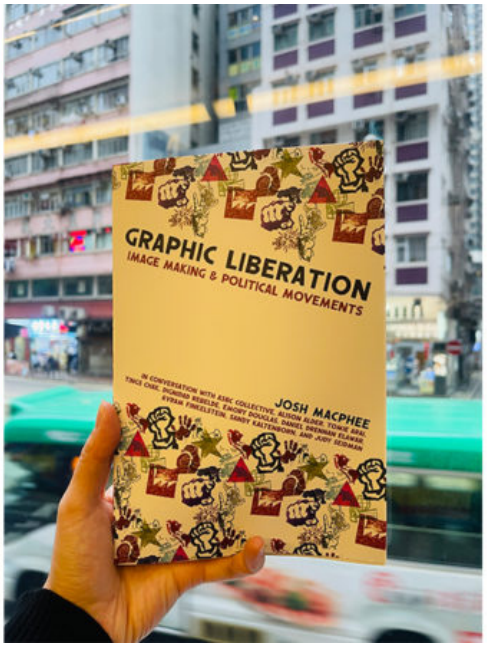
Valentina Aguirre (Venezuela), Haydée habla del Moncada, 2024.

This month's Red Books Day poster remembers the Cuban revolutionary Haydée Santamaría, whose life and work were documented in the book, *Haydée habla del Moncada* ('Haydée Speaks of Moncada'). The poster was created by **Valentina Aguirre**, Venezuelan illustrator, ceramist, and member of the Utopix community. Known by her friends and comrades as Yeyé, Haydée was one of the guerrilla fighters in the Moncada attacks on 26 July 1953 from which the revolutionary movement got its name. She was a founding member of the Communist Party of Cuba and headed the historical cultural institution Casa de las Américas ('Home of the Americas'). This space of literary and artistic exchange has been essential to break the cultural isolation imposed by the US empire on the Cuban Revolution.

In Haydée's **words**, 'I could not accept that because… our people would not know who our indigenous ancestors were, who the writers and artists were… And we broke the blockade, even if only in the cultural order'. You can read more about the culture of internationalism in the Cuban Revolution in our **dossier** no. 15, *The Art of the Revolution will be Internationalist.*

In Other News…







Our Tricontinental team has had a hand in some upcoming or newly published books. Ingrid Neves designed the new cover for *The Revolutionary Thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah*, edited by Efemia Chela and Vijay Prashad and published by **Inkani Books**. The artwork travelled back to Nkrumah's homeland, Ghana, and was gifted to his family, as well as the offices of **Pan African TV** in Accra. Meanwhile, Kael Abello created the cover for **1804 Books**' upcoming *Amílcar Cabral: A Political Biography* by Mario Pinto de Andrade. In case you missed it, designer, historian, and archivist Josh MacPhee interviewed me about our cultural work at Tricontinental, which was included in ***Graphic Liberation: Image Making and Political Movements***, alongside interviews with revolutionary artists from the Black Panther Party's Emory Douglas to Medu Art Ensemble's Judy Seidman.



'Internationalise the struggle. Internationalise the hope' graphic arts workshop at the Battle of Ideas course in Brazil, 2024.

Throughout this month, members of our art collective have been actively participating in the month-long course Battle of Ideas: Culture and Communication in Political Education for Cadre, hosted by the International Peoples' Assembly and the MST's Florestan Fernandes National School. During the workshops, Tricontinental has been drawing from our **research** on the art and culture of national liberation, socialist struggles and our practices developed by producing artwork and knowledge from and for social movements and political organisations.

The **Battle of Ideas**, a banner that Fidel Castro raised in the 1990s, was a clarion call to the Cuban people to fight against the rising neoliberal ideology that followed the overthrow of the Soviet Union. This meant the necessity of winning the hearts and minds of the people as a defiant defence of socialism against the so-called end of history. As Fidel said a quarter-century ago at Hugo Chávez's presidential inauguration in Caracas, Venezuela, 'A revolution can only be the child of culture and ideas'. It is in the trenches of this battle over culture, ideas, and emotions that we firmly continue.

Warmly,

Tings

P.S. Our monthly Tricontinental Art Bulletin is now published in **English**, **Spanish**, and **Portuguese**. Please do subscribe using the embedded links and share.