



Art & Politics in Mao's China



Introduction

Art is a medium of expression where the individual and culture come together. What happens to the individual artist when culture becomes a tool of the government? How does politics impact art as an expression of the times? Can art and culture survive and overcome government repression?



JIN ZHILIN (1928-); Beijing, China; "The People March Under the Banner of Chairman Mao" 1971 watercolor and charcoal, 10 1/8" x 19 1/8"

Following the rise of the communists to power in 1949, all artists in China were compelled to adhere to the party line on art. During the 1950s, this meant adopting Soviet-style "social realism," an overtly didactic art style that promoted communist ideas. During the devastating decade of Mao's Cultural Revolution, artists were forced to adopt a style called "revolutionary romanticism," and during the healing years immediately following the revolution, artists returned to more personal styles and revived folk art styles.

These three periods are reflected in the brush strokes and carvings of Jin Zhilin and his students Song Ruxin, Chen Sanqiao, and Feng Shanyun, who were trained at the Yan'an Masses Art Studio under Jin's direction. "At that time [after the communists took power] art changed directions because of the revolution. Now, art should serve the people—the workers, peasants, and soldiers," declared Jin.

No Events