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Metro Stickers Take On Fascists

By Joy Neumeyer

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Artist Emory Douglas allowed his iconic image of black power to be used.

Among the usual barrage of ads, commuters on Moscow's metro may be noticing images with a social mission more urgent than selling shoes or sushi. "Art Against Nazism," a guerrilla exhibition staged by anti-fascist organization the January 19 Committee, is enlisting artists in its struggle against what it sees as a rising tide of racial and cultural intolerance in today's Russia.

The project features graphics by almost 20 artists from Russia, the United States, Argentina and other countries, which appear in the form of stickers. The images are all available for download on the group's web site, 19jan.ru. The site encourages users to disseminate them throughout the metro, as well as upload their own images.

The most recognizable image on display is Emory Douglas' famous work "Afro-American Solidarity," which depicts a woman with an Afro taking up arms. Douglas, who agreed to have his work included in the project, created the classic image of the black power movement while serving as the Black Panthers' Minister of Culture in 1969.

The January 19 Committee frames the stickers as a response to violent manifestations of prejudice against "outsiders" in Russian society. Pavel, a group leader who declined to give his last name, said the December riots against North Caucasus immigrants in Moscow were part of the "escalation of cruelty" driven by extremism's increasing sway over Russians, from young people to top politicians.

"Many people come here to work and find themselves completely without rights ... and are completely written out of society," he said.

Several artists submitted new work for the project. Mikhail Sobayev's "X-ray" features a small swastika nesting within the X-rayed image of a skull, invoking the collages made by Communist artists in Berlin in the 1920s and '30s that opposed Hitler's National Socialist Party. "CrossWorlds," an interactive piece by Olga Kiseleva, dares viewers to read a barcode with their cell phones, prompting one of a set of words — such as "democracy" or "tolerance" — to appear on the phone's screen.

The January 19 Committee, which is not aligned with any political party, was formed last year to mark the one-year anniversary of the murders of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, who were shot near the Kremlin. Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis, who are awaiting trial in connection with the killings, are members of ultranationalist group Russky Obraz.

"Art Against Nazism" will conclude with an anti-fascist demonstration on Wednesday at 7 p.m. at Tverskaya Ulitsa's Nikitskiye Vorota.

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