Politics in Art Forms

Art that provokes action is a theme as current as the headlines. Videos, cartoons, posters, songs, films and live performances travel the globe at warp speed, often spurring protests and political action.

An international conversation on this subject among scholars at the University of Paris 8, UCLA and USC is coming to campus Friday, Feb. 8 in a conference that includes film screenings, a panel discussion and speakers. (The first day of the conference is being held at UCLA.) Events both days are open to the public. For the Feb. 7 schedule, go to http://cnp-la.org/event/politics-in-art-forms-at-ucla/. For the Feb. 8 schedule, go to: http://cnp-la.org/event/politics-in-art-forms-at-usc/

Violaine Roussel, professor of sociology and political science at University of Paris 8, the conference organizer, said she has brought together scholars from sociology, political science, history and communication studies who work on the relationships between artists and politics who will “confront and compare” various art forms subject to politicization. “Beside its interdisciplinary and comparative character,” she said, “the originality of the conference lies in the direct conversation between artists and scholars that we have organized in the three discussion panels on music, dance and film.”

Friday’s panel at USC will be about film. Two films will be screened in Norris Cinema Theatre, starting at 9 a.m.: Dans la torment (2012) and Day Zero (2007). The directors of the films, Christophe Ruggia and Bryan Gunnar Cole, respectively, will be present at a panel discussion at 2 p.m. in the USC School of Cinematic Arts Room 108. Also part of the panel will be USC scholars Steven Ross (history) and Michael Renov (cinematic arts) and University of Paris 8 scholars Audrey Mariette (political science) and Violaine Roussel.

At 4 p.m., USC scholar Vanessa Schwartz (history, art history, film) will speak on “Beyond Atrocity: Looking at Photojournalism,” followed by Gisele Sapiro of the University of Paris 1 speaking on “Framing the Perception of Reality: The Political Power of Literature, in Comparison With Other Media.”

Roussel said that the collaboration began in 2010 with her institution and William Roy at UCLA. An extension in 2012 of a Memorandum of Understanding with USC originally signed in 2009 brought research cooperation from USC.
USC historian Ross characterized the conference as part of a larger relationship between USC and the University of Paris 8 to create intellectual conversations between the two universities. “In this instance,” he said, “we hope to explore the trans-Atlantic visions of artists as activists and the ways in which various forms of artistic endeavor can awaken and politicize a population.”

Roussel said the conference has been selected to be included in a larger series of cultural events organized under the aegis of the French Embassy in Los Angeles titled "This is not ... Art between France and Los Angeles." The title is a reference to René Magritte's famous painting, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

Conference sponsors at USC include the USC Office of the Provost, USC Dornsife Office of the Dean, USC School of Cinematic Arts, USC History Department, USC American Studies & Ethnicity and USC Francophone Research and Resource Center.