

Marcelo Brodsky: People All Over the World

Argentine artist Marcelo Brodsky presents a solo show this month in Glasgow, in which he intends to broaden an understanding of the world-changing events of 1968 to share a greater appreciation of what was taking place outside of central Europe

Feature by Adam Benmakhoulou | 15 Feb 2018



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On October 17th, 1968 large numbers of University students marched from the Campus of the University of the West Indies to downtown Kingston to support Dr. Walter Rodney who was in Government, coming back from the Black Workers Conference in Montreal, Canada. The demonstration was repressed by the Security Forces of Jamaica. They could be seen



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October 1968 departing from Trafalgar Square and marching to Grosvenor Square, where the American Embassy is located. Photo by Martin Carroll/AG



The Free Speech movement started in the University of California connected with the Civil Rights Movement in 1964-65 and then extended to other U.S. very active year in Chicago, this Free Speech march was part of a wider mobilization that included massive action of the students during the Democratic National Convention was held in a year of violence, political turbulence and civil unrest. The National Guard was mobilized by Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley.



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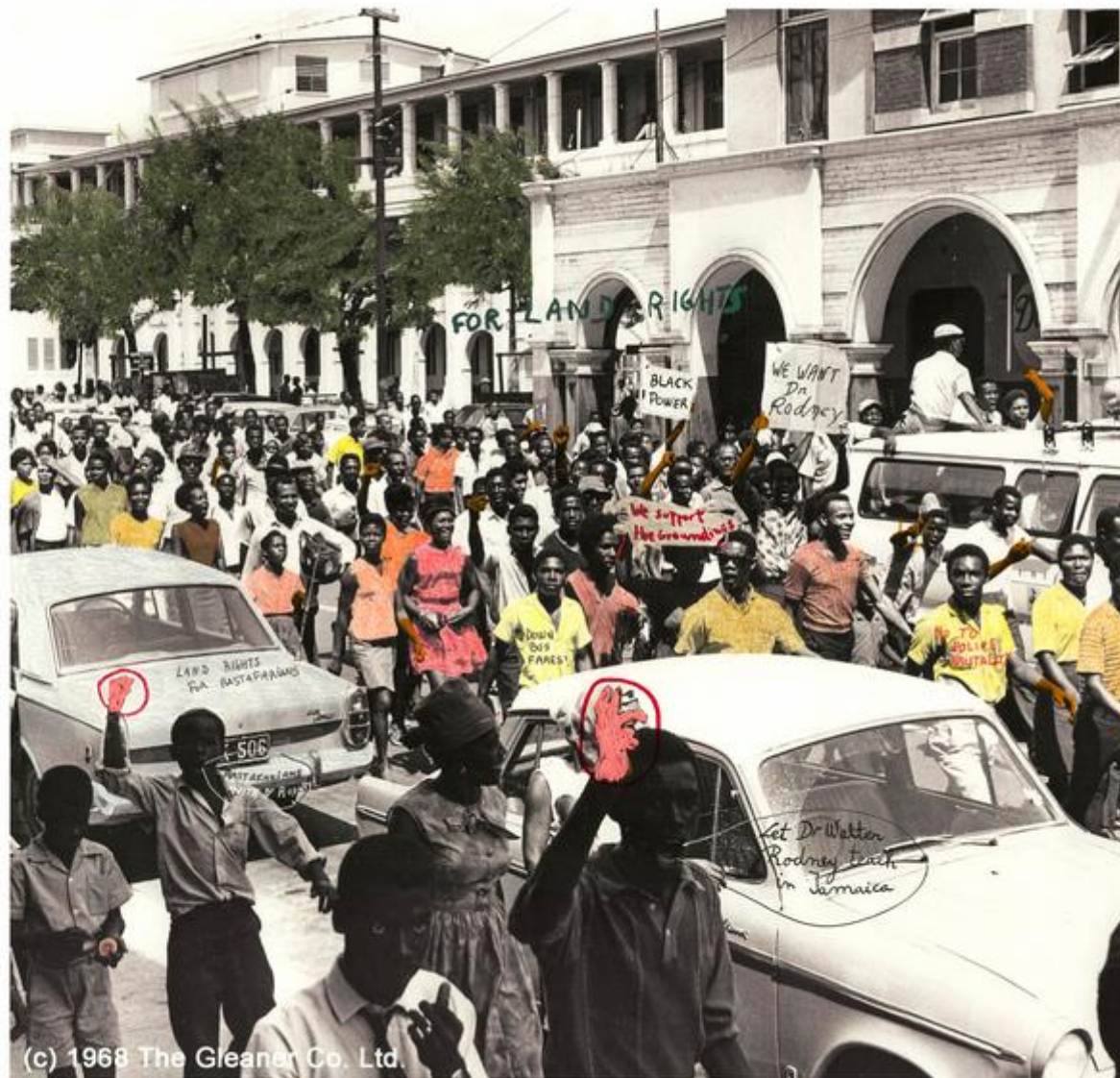
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Marcelo Brodsky, London

EDITOR'S CHOICE

This month Marcelo Brodsky presents a solo show in Street Level Photoworks. For several decades, he has been committed to promulgating images of marginalised histories and social mobilisation, both through his work as a press photographic agent and within his own artistic practice. Initially, he drew international attention for his archival research into the Dirty War in Argentina throughout the 70s and the start of the 80s, an extended era following a military coup there, and during which all levels of dissent were violently quashed and tens of thousands of political activists were killed – including Brodsky's own brother. It was through these works that he became known for his idiosyncratic form of making photographic artworks: annotating historical photos in his own handwriting with further information about the people in the pictures, the setting or the historical epoch.

"I intervene in images, they are manipulated [and] transformed... Therefore, I can place words and deliver the message that the image itself contains: magnify it, and

address it to different points. I change the focal point of the image, where the eye goes to.”

For Brodsky’s Glasgow project, he looks to the politically charged year of 1968. For him, the events that are now associated with this year are “fundamental to how we think today; everything has a relationship with what happened there.” What might first come to mind are the Paris student uprisings of May ’68, when those in their late teens and early twenties made demands against the conservatism of regulations that limited their freedom. This discontent gathered support and a strong sense of unity was fostered across the students and workers on general strike at the time. This led to circumstances that eventually saw France tipping into civil war. Since then, for a lot of people the year ’68 is synonymous with barricades and revolutionary fervour.

Importantly, photographs are central to Brodsky as a means of being able to expand ideas of the importance of 1968 beyond the usual Continental European reference points. For Brodsky, the best way of conveying the impact of the extent of the 1968 upheaval “is through images, as they give the panoramic feeling of the whole situation around the world.” For Brodsky, his own distinct interest is in what was taking place beyond the usual centres of attention during 1968, and he sees this as being related to his position of being to an extent outside of conventional cultural centres, “away in Argentina, somehow in the margins.” Rebutting these ideas of Eurocentrism, Brodsky has searched for images of the political actions in Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Chile.

“Latin America also had its ’68. What happened to us in Mexico [was] the killing of hundreds of students in [Tlatelolco](#) Square. It’s as important as Paris.” Brodsky has been recently involved extensively in provoking national and international awareness of this violence. Some of his works are “at this moment in the [Tlatelolco](#) memorial centre, in the very same place where everything happened.” He is showing 30 3x10 metre images from the 1968 riots in the site of the [Tlatelolco](#) massacre, and he’s clear that this “is one of the most important exhibitions of my life.”

It’s for this reason that as Brodsky’s work on the politics of 1968 circulates internationally, it is received in different ways depending on the national historical context within which it is shown. While Brodsky describes the time as “an anticipation of the glocal,” each of the country’s specific configurations and political narrated of the period differs. “It was certainly a global moment, and Paris was inspiring, but each location had its own movement. Bangladeshi protestors were fighting for independence, in Mexico there were demands for democracy, resources and the involvement of students, Cordova had a large insurrection, in Lithuania the issue was independence, in England there were actions against the Vietnam War, in the US there was the Poor People’s March with Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement.”

Speaking about how he approaches these issues in his work, Brodsky describes how he does not seek out any single type of photography, and so he spans vernacular types of photography (e.g. school photographs, and the output of local shop-based commercial photography studios as they once existed), as well as press images and images that are taken artistically or out of documentary intention.

For example, in one series about the war in Colombia, he created “an installation of images in the Archive of Modern Conflict in London, that are from the personal album of a military lieutenant of the Colombian army and through that album I narrated the Colombian war.” These images documented “all the different parts of [the lieutenant’s] life and of the Colombian army and different events in which he participates. That is another way to use archival photography, to narrate history.” Overall, though, when it comes to choosing an image, “it depends on what you want to talk about. You do the research on what you want to shoot or research. It’s not important if the image is vernacular, if it’s press or it’s taken by myself. What is important is what you want to say. The narration as a whole.”

It’s for this reason that the Glasgow exhibition not only contains photography, but also a sound piece. It has “the recorded excerpts of speeches by Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Daniel Cohn Bendit, Herbert Marcuse, and Agustin Tosco, whose ideas and actions fueled many of the protests.” For Brodsky, the images, the sound and the parts of text that he emblazons on the prints all come together to make a concept of history.

As well as pursuing his own well-received artistic practice, and running a press photo company, to this day Brodsky continues to put “pressure on authorities to solve and prosecute recent unsolved mass murders” – as curator Anne Tucker writes in a recent publication that accompanied the previous version of the project that will soon be opening in Glasgow. Describing his relationship with other demands, he admits that he doesn’t have as much time for some of his other direct political pursuits (he alludes to an NGO that he ran for some time). Brodsky is now at a point where he has a full schedule of international exhibitions, invitations to show at world class biennales, and large scale public installations. Describing how he’s recently focused more exclusively on his art practice, he advises sagely: “You don’t have to have any more missions than the ones you want to take.”

Marcelo Brodsky, *The Fire of Ideas*, at Street Level Photoworks from 10 Feb-7 Apr