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From Foreign Correspondent to Curator: Charles Krause Opens a D.C. Gallery for International Political Art

BY JULIA HALPERIN | DECEMBER 14, 2011



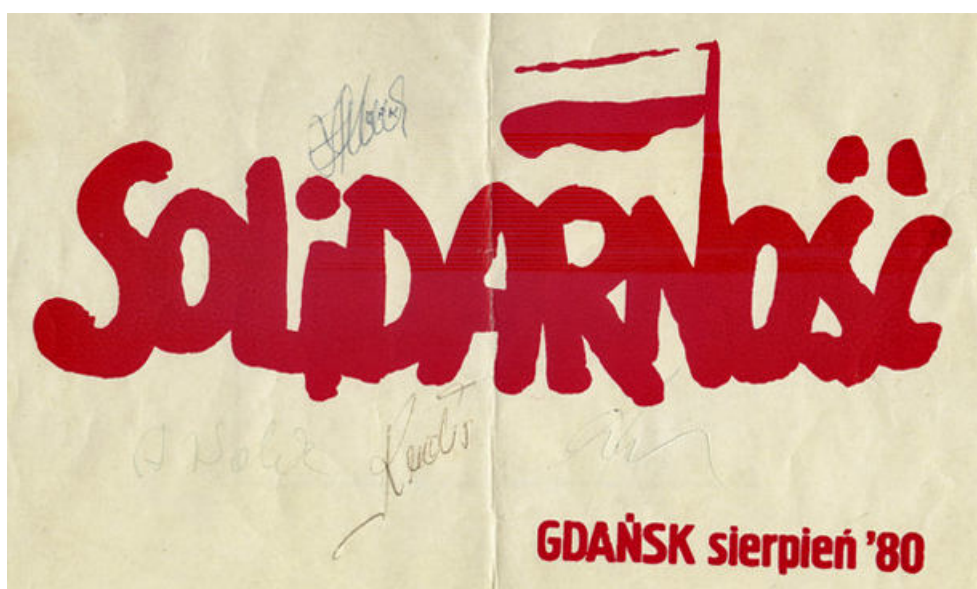
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The very first "Solidarity" (1980) imprint by Jerzy Janiszewski, signed by Solidarity leader Lech Walesa
(Courtesy Charles Krause/Reporting Fine Art)

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As a foreign correspondent for **CBS News**, the **Washington Post**, and the **NewsHour with Jim Lehrer**, **Charles Krause** reported on many of the great political conflicts of the 20th century, including the U.S. invasion of Panama, the liberation of Kuwait, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, he's hoping to use the same investigative acumen that won him an Emmy for his coverage of the 1996 Israeli elections to promote underrecognized international artists whose work deals with political themes.

Krause's new gallery, **Charles Krause/Reporting Fine Art**, opened last week in his converted Washington, D.C., apartment with an exhibition of Polish graphic artist **Jerzy Janiszewski**. Krause has six more shows planned in 2012, including one of contemporary

Finnish photographer **Stefan Bremer**. “In a way, you had to be a reporter to find these people,” Krause told **ARTINFO**. “They were largely underground. You had to dig and ask questions and find your way to them.” Most of Krause’s exhibitions will focus largely on art made from the 1970s to the present, and most of the artists he plans to exhibit — among them Polish, Finnish, and Estonian artists — have never shown in the United States.

Krause first became interested in art when he was growing up in Detroit as the son of collector parents (his high school graduation present was an **(/artists/alexander-calder-57)Alexander Calder (/artists/alexander-calder-57)** lithograph). When his job as a foreign correspondent for the Washington Post in the 1970s took him to South America and Eastern Europe, he met artists — like **Roberto Favelo** in Cuba — whose work challenged the established regimes.

“What I’m trying to show is not exactly political art,” he said. “The subject matter may not be overtly political. Sometimes artists are able to express opposition to or advocate political change simply by doing art that doesn’t conform to whatever the ideology of a particular regime or government.” Artists like **Vladimir Nemukhin**, a prominent figure in the Moscow art scene in the ’70s, painted abstract compositions with playing cards, but his refusal to conform to the official Soviet style was in itself a political statement.

The gallery’s first exhibition features 20 works of art by Janiszewski, whose logo for **Solidarity**, the independent Polish trade union, became an emblem of the struggle that led to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. (The image is in the collection of the **Victoria & Albert Museum** and the **Museum of Modern Art**.) The very first imprint of the logo, signed by Solidarity leader **Lech Walesa**, is included exhibition, though it’s not for sale. A signed and numbered early Solidarity poster — buried underground for seven years to keep it from being confiscated by Poland’s secret police — accompanies Janiszewski’s more recent work, which is exhibited here for the first time. His delicate mixed-media collages are made from cigarette boxes and metro ticket stubs, the only materials he could afford while in exile. The works in price from \$2,700 to \$15,000, and Krause reported three sales by opening weekend.

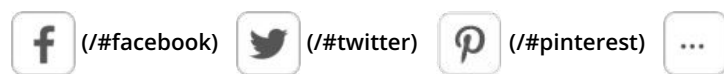
Despite the fact that Washington does not have a reputation as an art-market hub (its latest effort at an art fair, **(e)merge**, **premiered this fall** (<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/38704/high-hopes-and-modest-prices-mark-dcs-inaugural-emerge-art-fair/>) with mixed results), Krause believes the capital is an ideal showcase for this kind of art. “I think that people in this city who make policy decisions need to be much more sensitive to cultural issues and the importance of visual images and artists’ importance in creating conditions that lead to political and social change,” he said. Still, he acknowledges that many of his customers may come from outside the beltway. “There’s no way I’m going to succeed in terms of making enough money to keep this going if I depend just on the Washington market,” he said.

Janiszewski, who made his name creating a graphic in opposition to the government, was recently commissioned by the state of Poland to create the logo for its six-month term as

president of the Council of the European Union. Krause hopes his gallery will advocate for lesser-known artists like Janiszewski — those who created game-changing graphic designs and even propaganda posters in addition to fine art. “Other galleries have had a long time to discover these people, but they didn’t,” he said. “You could say, ‘Oh, that’s because they aren’t very good artists,’ but I don’t believe that.”

"The Graphic and Fine Art of Poland's Jerzy Janiszewski: The Artist Whose Graphic Design Changed History" runs through January 29. Charles Krause/Reporting Fine Art is located at 1300 13th Street NW, Suite 105 in Washington, D.C. The gallery is open by appointment.

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