

## Bearing Witness: The Literature, Music, and Art of Protest and Hope

Throughout human history, and across the globe, people have used the arts (literature, music, film, poetry, painting, photos, posters, cartoons, bumper stickers, T-shirts...) to celebrate, encourage, express outrage and anguish, and bear witness to the events which have impacted their lives.

I suspect we can all identify some image or song that helped propel us into action, or at least into examining an issue more closely ( i.e., “Blowin’ in the Wind”, Doonesbury cartoons, “Strange Fruit”, the Tiananmen Sq. “Tank Man” photo, the fire-hoses aimed at Civil Rights marchers, M.L.K.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, “12 Years a Slave”, the photo of the Syrian child’s body washed ashore....

Sometimes it takes a while for art to catch up with events. It was some time before poetry, drama, and song addressed the tragedy of “9/11”. In Cambodia, where the oppressor spoke the same language as the oppressed, resistance against and documentation of Khmer Rouge actions remained hidden for years. During apartheid in South Africa, the miners’ boots relayed messages through dance patterns only recently revealed.

During our time together, I hope we’ll explore a variety of national and international works [songs, poems, plays, films, memoirs, art, short stories....] that have served

to lift up, empower, and bear witness to the lives/suffering/victories of others.

**“In the dark times, will there also be singing?**

**Yes, there will be singing.**

**About the dark times.”**

**Bertolt Brecht**

My hope is that seminar participants will choose a period of time (e.g., Mao’s Cultural

Revolution or Argentina’s Dirty War) or an issue (e.g., Women’s Suffrage or AIDS),

and research the “art” that emerged from it to share with us.

Because the best materials are primary sources, I’m not “assigning” a specific text.

I will be happy to provide suggestions: titles, sites, even objects (such as Chilean

“arpilleras”) from my own collections.

Some written sources that I’ve found helpful include:

Carolyn Forché: Against Forgetting - 20th Century Poetry of Witness;

Chanrithy Him: When Broken Glass Floats; Terence DesPres: The Survivor;

Alicia Partnoy : The Little School; Lorraine Hansberry: Raisin in the Sun

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Art Spiegelman: Maus; Athol Fugard: Master Harold and the Boys

LIR Fall 2018 Sandi Albertson-Shea Mondays 10-12:00 Smith College  
Campus Center