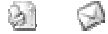


propaganda works



By Elizabeth Nguyen

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two contrasting exhibits honor the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth

Art has incredible power to influence public opinion, as proven by countless war propaganda campaigns. During World War II, illustrators worked to persuade the United States to enter the fight, fabulous posters extolled the virtues of women in the workplace, and newsreels brought home weekly images of the latest military exploits abroad. Vietnam-era photojournalists used the shock value of war's grim reality as a tool to change public opinion. Come to think of it, aren't we at war right now? As mainstream television and newspapers manufacture the official story with hyper-efficiency, artists are at liberty to diverge from it, enhance it, or drag it through the mud if they want.

Of course, not all artists are warriors driving home a single-minded political message. Seeking a larger context or a deeper meaning behind the disorder or pushing forward contradictions are also brave and noteworthy acts of expression. This is what distinguishes art from propaganda, that which seeks to influence public opinion through subjective bias and occasionally a little omission or disinformation.

"The Art of Peace: 100th Anniversary of the Russo-Japanese Treaty Signing" at the New Hampshire Art Association's Robert Lincoln Levy Gallery trends toward an introspective vein of thought on war and mostly peace, although a sea of doves, angels and works titled simply "Peace" nearly drown out the brave and noteworthy. While there are too many pieces in the show for any consistent quality to stand forth, a good number of them will make it worth your trip.

Paul Wainwright's black and white photograph "Box Pews, Rocky Hill Meeting House" drives home the essence of the celebration of the Peace Treaty. Establishing the historic first in "multi-track" diplomacy meant the community came together in support of the common goal, even inviting the Russians and Japanese negotiators into their homes. This grew out of their sense of community and their moral beliefs; it grew out of the meetinghouse. Wainwright's photo of four family box pews creating one cross reminds us of this cultural history.