

Alan E. Cober:

The Artist as Illustrator

The Illustrator as Journalist

The Renegade



Katonah Museum of Art

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The artist as journalist is not a new vocation. In the sixteenth century Jacques Callot chronicled the suffering brought on by the Thirty Years War. Two centuries later Francesco Goya made etchings which detailed the most unspeakable horrors of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain. And almost two centuries later Georg Grosz in a series of drawings portrayed the moral bankruptcy of the German oligarchy. If these artists failed to right the world's wrongs, they did bear witness so that others might continue the struggle.

Some of the most scathing indictments of man's folly have been made by those artists committed to art in the service of humankind – an accessible art that does not appeal to the lowest denominator but to the highest ideal. Despite our current reliance on photographic, electronic, and now digital media, for the transmission and reception of objective information, the artist continues to be a valuable interpreter of critical events.

Alan E. Cober is a disciple of the pioneers of modern graphic commentary and visual journalism, artists such as Honoré Daumier, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Kathé Kollwitz, and Ben Shahn. He is, therefore, one of a small group of contemporary practitioners who still believes that narrative art can influence and inform public opinion. Yet he's a commentator without a specific beat or agenda, which is not to imply that he doesn't have a distinct viewpoint. One cannot, for example, look at his drawings of Sing Sing prison's moth-balled electric chair without feeling the sensations he must have felt upon first entering the death chamber. Nor is it possible to look at Cober's etchings of mammoth industrial engines without seeing how completely fascinated he was by these monuments of the Machine Age. To say that Cober does not have a specific agenda means that his responses to outside stimuli are conditioned, not by some preconceived conviction, but by the experiences themselves. To say that he does not have a beat means he is not burdened by a constricting formalism, but rather is open to as many approaches and media as the subject demands. To say that he does not have a beat also suggests that Cober does not have a sinecure. Today he

