

Seeing Red at MoMA

Say the word “communism” and chances are most people will conjure images of the Soviet Union, the Cuban Missile Crisis, or **Nikita Khrushchev**

banging his shoe at the United Nations. It is far less likely that anyone will recall the unassuming brick structure that stands on the corner of Forsyth and Broome Streets in downtown Manhattan, the site of some of the earliest socialist and communist meetings held in the United States (back in the 19th century). For artist **Yevgeniy Fiks**, however, this type of place has inspired works that examine the often overlooked history of communism in the West.

Born in Russia but based in New York since 1994, Fiks has painted portraits of current members of the Communist Party USA and photographed New York locations connected to communist history. In March 2010, he led a group of visitors on a guerrilla performance tour of the Museum of Modern Art, in which he detailed the communist sympathies of artists in the permanent collection. (Interesting fact: **Jackson Pollock** went to communist meetings when he lived in Los Angeles in the '20s.) Now, MoMA has invited Fiks to give an officially sanctioned “Communist Tour” of the museum on February 15,

guiding visitors through the exhibition “Diego Rivera: Murals for the Museum of Modern Art.”

The expectation is that

he inserted an image of Russian revolutionary leader

Vladimir Lenin into a commissioned mural at New York’s Rockefeller Center. The

he’s really creating speech that reflected his own beliefs,” she adds—beliefs that were hardly in lockstep with what was coming out of Moscow. In

fact, Rivera had been expelled from Russia just a few years earlier for supporting **Leon Trotsky** over **Joseph Stalin**. The tour, says Fiks, will explore the artist’s contentious relationship with fellow muralist **David Alfaro Siqueiros**, a devoted Stalinist, and Rivera’s eventual return to Russia in the 1950s.

Fiks says the tour is also an opportunity to tell a more nuanced story about communists living and working in the United States. “In the 1920s and ‘30s, the Communist Party was really strong on issues of race and integration,” he says. But during the Cold War, the party was considered “despicable, unmentionable, horrible” in mainstream America. As part of his performance, Fiks will take visitors on a short detour through MoMA’s permanent collection to learn about the leftist politics of **Picasso**, **Matisse**, and **Magritte**. “MoMA always presents art against a light backdrop of his-

tory,” he explains. “But I don’t really think we can separate the artists from their work.” Certainly not for someone as vocal and impassioned as Rivera.

—**Carolina A. Miranda**



Yevgeniy Fiks in his guerrilla performance *Communist Tour of MoMA*, 2010 (top). Diego Rivera’s fresco *The Uprising*, 1931 (bottom).

Fiks will help illuminate the complexities of the Mexican muralist’s leftist leanings. An avowed member of the Communist Party, Rivera generated a great deal of controversy in 1933, when

gesture led to the mural’s demolition in early 1934 and Rivera to be dismissed as a propagandist, says **Leah Dickerman**, the curator behind the MoMA show, which is up through May 14. “But

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