



Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Artist as Reporter: The *PM* News Picture, 1940–48

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Published in New York City between 1940 and 1948, *PM* was a large-circulation Popular Front tabloid newspaper whose editorial independence and sophisticated visual program attracted the participation of many of the day's most celebrated artists, illustrators, and photographers, from Weegee and Ad Reinhardt to Lisette Model, Ralph Steiner, and Dr. Seuss. My dissertation evaluates this newspaper's neglected but crucial intervention into the American artistic and visual culture of the World War II era, situating *PM* between the period's more familiar conceptual frames of *Life* and *The Partisan Review* as a pivotal location for the display of images, one which activated the technology of mass culture toward recognizably avant-garde ends. Whether through its organization of an exhibition of news illustrations at the Museum of Modern Art, its championing of abstract painting, its investigation into photographic meaning, or its emphasis on the importance of visual literacy to the left's navigation of modernity in wartime, *PM* was much more than just a documentary reflection of its moment; it was an active and innovative participant in the visual and artistic culture of its day. For *PM*, rigid distinctions between avant-garde and kitsch, advanced art and mass culture, served only to inhibit the critical visual understanding of its complex world. Taken into fuller account, *PM* may also help to move our present historical reckoning with its moment past this old divide.