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Kirsten Holst Petersen

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Abstract

The following pictures form part of an exhibition of modern Aboriginal posters and screenprints, held at Moesgaard Museum in Denmark. The exhibition has been put together by Ruth and Vincent Megaw from the collection held at the art gallery at Flinders University in South Australia. The Danish exhibition also featured a collection of screenprints by Sally Morgan, kindly lent to us by the artist.

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The exhibition, which was part of a bicentennial festival, was deliberately chosen to tell Danes the other side of the story. It aroused much interest and had a good press coverage. One reason why the Danes understood it immediately might be their/our familiarity with the medium. The political poster as both art form and medium for protest is an established tradition. In the sophisticated form of the Aboriginal posters it goes back to the 60s, to the student revolts around Europe – in particular to the Polish cultural protest movement – to the new left films and fringe theatre and to the campaign against nuclear power. The basic iconography of political art is, of course, much older and goes back through the Russian revolution to the pictorial language of the Christian icons. The Aboriginal posters add their own language to the iconography of the raised fist, the slogan and the flag. Aboriginal art forms and modes of expression are incorporated into the modern multi-media form, and the result is striking.

Political survival in the form of land rights, better education etc. is the obvious aim of these prints, but the embedded features of Aboriginal painting styles and motifs speak of the even more essential survival of a culture, which is a prerequisite of political survival.