

## ART

# Chinese collectives paint collectively

After the Great Leap Forward in 1958, rural communards in Huhsien—a remote agricultural section of central China—turned to painting to record and express their feelings about their daily life. The result has been a popular art of enormous sophistication and social vision.

An exhibit of these peasant paintings, presently at the Brooklyn Museum, will visit New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles and Houston later this year.

The Huhsien paintings catalog a New Futurism, one with roots in the woman-plus-man-with-red-banner school of socialist realism. But here the focus is on collective work styles, "Seething with Enthusiasm," as one of the tableaux is called.

From the lapis-colored depths of a mountain valley in a snowstorm, "Transportation Team on High Mountains" shows a caravan of trucks winding along a road edged in icy turquoise. In the more bucolic "Selling Eggs to the State," pairs of women weigh out bushel baskets of brown and porcelain pastel-colored eggs. The round, red-cheeked faces show none of the "facelessness" expected from writings about contemporary Chinese life, but the talents of different painters fuse in style to form what seems like the work of a single artist.

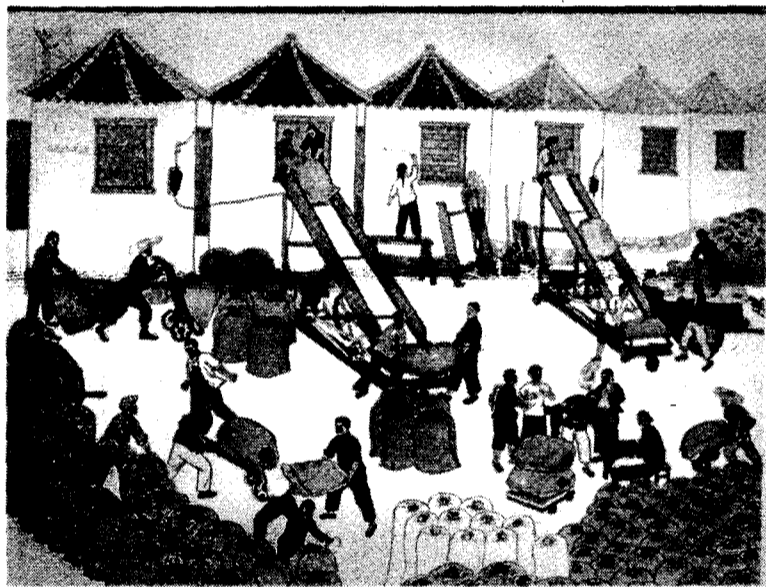
Collective production of some canvasses may explain this phenomenon. Or possibly the subject—collectivization of agriculture—inspired collaboration.

According to the exhibit handbook, these artists do not earn their living from painting. By western standards they must be called amateurs. Many carry their sketchpads to the fields along with their hoes. Understanding this context makes the Huhsien achievement both more remarkable and understandable.

Art produced in the workplace will necessarily be widely comprehensible and based on mass, rather than individual experience. Thus, "Store Grain Everywhere" demonstrates how a production line molds itself to the work at



*Our Commune's Fishpond*



*Store Grain Everywhere (1973)*

hand as smoothly as a bicycle chain turns its wheels.

One can't help wonder exactly how the combination of work and painting is accomplished. Do other brigade members pull carts

twice as heavy while some blend paint on their palettes? Are those with extraordinary talent encouraged to paint at the expense of other production goals? Is there a standard production rate for

art work, as there might be for apple-picking?

Using opaque colors which have been ground in water and mingled with glue, the artists employ subtle gradations—a half-dozen different yellows in the same canvas—to create intense colors. This is representational art, with an ideological wash. The perspective of some paintings is deliberately vast, to suggest fields without end and unending production. In one canvas, "Gathering Garlic," the tones are deliberately subdued except for lines of magenta around the over-sized bulbs. The effect gives a certain gaiety to harvesting the pungent crop.

While the standard of the selection among the various artists emphasizes uniformity, an occasional unevenness reveals the talented amateur. Children are represented as small-scale adults. Some of the produce harvested is of alarming proportions, more suited to

science fiction than social realism.

Yet even this distortion of proportion reflects artistic cunning. In "A Commune Fishpond," hundreds of fish flop into nets pulled by a dozen laughing "fisher people." Over their glistening scales bright yellow fish eyes peer, far larger than life. This gives the fish a cheerful look. Leaping enthusiastically into the net, tails wagging, even the fish seem to be pulling their share of the revolution.

—David King Dunaway  
*Peasant paintings from Huhsien County can be seen through January at the Brooklyn Museum; at the San Francisco Chinese Cultural Center in February and March; the Art Institute of Chicago in April and May; the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles June and July; and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston in August and September.*

*David King Dunaway is a freelance writer in Santa Cruz, California.*

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## BOOKS

# A modest proposal for ending hunger

## FOOD FIRST

By Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, with Cary Fowler  
Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1977

How should I respond to reports in the media about coming food crises? Ought I to think of my country as a "lifeboat" in which to save myself, perhaps at the expense of other nations and their peoples? Or is a broader vision needed, wherein I view myself as a member of one community: the world?

The purpose of *Food First* is to provide basic information for thinking over these matters. It succeeds admirably and can help us to act rationally in the coming, problem-laden years.

Moreover, it is a pleasure to read.

Lappe and Collins let a concerned layperson ask 48 probing questions about the world food situation, each of which is answered in turn. The book's chief theses, slowly unfolded in the answers, are:

- that no country needs to have a food problem;
- that problems like famine and nutritional inequality are largely the results of misuse of land and of exploitation of populations;
- and that the ensuing devastation can, with effort, be counteracted.

This case is argued by presenting a vast body of data in a systematic, yet simple way. A running critical evaluation gives the authors' views, which are presented on three levels.

First, there are some examples. We are shown that even Bangladesh (popularly written off as hopeless) "probably now produces enough to keep all its people sufficiently fed. But the rich

eat several times more grain than the poor." Indeed, "an elite few prevent the majority from having access to the country's resources." Land reform can increase production and spread those democratic privileges and freedoms that are now largely denied.

Roughly the same holds for the Sahel. Here as in Bangladesh the possession of most of the land by a few large holders has, with the aid of their "modern" farming techniques, destabilized ecological systems which for centuries had been decently exploited by the local population. Clearly, this undemocratic and physically debilitating situation can be remedied.

Secondly, we learn more about these modern approaches to land exploitation. The harmful results of the large-scale use of insecticides like DDT are described in detail. DDT is forbidden in the USA, so its American producers are eager to sell it abroad, and their success has amply covered the loss of their home market. But it turns out that DDT is not needed to ensure the efficient production of high-quality crops, as the Japanese have demonstrated.

Other malpractices, such as the destruction of entire forests to render areas suitable for the growth of a single crop are reported. The results are almost always the same: the local residents are deprived of their own land; they are forced to work at low wages under the new system of ownership; their nutritionally excellent ecological balance is destroyed; profit is created for a few by the many's labor.

Thirdly, the authors show how this exploitation is organized. A large (often multinational) "agribusiness" concern can acquire control over large areas of land, can force the peasants to work on



it (their only option being to flee to the cities and join the urban poor), and can convince the government to buy implements made by that very firm. Even when the firm does not actually own the land, it collaborates very closely with the owners. This is an attractive policy since the taint of imperialism is removed from the surface of the operations. A "global supermarket" can be constructed from this web of international contracts and agreements.

The hamburger is, perhaps, the universal symbol of this economic integration.

Much more is revealed in this book. We read about the nutri-

tional problems of underdeveloped areas and their exacerbation by the growth of the global supermarket.

For example, breast feeding is discouraged in favor of canned milk, which its multinational producers bill as a status symbol. However, a mother's milk is usually suited to the nutritional needs of a child in a given region, whereas canned milk need not be. Moreover, a mother who cannot afford enough canned milk will often dilute what little she can buy to make it last. The resulting malnutrition has been widely documented, and Lappe and Collins summarize the data.

The book closes with some sug-

gestions directed to Americans. The solution of problems related to food and its distribution is seen as a necessary condition for the treatment of other social injustices. Hence the title.

This compendious yet lucid book ought to be widely read. For if we remain uninformed about these issues we "will be forced to translate our own legitimate food requirements into opposition to those of countries where hundreds of millions go hungry." The results of our own needless ignorance may well be disastrous.

—George Berger  
*George Berger is an American teaching at the University of Amsterdam.*

## Science fiction writers vs. War

### STUDY WAR NO MORE

Edited by Joseph Haldeman  
St. Martin's Press, N.Y., \$8.95

The fly-leaf of this slender volume promises ten alternatives to war, conceived by ten prominent science-fiction writers. Editor Joseph Haldeman, a science fiction writer of considerable acclaim, vouches for the stories as "hopeful, chilling, satirical and entertaining, whether practical or not. And all of them offer food for thought. The ones that offer hope as well offer something rare."

Whether the alternatives presented are practical, who knows? But food for thought they do give, and entertaining they are.

Ben Bova (editor of *Analog*, a science fiction magazine) presents us with a complicated dueling machine to be used by prime ministers, presidents or those in high places who seek to make war. The belligerents may fight a duel on this ingenious device without hurting anyone. The machine simply settles a score and works out the aggressive feelings.

Paul Anderson takes us to the time after World War III, which "short and inconclusive as it was, made painfully clear that mass destruction had become ridiculous." Through the voice of the newly elected president of the University of California, the author tells us that "many distinguished

thinkers regard our present system of killing—not whole populations, but the leaders of those populations—as a step forward." In short, assassination! Shocking? Is 50,000 U.S. dead in Vietnam less shocking, or the death of Vietnamese more acceptable?

Isaac Asimov, one of the greats of the genre, prescribes peace and freedom through cybernetic regimentation. With tongue in cheek, I'm sure, Mr. Asimov advocates a completely computerized society and concludes that "individuals may be emotional enough to want war as an optimum solution. If the various nations all computerized themselves properly...all the nations' computers would agree on solutions since the world is small. We rise together, all of us; or we sink together."

Even with my repugnance for a computerized society, I find Mr. Asimov's thinking holds up better than the proposals for a neutron bomb.

In "Basilisk," Harvey Ellison suggests that those who wage war become anaesthetized to its horrors. His alternative would be to force those who create war to see the ugly face of what it achieves, in a deeply moving, skin-crawling story that makes you ashamed of man's barbarism.

Harry Harrison's satirical novel, *Bill, the Galactic Hero* reflects his utter contempt for war and

warriors. William Nabors writes of a peace virus to which there is no known antidote. Damon Knight's alternative flies in the face of the worn-out cliché: you can't change human nature. And finally there is a highly dramatic series of letters by Joe Haldeman, who brainstormed the idea of the collection.

"Whether or not you agree with me that all nations must give up their arms is immaterial," he writes. "Whether I am a saint or a power-drunk madman is immaterial. I give the governments of the world three days' notice—perhaps less than three days if they do not follow my instructions to the letter!"

This is nuclear blackmail—a threat so powerful as to make even nations think.

If we don't turn the arms race into a peace race, we really face extinction. It's time to abandon the stereotyped bromides and start thinking along original lines. However amusingly unrealistic the alternatives in *Study War No More* may seem, the book deserves an audience and discussion.

Maybe it is going to take the "unrealistic" to abolish the realism that presently menaces humanity.

—Mildred Simon  
*Mildred Simon is a lecturer and a journalist in southern California.*



Joseph Haldeman, science fiction writer and editor