

ARTFORUM

Yevgeniy Fiks

TEMPLE GALLERY

Tyler School of Art, Temple University, 12th and Norris Streets
September 8–November 6



View of “Communist Conspiracy in Art Threatens American Museums,” 2010.

The most intriguing piece on view in the latest exhibition by the Russian-born, New York–based artist Yevgeniy Fiks is *Stalin’s Directive on Modern Art* (all works 2010). Two vitrines display documents fabricated by the artist that speculate on the notorious leader’s interest in art. One page bears a famous statement attributed to Stalin that appeared in an article written by Eleanor Jewett for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1955, in which Stalin urged artists to “create confusion,” among other suggestions, in order to contribute to the collapse of Western society. Fiks also presents numerous photographs of artists and other intellectuals involved with communism—for example, MoMA’s Alfred H. Barr Jr. visiting official USSR artist Yevgeny Kibrik in Moscow in 1959.

This work sets the tone for the rest of the exhibition, which is appropriately titled “Communist Conspiracy in Art Threatens American Museums,” after the name of a 1952 speech by Republican congressman George A. Dondero. A related piece, *Tour of MoMA with Congressman Dondero*, is a posterlike series of twenty-one sentences from Dondero’s 1952 and 1956 speeches as culled from congressional records. Among handmade reproductions of legendary communist figures’ portraits—including Julius and Ethel Rosenberg—originally drawn by Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger, there is also *Communist Tour of MoMA*, seven red canvases offering declarations from artists such as Picasso, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera regarding their commitment to communism alongside their distinctive signatures. There is, for instance, a quote in which Kahlo compared herself to Rivera, her husband: I WAS A MEMBER OF THE PARTY BEFORE I MET DIEGO AND I THINK I AM A BETTER COMMUNIST THAN HE IS OR EVER WILL BE. Intelligently bringing together cold war politics and artistic agency, this exhibition presents Fiks’s critical examination of the historical intertwining of ideology and aesthetics in the twentieth century.

— Miguel Amado