

The exhibition, marking the fifth year anniversary of the gallery, takes as its title the murder of Leon Trotsky on August 21, 1940 in Mexico City. The moment is chosen for its evocative, allusive potential—and as an introduction to the theme of the exhibition, which is the relationship between art and ideology. The figure of Trotsky, and particularly his last years in Mexico, serve as a symbol of the strange terrain where art and ideology meet, entangle, dissolve, and become *other*. Trotsky is here conjured as a liminal figure of paradoxes, chiasmuses: North (Russia) and South (Mexico), the reality of revolution and the fantasy of escape, (but, conversely, the fantasy of revolution and the reality of escape—escape leading to death); the uncanny entanglement of art (Frida Kahlo) and politics, and even art and violence.¹

Why the question of ideology—and why now? In James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus famously laments, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” How to wake up? Presumably by understanding the causes of the crisis; by bringing to light the ideology that created it. Presumably the matter can be addressed directly. But: Ideology has no history. This is the claim of Louis Althusser. Individual ideologies have histories, and can be analyzed, scrutinized, challenged, and critiqued. Ideology itself is however beyond such modes of apprehension. It is eternal and invisible, and therefore analogous to the Freudian unconscious. A source of dreams—a world of masks and symbols. Althusser, again:

“[The] proposition: ideology has no history, can and must... be related directly to Freud’s proposition that the unconscious is eternal, i.e. that it has no history. If eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud’s expression word for word, and write ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious.”²

The exhibition stages a dialogue between artists of different generations, with very different practices, each of whom wrestles with the riddle (the serpent) of ideology, and resonates with Stephen Daedalus’s lament. They wrestle with the challenge of making ideologies visible—of bringing them to light—while at the same time reckoning with their permanent invisibility and evasions: the nocturnal, nightmares, and dreams. The conflict is played out at the level of image, symbol, and material: The torch (of Liberty), the outstretched hand (giving or taking?); targets; serpents; slavery and slaves-ships; the River and the Flood; violence and trauma; war and exploitation; *Mourning and Melancholia*;³ *Mourning and Militancy*;⁴ Michael Jackson; Ana Mendieta and Carl Andre; the hope, promise, and failure of utopia; apocalypse and Revelation. “To live is to struggle.”⁵

1 Even before his murder Trotsky had been the target of an assassination attempt, this one by another famous artist, muralist and Party loyalist David Siqueiros.

2 Louis Althusser, “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État (Notes pour une recherche),” *La Pensée* 151 (June 1970): 3-38.

3 Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis), vol. IV, 152-170.

4 Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (1989): 3-18.

5 Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Charles Schribner’s Sons, 1930).