

CRISTIN TIERNEY



Integrating Message and Method



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By Steven Heller

Signal flew under my radar. I have seen one or two issues but hadn't realized until the latest edition (edited by Alec Dunn and Josh MacPhee) how exceptional it is as a gateway to little and unknown polemical graphic material. "From the beginning of *Signal*, we have maintained an open-handed approach to political art," write the editors. In this issue alone I learned about an under-reported slave rebellion reenactment, a vital proto-underground politico-cultural magazine's stunning covers, the legacy of books published

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supporting the Black Panthers from around the globe, plus more novel content. Designed by Dunn and MacPhee (who also co-founded the Interference Archive), the digest size and full-color printing of *Signal* contributes to an entire package that, for a scholarly journal, is refreshingly accessible.

“We chose the title *Signal* for its obvious metaphorical implication: A signal is something concise and directed, a pointed communication that spurs action,” the editors add, “but signal is also a verb, an idea in motion.”

The magazine combines a lot of disparate political events, philosophies, artifacts and time periods. MacPhee admits it is not easy to compile and edit, but *Signal:08* has come together as they hoped it would.

One of the most distinctive stories is MacPhee’s interview with activist artist Dread Scott, who for years has been raising awareness of what his namesake stood for. (Dred Scott was a former slave living in a non-slave state, who unsuccessfully sued for freedom for his wife and their two daughters in the Dred Scott v. Sandford Supreme Court case of 1857, known as the “Dred Scott decision.”)

Over nine days in November 2019, the artist Scott recruited Black and indigenous men and women wearing period clothing and carrying muskets to recreate the German Coast Uprising of 1811 outside of New Orleans. Called the “Slave Rebellion Reenactment” (taking a page from popular Civil War historical reenactments), Scott and 400 descendants of enslaved people marched 26 miles over two days. The action vividly raised the shroud that had hung over this forgotten fact of history. Choreographing the event took six years for Scott to arrange. MacPhee’s interview is thorough and illuminating.