

Revolutions: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Printmaking and Latin American History

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AS PROFESSORS in the early twenty-first century, we are constantly absorbing information about new technologies and how we might best use them to teach history.¹ As part of a U.S. Department of Education grant to expand Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Albright College, the authors of this article, one a historian and one an artist, teamed up to teach a course called Revolutions: Art and Revolution in Latin America. In the class, we proposed to combine a studio art printmaking class with Latin American history content. We wanted to use a different kind of technology to help students understand the past, and use Latin America's revolutionary past to help students understand the different ways that art has been used to promote social change. This article is going to talk about the methods that we use to teach the class, the resources available, and some of the challenges of offering this type of hybrid class.

The content of the class covers the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. Both of these twentieth-century revolutions overthrew the standing governments and brought in revolutionary governments that stressed national identity, sovereignty, and social justice. While the Mexican Revolution began in 1910 and the Cuban revolutionary government came to power in 1959, both continue to shape the contemporary nations. Our class examines the revolutionary governments and their relationship to the graphic arts in three different ways. After giving a general introduction

to the causes and consequences of the revolutions, we examine the role of artists in promoting, supporting, and sometimes criticizing (or at least problematizing) the revolutions. Second, we examine the ways that the revolutionary governments promoted the arts and artists as part of their revolutionary goals by offering expanded funding for the arts and for arts education. With this section, we expand beyond the graphic arts to discuss the cultural policies of the two revolutions and the ways that graphic artists worked as part of larger artistic movements within the revolutions. Finally, we discuss changes in the revolutions and concurrent changes in the art as the revolutions passed through different phases.² At the end of the class, we discuss Brazilian *literatura de cordel*, or “stories on a string,” the small books, or *folhetos*, which, although not revolutionary, represent an art form used by people in the Brazilian northeast to spread news about current events.

Along with the historical content, students have the opportunity to make editions of their own prints. Printmaking is a democratic method of making multiple originals, or an edition of virtually identical signed and numbered prints. Unlike offset mechanical printing or photographic reproduction, the artist creates each print by applying ink on top of the matrix, as in relief printmaking, or in the carved grooves of an intaglio plate. Lithography and serigraphy, or silkscreen, are both planographic processes. Neither relies on carving, but a flat printmaking method that maintains the structural integrity of the original surface of the matrix. Silkscreen is a stencil-based process, and lithography is a chemically based resist that keeps oil-based ink separate from a dampened surface such as stone or metal. Although digital techniques are now commonly integrated into contemporary printmaking, because of the scope of the course and limitations of our graphic studio, we chose to limit our print processes to the traditional relief, intaglio, and silkscreen techniques used by Latin American artists during the revolutionary periods discussed.

Linocut is the most basic of the mediums that we introduce, and as a relief process, it lends itself to high-contrast imagery appropriated from José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), the prolific printmaker who worked in the years before and during the early years of the Mexican Revolution.³ Woodcuts, while somewhat less forgiving, allow a greater range of techniques and textures, and they were used extensively by artists of the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (the People’s Graphic Workshop—TGP) of Mexico.⁴ Silkscreen aligns itself nicely with the bold graphic posters of the Cuban Revolution, while collagraphs segue nicely into Cuba’s Special Period, with an acknowledgement of the scarcity of suitable metals and restriction of specialized non-essential products imported to the island. Intaglio is arguably the more complex of the processes,

relying on manipulating the surface of a metal matrix with hand tools or acid. At the end of the semester, students create small zinc etchings with nitric acid while thinking about the ways that Brazilian *folhetos* are used to spread news.

In our original conception of the class, we had hoped to take students to Cuba during spring break. We secured a license for Albright from the Department of the Treasury and visited Cuba during spring break in 2004. Working with the Center for Cross-Cultural Study, we were able to visit several printmaking workshops (*talleres*) in and around Havana, talking to artists and observing the current production of graphic art. Collagraphs were still the most popular process and artists we spoke with indicated that metal was still hard to come by. The main relief and intaglio *taller* had a substantial lithographic stone library, most of the stones having been used since the late nineteenth century—some with cigar labels still printed on them. Since the Bavarian limestone can be used over and over again, only the top layer is sanded down after an image is produced and a work is editioned. Lithography is the one process that we cannot do at Albright because we do not have a stone library nor the press needed to produce the images. Unfortunately, politics closed the door to short-term academic travel to Cuba later in 2004.

Before the class began, we also traveled to the University of New Mexico to examine some of Posada's original broadsides at the Center for Southwest Research and some of the TGP prints in the University Museum Collection. The Center for Southwest Research currently has many of those images in their digital library, which is an open resource for scholars and students.⁵ After the second time we taught the class, we traveled to Rio de Janeiro and had the opportunity to visit the Brazilian Academy of Cordel Literature in the Santa Teresa neighborhood. The visit made us realize that the cordel prints could play a bigger part in discussing the role of *popular* printmaking in Latin America today.⁶ All of these visits helped us to understand the importance of the graphic arts in Latin America.

Through offering this type of hands-on studio art class that includes historical content, we try to make students aware of the importance of art and artists in promoting, and sometimes critiquing, these revolutions. In the class, we assign papers, vocabulary quizzes, and oral presentations, as well as the small editions of their prints. We also teach the students to critique their peers' work, and each process is followed by one of these collective critiques. Below, we outline the main contours of the content that we cover and the ways that we incorporate the printmaking into the content. In the end, we hope that the students gain a new appreciation for the potential of art as a facilitator of social change.

The Mexican Revolution/Linocuts

The Mexican Revolution erupted in Mexico in 1910 after the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (the Porfiriato). Díaz was one of the many technocratic leaders that came to power in Latin America in the late nineteenth century. He believed in the positivist goals of order and progress, and in the ability of technocrats to bring the Latin American nations into the “modern” age. He was able to stabilize Mexico after decades of unrest, but the stability came at the cost of political and civil freedoms for most Mexicans. He made Mexico attractive to foreign investors and greatly expanded industrial agriculture—all at the expense of the vast majority of people in Mexico.⁷ In this section of the class, we emphasize the policies of the Porfiriato that were overturned by the revolution so that students can understand why the revolution was important and what it was attempting to change.

In 1910, the pent-up frustration of Mexico erupted when Díaz, at the age of 80, said he was going to run for another term. The next ten years became what most scholars agree was the military phase of the revolution, which were bracketed by the ouster of Díaz from the presidency and the assassination of the constitutionalist president, Venustiano Carranza. These ten years were defined by a power struggle between different factions of revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. Trying not to confuse the students with what was an extremely chaotic revolution, we introduce the main figures of the revolution, especially those who became iconic figures of the revolution, with focus on Emiliano Zapata—whose phrase “land and liberty” became a rallying cry for his and later revolutions. We spend time discussing the Constitution of 1917 and its revolutionary articles, especially Article 27, which included land reform and the declaration that all underground rights belonged to Mexico. The article reversed the economic trends of the Porfiriato, which had consolidated land in the hands of a few and had sold pieces of Mexico’s rich mineral and energy wealth to the highest bidder.

Even before the revolution took hold of the country, the artist José Guadalupe Posada was creating images that shocked and amused the population. A satirical cartoonist trained in lithography and metal engraving, Posada employed the medium in artistic production—that is, he created original images for print rather than copying famous paintings or drawings by other artists. Posada was prolific and his works are ubiquitous, especially in the form of broadsides, which were inexpensive fliers with image and text. A surprising number of these broadsides, which were printed on inexpensive non-archival paper, are still in existence.⁸ Paper foxing and brittleness threaten them as archival materials, but they were

reproduced in great numbers during and after his lifetime. For most of his career, he worked in the print workshop of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo in Mexico City. His subject matter ranged from oddities of nature to fables and legends, but increasingly, as Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship became more repressive, Posada also started to produce political images, often lampooning those in power by turning them into *calaveras*—literally, skulls or skeletons. Posada's *calaveras* are often gender specific—boasting grotesquely decorated and feathered hats and boas in the cases of the females, and male skeletons sporting exaggerated mustaches and wide sombreros. Socioeconomic class is an essential element in his prints, as he demonstrates a divided Mexico before the Revolution, mocking the hapless upper class during the reign of Díaz. Posada's aristocrats are often engaged in illicit activities, reinforcing moral lessons through their unintended predicaments. Although Posada died early in the revolution, later artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and Leopoldo Méndez recognized Posada as their inspiration, anchoring his vital role in Mexican revolutionary art.⁹

In terms of technique, Posada engraved metal, but printed the plate in the relief rather than the intaglio manner. His images therefore maintain the graphic linear quality most often attributed to traditional relief mediums, such as wood or linoleum. For the assignment, we ask students to do further research on Posada's work and find an image for appropriation. Students create sketches first, taking all or part of the original image, and rework it to address a contemporary issue or express a new visual idea. Linocut is the first print technique explored. Students are asked to transfer their finished sketch with pencil onto the linoleum matrix. We give basic carving instructions and a majority of the matrix is carved during studio class time. Rolling oil-based ink onto the matrix, students either take a first proof on newsprint by running the matrix through the press (Tackach-Garfield) or simply applying pressure with a wooden spoon on the back of the newsprint. Once the students are happy with their work, they are asked to create a small edition of five prints on archival Japanese paper such as Hosho or Mulberry. The longer fibers of these papers counters the drag often created by the press, and provides an archival bright white surface. While the final edition is very small, students are asked to strive for exact duplication, signing and numbering the finished prints. The discipline required to create an edition reinforces the idea of printmaking as a truly democratic medium of multiple fine art originals. Students are often amused at Posada's image of a "keg party" in *El Jarabe en Ultratumba* (Folk Dance Beyond the Grave) created in 1910 and make images based on that print, such as the one a student made in the spring of 2011 (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Katherine Kraus, "Keg Party." Linocut, 8" x 10".

Art and the Revolution/Woodcuts

As the students begin to create their first prints, we continue to discuss the revolution after 1920 and the emergence of the mural movement, perhaps the best-known artistic movement of the Mexican Revolution. The mural movement emerged from the policies of President Álvaro Obregón towards education, and his Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos. At the heart of the content of the movement was a turning back to truly Mexican forms through the appropriation of ancient Meso-American ideas and the celebration of the glorious indigenous past, as well as a celebration of the nobility of the Mexican peasant. Certainly, the most easily recognizable art of the Revolution were the magnificent frescoes painted by *los tres*

grandes, Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), and David Alfaro Siquieros (1896-1974), and it would be impossible to talk about art and the Mexican Revolution without reference to them and why they were created. Like graphic art, mural art (or frescoes in the case of Mexico) can be considered to be a profoundly democratic art form. In the case of the Mexican Revolution, murals were used to educate the population—in fact, the first large consignments were to paint the Ministry of Education and other government buildings.¹⁰

Revolutionary artists were not only concerned with the content of their art, but also the method of teaching art, and the very nature of art itself. Art would no longer be an elite practice, but rather something of the people, and artists would no longer be elevated intellectuals, but rather would be regarded as artisans—as fellow workers of the revolution. One of the earliest expressions of this policy was the open-air schools, started in Mexico City during the most chaotic period of the revolution. After 1921, when French artist Jean Charlot arrived, the artists in these schools extensively used woodcuts as their medium, seeing it as a way to reach more people and get closer to being artisans rather than artists.¹¹ Diego Rivera became the director of the most famous art school in Mexico, the Academy of San Carlos, and changed its name and its statutes to reflect these new ideals.¹²

In 1937, Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O'Higgins, and Luis Arenal started what would become one of the most important graphic arts workshops in the Americas. The TGP became important both in terms of spreading the revolutionary message and supporting other international causes, such as the fight against fascism in Latin America that was beginning to gain ground after 1930. The TGP grew out of several artistic/artisanal movements that had been inspired by the revolution. In 1922, *Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores* (SOTPE), which was a union of technical workers, painters, and sculptors, repudiated what they characterized as bourgeois artistic ideals. In the next fifteen years, other movements moved even farther left of the revolution, such as the Stridentist movement that included both artists and writers; *¡30-30!*, an artistic movement named after the rifle most commonly used in the revolution; and the League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (LEAR), which fully supported the communist party.¹³ The artists of the TGP developed a set of principles that emphasized the need to work collectively as artists; to always work for the social good, especially against fascism; to collectively reflect and critique their work; and to develop individual artistic skills. They insisted on making representational images, and yet their work does not at all resemble the Social Realism of Soviet art—in fact, two different exhibitions of work of the TGP in Moscow were widely criticized for not making Mexican peasants look happier.¹⁴ In this section of the class, we



Figure 2: Miranda Warrington, "Hands." Woodcut, 8" x 10".

discuss the idea of the artist as part of a collective and what it means for artists to take on issues of social responsibility. Towards the later years of the TGP, however, the movement also serves as a good point of departure for a discussion about some of the contradictions that appear when the idealism of making revolutionary art collides with the need for funding and the art market, especially after the Mexican Revolutionary government diminished its support of such artistic endeavors.

Artists of the Mexican Revolution, including those of the TGP, widely used the woodcut because it was seen to be a material easily acquired by almost anyone. For this reason, we introduce wood as the second matrix for relief carving. Students explore a broader range of tools and techniques. Students are given 8" x 11" pieces of pine shelving, because of its qualities as a soft wood. Birch is often preferred because of its more subtle grain pattern, but we chose pine for the erratic knotting and grain pattern. Students are encouraged to incorporate the grain pattern into their image. They learn to raise the grain of the wood plank with a steel wire brush—removing the softer wood and leaving the harder grain pattern to translate in the final print. Nails and small, hard tools can also create dot patterns or stamps into wood, whereas the very soft linoleum surface would close back after this type of working of the surface. We demonstrate color registration, and some of the more advanced students experiment with multiple block or jigsaw registration. The emphasis, however, remains on the simple graphic black and white image used by the TGP for disseminating information.

The subject of this print is Article 27 of the revolutionary 1917 Mexican Constitution. Students have explored both illustrative and didactic images of peasants in the landscape, or more symbolic interpretations of form and text. We continue to talk about formal principles of design along with the historical context of land reform and Mexican sovereignty embedded in images we discuss or create. This semester, a student created a simple and poignant image of open hands, etched with the grain of the wood plank, with black, empty, or “negative” space on the bottom. Her print is open to interpretation, simultaneously suggesting the promises made to Mexicans in Article 27, and promises unfulfilled (Figure 2).

Cuba and the Revolution/Silkscreens

The Cuban Revolution began in the 1950s, just as the Mexican government was hardening into single-party rule, turning Mexico to the right. Nonetheless, revolutionaries from throughout Latin America still saw Mexico City as a center for revolutionary thought and action. It was in Mexico City that Che Guevara and Fidel Castro met for the first time in 1955, and planned their overthrow of the corrupt government of Fulgencio

Batista in Cuba. Castro, Guevara, and their small revolutionary group returned to Cuba in 1956, and succeeded in taking over the government in early 1959. According to the logic of the Cold War, the success of a “communist” revolution so close to the United States was deemed a threat to national security and consecutive United States’ governments attempted to either overthrow Castro or crush the Cuban economy with the goal of ousting the revolutionary government with an economic blockade. The contentious relationship between Cuba and the United States has lasted to the present. In the class, we discuss some of the historical roots of the relationship between the United States and Cuba and talk about the ways that it changed, and stayed the same, through the almost fifty years that Fidel Castro was in power.¹⁵

Like the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Castro and the other revolutionaries that took charge of Cuba’s government made education—and specifically, literacy—one of their primary goals, and their success of Cuba’s literacy campaign has been a showpiece of the revolution’s social agenda.¹⁶ Also similar to Mexico, the Cuban government understood the arts to be of critical importance in building a revolutionary society, but the ways they approached the arts differed greatly from Mexico’s. They believed in a form of “cultural democracy” in which Cubans would not only have access to the arts, but would become producers of the arts as well as enter into critical dialogue with the arts. The Cuban revolutionary government wanted to end the elitist view of art as something for only the rich to consume and make the entire population able to engage in discussions about art. Like the literacy crusade, this new appreciation for art would come through dialogue, in which all segments of the population would have opportunities to engage in active and critical dialogues about art.¹⁷

To that end, the Cuban revolutionary government dedicated a significant budget to expand the arts and arts education in Cuba. They began building a huge new School for the Arts in the location of a former country club in Havana. The ambitious project, which unfortunately was never finished, brought promising students from all over Cuba to study the visual arts, theater, dance, and music.¹⁸ In 1976, the Cuban government opened the graduate school of art, the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (ISA). In addition to the arts schools, the Cuban government promoted film production through the creation of the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC). They also opened the *Casas de las Américas*, cultural centers that promoted the arts of the Americas. In one of their most wide-reaching programs, they opened workplace arts programs, in which factory or field workers would participate in dance, theater, and reading groups as part of their service on the job.¹⁹ We stress the excitement and innovation of these programs while pointing out that Cuban artists also had to deal with periods of

repression and censorship of their work, and that although the arts did offer some avenues for criticism of the revolution, that criticism was carefully controlled by the Cuban government.²⁰ Nonetheless, most students have only heard negative things about Cuba and we try to add some nuance to their understanding of the revolution, especially in regard to the arts.

The graphic arts played an important role in fulfilling the revolution's goals. Of course, graphic arts enjoyed the same prestige as other fine arts and was taught at the ISA. The government also fully supported the *Taller Experimental de Gráfica* in Havana, in which artists produced lithographs, woodcuts, etchings, and a wide range of other techniques. The print process that really made Cuba known for graphic art, however, was silkscreen, especially because the revolution coincided with the Pop Art movement of the 1960s. Although the idea of using silkscreen poster production for the promotion of consumer goods was rejected in Cuba, Cuban artists created posters to promote music and literary festivals, as well as to advertise films—not only Cuban films of the ICAIC, but films from around the world that were shown in Cuba and at film festivals.²¹

Silkscreen posters and graphic arts billboards also promoted revolutionary goals for Cuba, as well as solidarity with others in the "third world." Photographs that we took during our trip to Cuba reveal widespread dissemination of political messages through graphic images such as colorful billboards, signage, and printed materials. Silkscreen posters also played an important role in promoting the causes of the non-aligned movement that emerged in the 1970s. The Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas (OSPAAAL), an international non-governmental organization (NGO) of revolutionary graphic art based in Havana, started in the 1970s. Through OSPAAAL, Cuban artists could produce art that expressed solidarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements throughout the world.²²

Because of its importance to the Cuban Revolution, the next process we introduce to the students is screen printing, or serigraphy. Silkscreen is a bold graphic medium that lends itself to large flat areas of value or color. As our graphics studio is small, and without dedicated space for washing oil-based inks out of the screen matrix, we switched to water-based inks. Students begin by stretching polyfiber filament over wooden screens and then apply a wax resist or place shapes cut from commercial contact paper to block out the negative space. Because of the simple stencil process, we encourage students to use multi-screen registration to produce multi-color prints. We set up two designated stations in the studio with jiffy clamps for students to position the screens for the color registration. The studio also has an assortment of various-sized rubber squeegees to pull ink through the screen.



Figure 3: Melissa Yake, working on her silkscreen “Do Not Enter.”

Students are asked to work in pairs and to develop an image that reflects the historically strained relationship between the United States and Cuba. Working in pairs gives them a collaborative experience where each had to modify their ideas and compromise with color and image. It also allows them ample room to work. Students have produced images of barbed wire fences, flags in opposition and coming together, and visual metaphors of United States’ domination of Cuba before the Revolution. In “Do Not Enter,” students used a red circular shape reminiscent of a stop sign with a silhouette of the island and words to illustrate the sentiment of the United States towards Cuba (Figure 3).

The Special Period/Collagraphs

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War was effectively over. Critical for Cuba, the Soviet Union ended its generous subsidies abruptly in 1991, causing

a massive economic contraction in Cuba that resulted in widespread blackouts and critical food shortages. In the first five years of the 1990s, each Cuban lost twenty-five pounds! Fidel Castro called this period the Special Period in Times of Peace, and through his personal charisma and appeal to the benefits of the revolution, he managed to see his country through the crisis while maintaining his grip on power. There were changes, however, as the new constitution opened the door for the practice of religion as well as for some partial foreign investment in Cuba, which came mostly in the tourist industry, as well as the allowance of some private ownership of small businesses.²³

Artists, like everyone in the population, were strangled by a lack of materials to produce art. In response, Cuban graphic artists began to use found materials to produce prints, using a process known as collagraphy. An alternative intaglio or relief process developed with found materials such as cardboard and plastic introduced during World War II. Because of the metal shortages, printmakers sought out alternatives to copper and zinc plates.²⁴ Collagraphy's wide appeal comes from the diverse types of materials that can be incorporated into the cardboard plate in an additive manner. While Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's collages were precursors to collagraphs, the collagraph originally developed in the United States as the war drove Stanley William Hayter's experimental Atelier 17 out of Paris to New York City.²⁵ The invention of plastic adhesives also made the building of collagraphs more durable, and allowed different types of materials to hold up to printing with oil-based ink. American printmaker Ed Stasack tells the story of teaching at University of Hawaii in 1956, which brings back into the scene Jean Charlot, who had been so important in the Mexican Revolution:

Intaglio printmaking was limited to drypoint on acetate. Jean Charlot, primarily a lithographer, was being asked to teach etching without facilities, proper equipment or supplies. Since there was neither hope nor budget for improving this situation in the foreseeable future I was desperate to find a way to be able to continue my own creative work....I tried many things without success....In mid 1957 I used cut cardboard to make a few relief prints in three or four colors.

He goes on to say that having been trained as a rather orthodox printmaker, he found it difficult to take his collagraphs seriously. Through encouragement of colleagues, he finally exhibited these works in 1960.²⁶

Collagraphs are a perfect process to explore when we talk about Cuba's Special Period, when the Cold War ended Cuba's subsidies from the Soviet Union, plunging it into an economic catastrophe. While we cannot definitively say that Cuban artists knew of Stasack's exploration with new print processes, we know they faced the same shortages of metals with

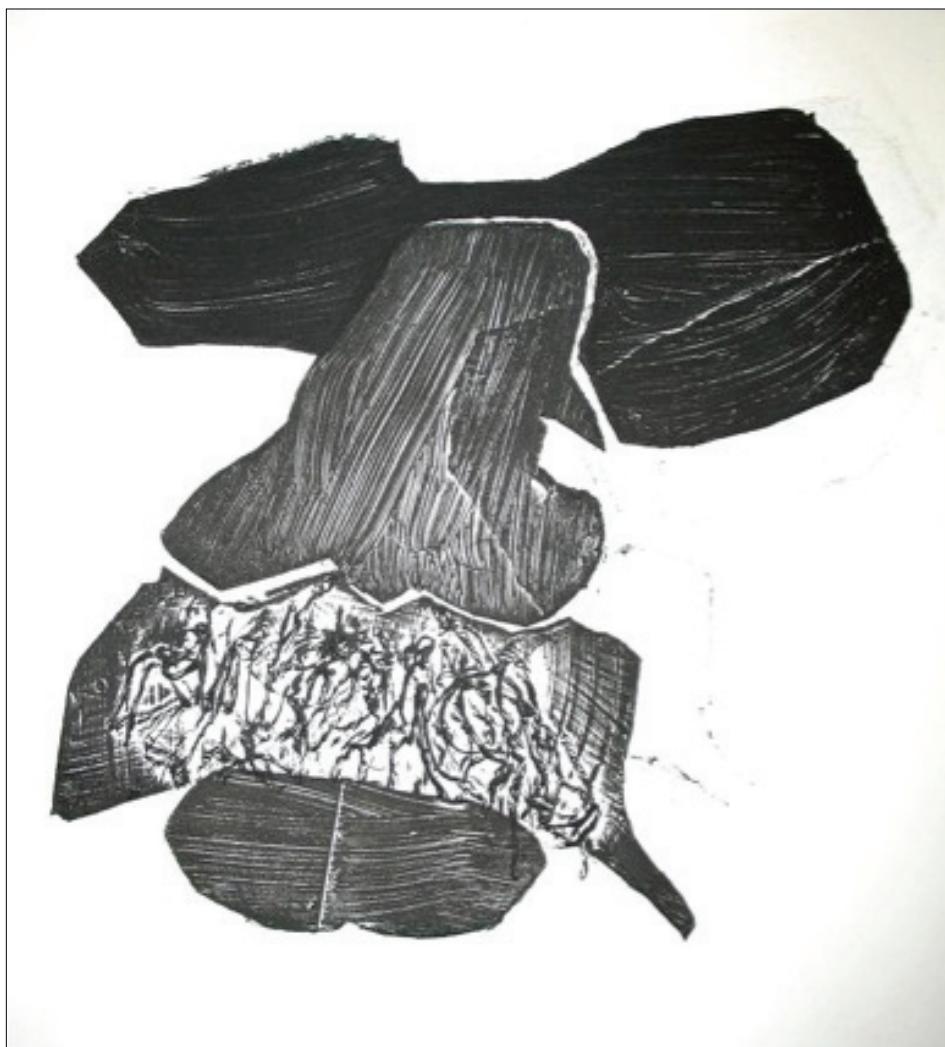


Figure 4: "Allende," by Rory Koch. Collagraph, 5" x 7".

Soviet imports declining in the economic crisis. In today's (2006) *Taller Experimental de Gráfica* in central Havana, we found artists continuing to work with collagraphs because of the prohibitive expense of metal plates.²⁷ The matrixes composed of scrap paper and board allowed the artists to create very large-scale works, some printed in the French *à la poupee*, which is a method of inking several colors simultaneously on a matrix. The students construct their plates from cardboard and adhesive,

often adding fibers, fabric pieces, and other textured items to create the image. They are encouraged to use the *à la poupee* method and to play with colors. We encourage the students to use the intaglio process, in which oil-based ink is pushed into the valleys of the matrix with tarlatan, and the surface rubbed as clean as possible before printing. Instead of printing on dry paper, as in relief or silkscreen, thicker rag paper needs to be soaked and then blotted to a suitably pliable surface that will not repel the oil-based ink before it is run through the press. In fact, we demonstrate what the embossed image looks like without ink, to show how important it is to get the paper down into the valleys of the matrix to pick up the colors. Students, if they wish, can also choose to print in the relief manner, which they have already done with linocuts and woodcuts, in which case they top-roll the image and print on the thinner Japanese paper.

In terms of subject matter for collagraphs, we ask the students to research revolutionary leaders and we discuss the mythology that often surrounds their personal lives along with their corresponding political regimes. For instance, images of Che Guevara have deified him fifty years after the initial phase of the Cuban Revolution. Reprinted on posters, tank tops, and even cigarettes and dinnerware, Guevara emerges as a swaggering soldier and a legendary hero-warrior harnessed, ironically, for capitalistic gain. Similarly, Eva Perón rose to become a cultural icon in Argentina despite, or perhaps in part due to, her humble beginnings. Like Guevara, Perón's charismatic personality overshadowed accusations of fascist leanings or oversexualized behaviors for her followers. For her many detractors, like critics of Guevara, she personified all that was wrong with her movement. We offer the students the text *Revolution: Faces of Change* for photographic reference of some revolutionary leaders of Latin America, including Pancho Villa, Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, and Subcomandante Marcos, as well as César Chávez of the United States.²⁸ We also encourage students to go outside of the limits of the book, and they have created images of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, Celia Sánchez and Haydée Santamaría of Cuba, and even Manuela Sáenz, Simón Bolívar's mistress. We suggest to the students that the final images do not have to be representational and we encourage more symbolic or metaphorical iconography, both because the medium lends itself to more abstract imagery, and because Cuban artists experimented extensively with non-representational art. One student did a multi-piece collagraph abstractly depicting Salvador Allende of Chile with his iconic mustache and glasses (Figure 4).

Cordel, Current Events/Etchings

In the final section of the class, we move away from revolution and return to talking about printmaking as a democratic art form. We use a

discussion of the Brazilian *literatura de cordel*, or “stories on a string,” to come full circle and talk about the ways that handmade images and the texts they accompany are used to spread news, or just to entertain people who have little or no access to education and news of current events. The circle takes the students back to the broadsides of Posada, which were created and used for similar reasons, with a similar combination of text and image. The *folhetos*, or little books, are booklets of long poems that tell a story, and which usually have on their covers a woodblock print that illustrates the story. They traditionally were hung on strings in marketplace stalls in the dry northeastern backlands of Brazil, and their authors would sing the story to the crowds at the market. Like Posada’s broadsides, cordel literature was used to tell stories that could be religious, secular, and even profane, and chronicle current events. Unlike graphic art presented in signed and numbered editions as fine art, the *folhetos* are not numerically designated, and are sold at a fraction of the price of fine art.²⁹ Candace Slater’s article on the *folheto*, “Terror in the Twin Towers,” written shortly after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, demonstrates the ways that *folheto* authors would turn a current event into a moral tale that would be meaningful to their audience. We encourage students to think about doing the same with their images, either by choosing a current event to depict, and/or by using the iconography of another type of Latin American folk art production, the painted *ex-voto*.

Ex-votos are a category of Latin American folk art connected with the Latin American Catholic practice of making a promise to a saint in exchange for facilitating a rescue from a dire situation, often health related. When the intervention is successful, the petitioner makes an offering that represents the miracle. Examples in Brazil might include carving a heart for the miraculous recovery from heart disease, and in Mexico, a tiny silver leg might be offered in thanks for a healed limb. One of the most widely used types of ex-votos are the ex-voto paintings, which are done on small pieces of wood or tin and both depict the miracle and recount it in words on the bottom. Even though these are not made in multiples, they are an important and easily recognizable form of Latin American folk art that is used to express ideas and events.³⁰

Although the covers of the cordel literature *folhetos* are done in woodblock, we introduce the students to etching in this final section of the class. Etching is arguably the most complex printing method of the processes we introduce in the course, requiring multiple steps. First, the students file and degrease the small sixteen-gauge 4” x 6” or 5” x 7” zinc metal plate. They apply acid-resistant ground, we use hard asphaltum, and scratch their image into the ground. Once the image is in the ground, the students submerge the plate into a 10:1 bath of nitric acid, timing the

process to make sure the lines get etched. Once etched, the metal plates are cleaned and dried, and then, as with collagraphs, oil-based ink is pushed into the incised lines with tarlatan, and the surface buffed clean before printing. *Chine-collé*, a process of printing on multiple pieces of colored paper simultaneously is demonstrated as a way to add colored sections to the printed image without registration. Once again, the students use the thicker rag paper that has been soaked and blotted so that it can be pushed by the press into the fine incised lines.

We also encourage students to play with the values of the image by using simple aquatints, a method by which the artist can create large areas of black or grey on the image in contrast with the fine lines of a plain etching. Aquatint today is created with a spray paint, though we also present rosin as the more labor-intensive but historically accurate alternative. After etching and proofing, students are encouraged to add drypoint lines directly to their plates, a method in which, rather than etching, the lines are scratched directly into the metal plate. One print done in the Spring 2011 class reflected the news of the Arab Spring by creating an image of Moammar Gadhafi being peddled on a broadside that evokes United States political sentiment as well (Figure 5).

Nuts and Bolts

In the preceding paragraphs, we have presented an overview of the different components of the class. In this section, we would like to outline the components of the course in a more concise way and talk a little bit about assessment. The first week of the fourteen-week semester is dedicated to giving an overview of Latin American revolutionary culture, its relationship to the graphic arts, and the materials, methods, readings, and expectations of the class. The students are required to purchase the main texts of the class, which are David Craven's *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* and Julia E. Sweig's *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*.³¹ Additional texts, such as Candace Slater's "Terror in the Twin Towers," are also made available to students either on reserve or through the college library databases.³² Students are also expected to buy the paper for the print editions. All other art supplies, including ink, matrixes, tools, and chemicals, are provided by the school. The class meets for two and a half hours twice a week because it is counted as a studio art class. This time frame gives us the ability to include lectures on a regular basis, with plenty of time for studio production and critique.

The class is then divided pretty much equally between the different topics of the class, and in each section, we introduce a new printmaking process. Weeks two through four are dedicated to the buildup to the



Figure 5: "Hopeless," by Mariam Mahmood. Etching with aquatint, 5" x 7".

Mexican Revolution and the military phase of the revolution (roughly 1870-1920) and the linocut process, and weeks five through seven cover the second part of the Mexican Revolution (1920-1960) and have students learn woodcuts. In weeks eight through ten, the class discusses the early part of the Cuban Revolution (roughly 1954-1991) and the silkscreen process, and then in weeks eleven and twelve, they work with collagraphs in the context of the Cuban Special period (1991-2000). Finally, we talk about the Brazilian *folhetos* and have them work on etchings as their final print process.

Throughout the semester, the students take small quizzes to make sure they are keeping up with the readings and are understanding basic print techniques. They take five vocabulary quizzes that ask about terminology of the techniques as well as key artists and movements. In addition, they take two map quizzes to make sure they have a sense of the geography of Latin America. Because we feel it is important for students to learn to speak publicly, they are also required to give oral presentations on specific artistic organizations or movements. These oral presentations occur around the middle of the semester. All of these smaller assignments are designed to reinforce the large projects that the students are required to do—the papers and print editions.

In each section of the class, the students are required to learn both content and artistic technique and terminology. For the historical material, the students are required to read the Craven, the Sweig, and the Slater texts. In response to the readings, they write four five-page analytical essays, using only the material from the class. This component of the course asks students to write essays reflecting on the causes and effects of the Latin American revolutions we have discussed, and how the arts and artists played a role in promoting, sustaining, and critiquing the revolutions. In addition to assessing student understanding of the content, these writing assignments are assessed on the students' ability to analyze the material, to organize their thoughts into a cogent analysis, and to correctly cite the material they use. Students are encouraged to revise these essays after they are returned, except for the final essay, which serves as a final exam and asks students to reflect back on the semester.

The print processes described in the preceding sections of this article are demonstrated in class. The assessment of the studio component of our interdisciplinary course involves understanding and demonstrating proficiency in a variety of traditional printmaking techniques. The printed editions are evaluated on specific relief and intaglio processes introduced in the course, as well as on the consistency of the editions. In addition to the physical processes, the students are evaluated on their ability to creatively solve a conceptual problem. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the

course, freehand drawing is not emphasized as the primary means to arrive at unique images. Students are encouraged to trace found images with tracing paper, alter them to make them unique, and to conform to the newly stated concept. For example, when students are asked to appropriate an image by Posada for manipulation, they are told they can make it more contemporary or germane to current issues in a number of ways (see Figure 1). This history of artistic appropriation or creative “borrowing” holds a long-standing tradition in the prints of Latin American revolutions. Even before entering into our course, students are familiar with the iconic image of Che Guevara, taken in March 1960 by Alberto Korda. Recognizing the image’s iconic stature, the Maryland Institute College of Art called the picture a symbol of the twentieth century and the world’s most famous photo.³³ We also have to look no further for examples in contemporary American graphic political art than Shepard Fairey’s “Obama Hope” poster. Of course, the legal limits and ramifications of fair use are also discussed.³⁴

Conclusion

Through the semester, students are exposed to a variety of hand-printing processes while learning about the content and context of Latin American revolutionary and artistic culture. While their individual skill level varies considerably, each student is able to produce a portfolio of small editions of linocuts, woodcuts, silkscreens, collagraphs, and etchings. The biggest challenge of the class is to make the studio component and the content work together. Students usually are not accustomed to one or the other of these aspects of the class. We often have a mix of art students, who are required to take a printmaking class, and students who take the class for humanities credits. The former group tends to feel comfortable in the studio aspect of the class, but do not understand why it might be important to think about art as a collective and political endeavor. The humanities students feel more comfortable with the content and the writing, even though few have a background in Latin American history, but feel intimidated by the studio aspect of the class. We try to overcome this bipolarity by building the information step-by-step and trying to link one topic, and process, logically to the next. Overall, student reaction has been positive both in the class evaluations and in anecdotal conversations. Students tend to express satisfaction that they have been pushed out of their comfort zones (and majors) and that they have benefitted from seeing the interdisciplinary connections.

We were fortunate to have funds from the grant to help us to develop this class through travel, but we found that much of the material that we used was available through online databases such as ArtStor.org and

electronic libraries such as the images available through the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Culture. In fact, more and more of these images are available online. We are also fortunate to have a fully equipped graphics studio, but many of the print processes could be done by hand. Relief printing, such as linocut and woodcut, historically have been printed by pressing a wooden spoon against the matrix. Collagraphs were developed in reaction to a shortage of materials and have been modified for the K-12 classroom. The only process that would be prohibitive would be etching, probably the least historically important of the processes we use in the class. However, students could still make an intaglio image by scratching into Plexiglas with a sharp tool.

With so many technologies available to our students—photocopying machines, digital scanners, mass media, social networking, and their familiarity with these technologies—students forget that there was a time in which technology did not allow the instantaneous reproduction of information. They get a chance to think with their own physical movements about what it took to create multiples of the same image. They also have an opportunity to think about those multiple images not as a partner in consumer culture, but as a method to make a change in the world around them. This methodology and interdisciplinarity could be applied to a range of historical subjects. The “Revolutions” of the title of the class, and of this paper, refers not only to the revolutions we study, but the revolutions of the barrel of the printing press and its role in promoting social change.

Notes

1. The authors of this article would like to thank *The History Teacher* readers for their helpful comments. We would also like to thank our students for helping us to construct our ideas about how to best present this material.

2. For our basic text, we use the sections of David Craven's *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002) on Mexico and Cuba. For printmaking in the Mexican Revolution, the edited collection by John Ittmann, *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts, 1920-1950* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), is essential, both for its excellent essays and for its collection of images.

3. See Craven, 65; Lyle W. Williams, “Evolution of a Revolution: A Brief History of Printmaking in Mexico,” in *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts, 1920-1950*, ed. John Ittmann (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 4-6. For a thorough collection of images, see Roberto Berdecio and Stanley Appelbaum, eds., *Posada's Popular Mexican Prints: 273 Cuts by José Guadalupe Posada* (New York: Dover Books, 1972). There are also a couple of recent books in English on Posada and his

art. See, for example, Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets: Mexican Popular Imagery, 1890-1910* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

4. See Craven, 64-71; Williams, 16-19; Susan Valerie Richards, "Imaging the Political: El Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico, 1937-1949" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 2001); Deborah Caplow, *Leopoldo Méndez: Revolutionary Art and the Mexican Print* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007), 123-291.

5. The Center for Southwest Research also has digital collections of political silkscreens and other graphic art collections from Latin America. It is a valuable resource, available at <http://econtent.unm.edu/cdm4/index_PictorialCollection.php>.

6. By popular, we mean arts "of the people," what is often called folk art. The Brazilian Academy of Literatura de Cordel has a website, <<http://www.ablc.com.br/>>.

7. There are many good texts on the Mexican Revolution. We have found Michael J. Gonzalez's text on the revolution to be especially helpful for undergraduates. Michael J. Gonzalez, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002). We have also used photographs from Anita Brenner's book, *The Wind that Swept Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971).

8. See Frank's *Posada's Broadsheets*, as well as the excellent collection in the digital archive of the University of New Mexico's Center for Southwest Research, <<http://elibrary.unm.edu/cswr/posada/>>. Many of his images are also available on ARTSTOR at <<http://www.artstor.org>>.

9. See Frank, 229-237; Caplow, 21-27.

10. Craven, 37-59; Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (New York: Chronicle Books, 1998).

11. Williams, 8-9.

12. Craven includes an Appendix with an excerpt from Rivera's new rules for the Academy. These rules serve as a great point of departure for a discussion of artists as part of a collective, part of a social movement, and as artisans. Craven, 176-179.

13. See James M. Wechsler, "Propaganda Grafica: Printmaking and the Radical Left in Mexico, 1920-50," in *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts, 1920-1950*, ed. John Ittmann (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 55-60; Craven, 62-63.

14. Caplow, 134-135, 219-220.

15. For this section of the class, we use Julia Sweig's excellent survey of Cuban history since the revolution. Julia E. Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

16. Sweig, 51-52.

17. Craven, 85-90.

18. For a fascinating look at the evolution and architecture of these schools, see John A. Loomis, *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999). The former *New Yorker* correspondent Alma Guillermoprieto also offers a somewhat impressionistic view of her time teaching dance at the schools in her book, *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

19. Sweig, 56-58; Craven, 81-85.

20. Sweig, 56-58, 255-256.

21. Lincoln Cushing, *¡Revolución!: Cuban Poster Art* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2003), 101-102; Craven, 94-98.

22. Cushing, 9-11, 61-99.

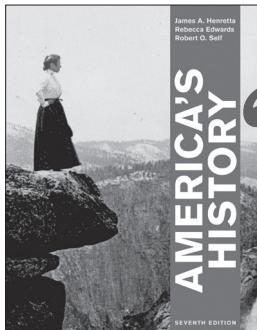
23. Sweig, 126-129.

24. Claire Romano and John Ross, *The Complete Printmaker* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of the Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980).

25. Ibid.
26. Riva Castleman, *Prints of the Twentieth Century: A History* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976).
27. Artists of the *Taller Experimental de Gráfica*, conversations with the authors.
28. John Miller and Aaron Kenedi, *Revolution: Faces of Change* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000).
29. Candace Slater, “Terror in the Twin Towers: The Events of September 11 in the Brazilian *Literatura de Cordel*,” *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 3 (October 2003): 37-59. Slater also has a full-length monograph on *literatura de cordel*; Candace Slater, *Stories on a String: The Brazilian Literatura de Cordel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982). See also Mark Dineen and Paul Kegan, *Brazilian Woodcut Prints* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
30. See Gloria Fraser Giffords, *Mexican Folk Retablos* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 143-165.
31. Craven; Sweig.
32. Slater.
33. Maryland Institute of Art, referenced at BBC News, “Che Guevara photographer dies,” 26 May 2001, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1352650.stm>>.
34. Ben Arnon, “How the Obama ‘Hope’ Poster Reached a Tipping Point and Became a Cultural Phenomenon: An Interview With the Artist Shepard Fairey,” *The Huffington Post*, 13 October 2009, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-arnon/how-the-obama-hope-poster_b_133874.html>.

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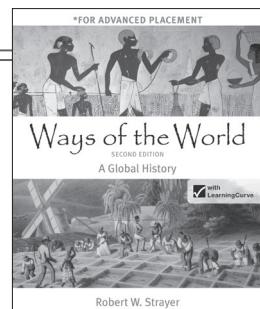
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