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Power, Politics, and Prints: Redefining Art Practice in Oaxaca City

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts

in

Latin American Studies (Cultural Studies Concentration)

by

Hannah Peterkort Gibson

Committee in charge:

Professor Everard Meade, Chair  
Professor Brian Goldfarb  
Professor Max Parra

2011

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

## DEDICATION

*For my fellow CILASeros.  
I could not have done it without you.*

## EPIGRAPH

Print's Mechanism of diffusion parodies fine arts elitism. Print provides the means to bypass the economic and critical hierarchy of the gallery-museum nexus. Print goes beyond the private artist language to speak to a broad audience and to function in daily life. It allows artists to cross the boundaries between art and life, aggressively seeking out new audiences. Beyond the museum wall, print is the mechanism for producing multiples that reach out into the community. In this form, print functions as a democratic, direct, and modest means of communication, breaking down arts function as a capitalist object. Prints produced by artists co-op which oppose racism, gentrification, or which explore topics such as AIDS, gay rights, and the commercialization of art itself, act as a visual conscience for a broader community. Here art is created for a specific purpose and breaks its connection with the contemplative function derived from painting aesthetics.

*Hugh Merrill, in Post-Print: Staking Claim to the Territory*

If craftpersons are to recover a dignified autonomy it is through a form of theoretical self-representation that, to begin with, may involve little more than revisiting some of the epistemological conundrums, not to mention prejudices that have constructed the crafts as a form of knowing in Western thought.

*Sue Rowley, in the introduction to *Craft and Contemporary Theory**

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Power, Politics, and Prints: Redefining Art Practice in Oaxaca City

by

Hannah Peterkort Gibson

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies (Cultural Studies Concentration)

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Everard Meade, Chair

This thesis considers the interplay of various social and historical factors that shape the practice of art in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. It looks at printmaking as a discipline particularly suited to challenging colonial and aesthetic hierarchies that have traditionally structured art markets, art practice, and art education in Oaxaca City. In Mexico, art and cultural production have maintained a more direct relationship with state power than in other countries, and this thesis outlines various artistic authenticities that, while no means exhaustive, have been important in establishing a certain aesthetic of Mexican printmaking since the Mexican Revolution.

These include the legacies of José Guadalupe Posada, muralism, the Taller de Gráfica Popular, La Ruptura, and the student movement of 1968, as well as particularly Oaxacan authenticities established by the Oaxacan Style and the street art produced in response to the teacher's strike of 2006-2007.

As the idea of the nation-state is disintegrating with the rise of a global capitalism and increased ease and speed of communication, it is important to consider the changing relationships between the state and cultural production in Mexico, and especially in Oaxaca. In Oaxaca, many people depend on a successful tourist industry, which is inherently linked to state policies and state money. Political and social upheaval in Oaxaca have reshaped the relationship Oaxacans have with their government, and have created new spaces for art that allow young printmakers to challenge traditional artistic Mexican and Oaxacan hierarchies.

## 1. Introduction

In July 2010, an exhibition of graphic art titled *MoNDAo corp. GRABADO* was held at La Curtiduría, an “independent cultural space” in Oaxaca City. Five artists were included, and their work had been compiled and printed as an edition by multi-media art duo MoNDAo corp., or Luis Carlos Hurtado and Gabriela Rodríguez Rivera. The wall text from the exhibition raises several important issues that inform avant-garde printmaking today:

What are the characteristics of printmaking today? Printmaking as a medium of reproduction, as a space for collective experimentation, as another means of understanding books and writing?...These questions interest us...Surrounding printmaking are many memories, histories, and traditions. But the most significant for us is the present moment. This is a project that tries to describe a series of meaningful experiences through a manner of thinking about the exorcizing practice of printmaking.<sup>1</sup>

The text recognizes that powerful social and political structures shape the practice of printmaking in Mexico, but also distances the works in the edition from such leaden histories by claiming that what is “most significant for us” is not the past but instead “the present moment.” MoNDAo co-founder Hurtado says that “art forms part of all our daily activities.”<sup>2</sup>

The text also questions printmaking’s place in modern society and changing ways of defining the practice. What are its most essential traits? Should it continue to perform its traditional communicative functions? How might printmakers rethink these traditional roles? A discipline that is seen as rooted in tradition, printmaking is also exceedingly modern. It offers an experimental outlet for post-modernism’s fascination with the

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<sup>1</sup> Wall text from the *MoNDAo corp. GRABADO* exhibition held at La Curtiduría in Oaxaca City, July 2010. Unless indicated, this, and all other translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Luis Carlos Hurtado, e-mail message to the author, April 13, 2010.

concept of the multiple and the social and psychological effects of mass production. Its less rigid adherence to modernist ideas of artist, artwork, originality, and authenticity allow it to assimilate post-modern concepts without the complete crisis of identity experienced by other media in recent decades.

The MoNDAo corp. GRABADO artists express their desire to define a new aesthetic of Mexican printmaking, one that references their present realities and that conceptualizes the unique expressive, communicative, and practical characteristics of printmaking in new ways. Defining such an aesthetic takes on new meaning in Mexico, where the relationship between culture and political ideology is strong, and particularly in Oaxaca City, a place where art, economy, and tourism are intricately linked.

Printmaking in Mexico has traditionally been validated by its ability to serve “the people,” its expressive or theoretical aspects subordinate to a moral obligation to address political or social causes. José Guadalupe Posada, a prolific printmaker of the Porfiriato who died poor and unknown in 1913, was hailed by the post-revolutionary state as a popular hero, a left-wing political propagandist who worked to expose corruption in the name of the urban working-class. His iconic *calavera* images, infused with irony and satire, have granted him the title of “spokesman for Mexico’s soul,”<sup>3</sup> despite his own, likely very different, understanding of his role as printmaker in late-nineteenth century Mexican society. A decade later, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, embraced Posada as their artistic and ideological mentor. Their works,

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<sup>3</sup> Ilan Stavans, “Posada, Lamponer,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propoganda Arts* 16 (1990): 54-71.

like his, claimed to be for non-elite audiences and established the new visual language for expressing *Mexicanidad* and clearly delineating what was or was not “Mexican” art.

In 1937, several members of the recently disbanded League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (LEAR) formed the Studio for Popular Graphics (TGP). The TGP printed expressive works, aimed again at non-elite audiences. They were intensely political, and allowed no dissent from the group’s public stance or party affiliation. The TGP emphatically denounced fascism and dignified the struggles of the rural poor, all the while proclaiming the triumph of popular revolutionary ideals in the leadership of the state’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). As the PRI morphed into a massive bureaucratic oligarchy, the TGP’s alliance with the state became a crutch, and led to crumbling ideological confusion.

*La Ruptura* was the first cohesive movement in Mexico that seriously challenged the Mexican state’s ideological power over cultural production. Artists such as José Luis Cuevas, Rufino Tamayo, Manuel Felguérez, Vicente Rojo, and Francisco Toledo called for a personal and expressive art informed by modern cosmopolitanism that did not simply reiterate the *Mexicanidad* established by the post-revolutionary regime. *La Ruptura* rejected the idea of state control over cultural production.

The art production inspired by the Mexico City student protests of 1968 again linked printmaking and Mexican politics, although this time the relationship between the artists and the state would be very different. Visually arresting, easy to read pamphlets and posters that supported the student cause and denounced the government of Díaz Ordaz were printed as quickly and as cheaply as possible. The tragic culmination of the summer protests in the Tlateloco massacre on October 2<sup>nd</sup> served to imbue these

propaganda materials, many of which were created anonymously, with an even more meaningful iconicity than they might have gained otherwise. They continued to authenticate graphic art as a tool for political and ideological communication in Mexico, but also pushed people to consider new possibilities for the creation of art in direct opposition to the state. Artist collectives, known as *Los Grupos*, that emerged in response to the events of 1968 sought to create art that would be ephemeral, conceptual, and ironic; ideas and practices that would have radically different relationships with the state than more traditional forms of art in Mexico.

The last decades of the twentieth century saw Mexican artists re-thinking the relationships between their art and the state in an increasingly globalized world. In Oaxaca, Mexico's "spiritual Mecca" and tourist haven, these issues were, and remain today, especially critical. In 2001, Robert Valerio published a comprehensive and critical examination of contemporary art in Oaxaca in which he critiqued the predominance of a particular iconography in the vast majority of Oaxacan art, an institutionalized "utopian impulse," detached from the modern reality of the artists' contemporary, urban lives. A lack of informed, critical discussion surrounding art in Oaxaca has turned this style into a repetitive market phenomenon, unresponsive to social and cultural change, that serves only to "impoverish and distort our perception of the visual arts in Oaxaca."<sup>4</sup> This style, which gained popularity in the 1970s, was easily aligned with the Mexican government's promotion of Oaxaca in the exterior as an indigenous utopia. Due in part to the support it

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Valerio, *Atardecer en la maquiladora de las utopías: ensayos críticos sobre las artes plásticas en Oaxaca*, (Oaxaca: Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca, 2001), 8.



received from state and federal government agencies, the style was incredibly successful, and helped to spur an active international market for Oaxacan art of this “Oaxacan Style.”

The style’s popularity also led critics and curators to focus mainly on artists who worked within it. Catalog after catalog of government-sponsored exhibitions extol the universal rhythms of the world experienced by indigenous Oaxacans and represented in their iconic artwork. Critics and curators wandered further and further from the works of art themselves, and the image of Oaxaca that developed in the exterior was of an idyllic place lost in time, uninvolved in the chaos of the modern world.

In June of 2006, Oaxaca City was thrust onto the international stage and the image of Oaxaca as an idealized utopia collided with its chaotic reality. Oaxacan governor Ulises Ruíz’s violent repression of striking school teachers resulted in a popular uprising of unprecedented proportions. Oaxacan citizens from all walks of life joined with the teachers to call unanimously for the resignation of Ruíz. They blockaded city streets, took over government buildings, and publicly protested Ruíz and his administration. Clashes between civilians and the government lasted through the summer and into the fall of 2007, and changed life in Oaxaca forever. Young artists responded to the growing global street-art movement in a uniquely Mexican way, with an outpouring of public protest art that referenced Mexican revolutionary heroes, satirized government officials, eloquently called for peace, and blatantly decried Ruíz as corrupt and incapable of governing. Art became one of the few outlets for uncensored expression. Protest art made in response to the 2006 events has been well documented in books, photo journals, personal memoirs, and documentaries that have been very popular outside of Mexico.

These events again used art as a tool for communication. Oaxacan artists responded to the global graffiti and street art movement, as well as drew from canonized imagery of the 1968 propaganda brigades and *Los Grupos* to respond to what was happening around them in ways that made sense to them. Tourism in the city and state took a huge hit as a result of the conflict, and the images of street art published outside of Oaxaca contrasted sharply with the naïve and idyllic image of Oaxaca that had been carefully constructed by the state for tourists over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Artists played a powerful role in creating a new identity for Oaxaca, and the existence of new technologies helped to spread images of their work further, faster, and cheaper than ever before. Young and unknown Oaxacan artists suddenly had the power to change established ideas of art and authenticity—a power that until very recently was accessible only to elite groups, and in Mexico, had traditionally been the state.

Interestingly, little critical scholarship exists on art in Oaxaca today that falls outside of the bounds of craft production, protest art, or the market-oriented style that originated in the 70s. At a time when the Mexican state is perhaps more unstable than it has been for almost eighty years, it seems critical to examine how artists in Mexico, and especially in Oaxaca, are navigating their contemporary realities and complicated histories. The 2006 and 2007 events in Oaxaca and Mexico's recent attempts at a more democratic state have opened new spaces for art-making in Oaxaca City that merit examination.

To propose what a contemporary Oaxacan aesthetic might be, given these parameters, this thesis looks specifically at the practice of five recently established printmaking studios in Oaxaca City. Like Mexican and Oaxacan artists, printmakers, for

centuries, have struggled against hierarchies of value established by powerful art-world elites. By challenging traditional conceptions of printmaking, Oaxaca printmakers can, indirectly, challenge many of the forces that have for years structured Oaxacan art and Oaxacan identity. Printmaking's simultaneous adherence to tradition yet ability to adapt to new technologies echoes the way artists must grapple with a rapidly globalizing world. Its self-imposed independence as a practice seen as inferior to other fine-art media parallels the important divide between art and craft constantly visible in Oaxaca City. A medium that has itself been dominated by "state" ideologies, printmaking offers Oaxacan artists unique practical and theoretical tools to navigate Oaxaca's marginalized, colonized, subjugated, and mythologized past and present.

Chapter 1 discusses in detail the historical trajectory of printmaking and why it is a particularly apt tool for contemporary Oaxacan artists to challenge artistic value systems. I will attempt to connect the theoretical idiosyncrasies of printmaking with similar theoretical and ideological trends in Oaxacan history. Chapter 2 will turn to the printmaking studios themselves, comparing studios established in the 70s, 80s, and 90s by successful Oaxacan Style artists, to the innovative practices of studios established since 2003. These newer studios challenge the idea that printmaking is less valuable or inherently inferior to other media. They bring printmaking into public spaces and contest printmaking's perceived technical fundamentalism. Aesthetically, they challenge ideas that Oaxacan art should look a certain way or serve a certain purpose. Chapter 3 expands on issues of artistic authenticity and hierarchies of power that determine aesthetic value systems, focusing specifically on Mexico and Oaxaca. The Mexican government has played a vital role in shaping art practice, especially printmaking, in Mexico, and

understanding how artists throughout the twentieth century have responded to these state-mandated authenticities is critical for understanding the work of contemporary Oaxacan printmakers.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to inspire greater critical thought on Oaxacan art in various media and diverse styles at a time when Mexican contemporary artists have a multitude of new theoretical and practical tools to work with. As at other various points in Mexican and Oaxacan history—perhaps in the aftermath of the Tlateloco massacre or during the social upheaval of the recent Oaxacan popular movement—the 2010s will again offer Mexican and Oaxacan artists opportunities to revision artistic value systems. What follows is an attempt to understand the possibilities for a new Oaxacan aesthetic by reconsidering contemporary Oaxacan art practice.

## 2. Myth-Making and Myth-Breaking: Printmaking as a Theoretical Tool

In his book *Exits From the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space*, Claudio Lomnitz-Adler attempts to deconstruct how scholars have traditionally understood nationalism and constructions of national identity. Ways of analyzing “national culture,” he argues, in fact only analyze national constructions of national identity, not actually the cultural practices that are happening as a result of the interplay of different, site-specific actors. In the introduction he explains that the book will attempt to “rethink cultural production” in different regional spaces in Mexico; its “central aim...to understand the dialectics between cultural production and ideology in these complex spaces.”<sup>5</sup>

How can we “rethink cultural production” and its relationship to ideology in Oaxaca? How do contemporary artists in Oaxaca, given the unique spaces in which they act, navigate this exchange of power? Examining printmaking as a type of cultural production within the national, regional, ideological, and conceptual space of Oaxaca allows us to rethink what it means to be a Oaxacan artist. Theoretically analyzing the practice of printmaking—something infrequently done—in tandem with Mexican and Oaxacan art history renders more clearly how these artists are challenging many of the established authenticities for Oaxacan art. Actions and artworks take on new meanings. Everyday practical activities become political statements. By pushing the conceptual limits of printmaking, these artists are simultaneously pushing the limits of Oaxacan art in ways in complex ways. The unique material and psychological characteristics of

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<sup>5</sup> Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits From the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 4.

printmaking and social-cultural and historical particularities of Oaxaca have been interpreted in simplified terms easily understandable to outsiders and beneficial to promoting a particular colonial world-view. By choosing to work in printmaking, these artists are challenging the lack of critical, scholarly discourse on Oaxacan art, its simplification and mythologization, its colonization by outside forces, and its use by powerful elites as a social tool. Printmaking offers practical and theoretical devices that allow these artists to deconstruct the powerful forces that have defined Oaxacan art over the course of the last century.

*A Marginalized Practice, A Distorted Discourse*

Artists began to explore Lithography's expressive possibilities in the late 1700s, and other forms of graphic art began to gain popularity in Europe and Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The theoretical movements that had developed alongside the rise of other media such as painting and sculpture failed to develop with printmaking. This situation persists today in relation to the graphic arts. Scholarly work dealing with printmaking tends to focus on technical particularities of the practice, rather than on theoretical or aesthetic evaluations. Moro writes: "Of the treatises and manuals specifically dealing with printmaking that we can find in libraries and bookstores today, only a few deal at all with theoretical aspects that would help us locate the practice within the esthetic traditions of this century...." He argues that it is important to work against this lack of theoretical discourse to "remedy the endemic disconnect between

printmaking and esthetics and the general discourse on modern and contemporary art.”<sup>6</sup> Susan Tallman writes that “...in contrast to the acres of ink that have been spilled on painting, sculpture, photography, or film, there has been remarkably little critical writing about the print.”<sup>7</sup> Other media receive more critical attention than printmaking. Patricia Hernández Rondán, a doctoral student at the University of Seville who has studied printmaking in Mexico concludes, after numerous interviews and discussions with Mexican artists, that “the official support received by the graphic arts today is lacking and insufficient. Printmaking as a specific activity within the arts suffers, in this sense, a major neglect in relation to the fine arts...,” and “the market for graphic art is small and scarce....”<sup>8</sup> Not only is there a lack of discourse on printmaking, there is a reduced demand for prints among collectors, art galleries, and art museums. Printmaking is not a priority for governmental or foundational support.

By choosing a medium that has been neglected in Western discourses of fine art, printmakers acknowledge the marginalized artistic space they occupy. Marginalized, forgotten spaces often offer their inhabitants freedom to challenge normative ways of thinking. Low-rider culture, for example, was developed by Los Angeles Latino youth who had been denied entrance into “mainstream” United States culture. Instead of the sleek, fast, minimal aesthetic of successful “America,” low riders embraced the “low” and the “slow.” Their aesthetic became one of shiny, gaudy, excessive decoration. Today low rider culture has generally been accepted as a unique aesthetic phenomenon, imitated

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<sup>6</sup> Juan Martínez Moro, *Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI* (Coyoacán: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern* (New York: Thames and Hudson), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Hernández Rondán, “Los Lenguajes de la Madera: Oswaldo Ramírez,” *Claustro de las Artes* 3 (2009): 5-6.

by those both inside and outside the Los Angeles Latino community. The marginal position of Latino youth allowed them to critique the dominant culture in and establish their own systems of cultural value.

Printmakers, similarly, exist in a marginal space that offers them freedom to critique hierarchies of artistic value that push them out of “mainstream” art historical discourse. In Oaxaca, these discourses have, for the last forty years, circled in and around what some critics have called the Oaxacan Style of art, discussed in more detail below. The market domination of this style since the late 1970s and the discouragement of work in other styles have been partially responsible for a lack of discourse on art in Oaxaca, similar to that surrounding printmaking. Robert Valerio criticizes this tendency, arguing that while there are many artists in Oaxaca and numerous galleries and spaces for the presentation, dissemination, and discussion of art, there is, for example, no publication that focuses specifically on the visual arts in Oaxaca. This, in turn, doesn’t draw the attention of critics and the situation is self-perpetuating.

Although Valerio was writing in the mid-to-late 90s, and the situation is less severe today, writing about Oaxacan art accessible outside of Oaxaca is still found mostly in exhibition catalogs or artist biographies. Being in the best interests of such publications to promote and validate the artist or exhibition they discuss, formal and material characteristics of artworks are often over-generalized or simplified. For example, in the exhibition catalog for *Art and Soul of Oaxaca*, an exhibition held in 1994 in Washington D.C. and San Antonio, curator Graciela Kartofel writes that Oaxaca is “A place with a dense and wide artistic scope composed of resemblances and diversities, expressed here [in the exhibition] through 31 of the many artists born in that mysterious and enchanting



land.”<sup>9</sup> She offers no examples of these “resemblances and diversities,” nor why Oaxaca is mysterious and enchanting, nor how the artists and their works are representative of a particular Oaxacan spirit.

In 2007 and 2008, the exhibition *Universal Language, Personal Style: The Rufino Tamayo School of Visual Arts 1974-1984* was held at the Museum of Oaxacan Painters. It highlighted the work of graduates of Oaxaca City’s Taller Tamayo art school who have gained international recognition and helped contribute to the formation of the Oaxacan Style of art. Manuel Matus Manzo poetically describes the exhibition: “The history of colors is made of the voices of the rain, or the recounting of the dawn. A line bifurcates and multiplies, creating light and shadow, and then, the established [order] is broken....”<sup>10</sup> Again, Manzo appeals to romanticized but unqualified notions of art’s power to evoke emotion and neglects to connect such flourishes to the artworks themselves. In a final example, curator and well-known Mexican art critic Alicia Azuela writes in the catalog to the exhibition *The Enchantment of Oaxaca*, that “the quality and diversity of the local culture, has converted Oaxaca into the Mexican spiritual Mecca.”<sup>11</sup> What could she mean by the “quality” of the culture? She continues: “the permanent impact of the Oaxacan world is definitive: this mold of enormous forms weighed down with sentiment and emotion, that fecund spiritual place, so collective yet so

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<sup>9</sup> Graciela Kartofel, introduction to the *Oaxaca’s Art and Soul* exhibition catalogue (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1994), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Manuel Matus Manzo, “La primera generación del Taller Rufino Tamayo,” in *Lenguaje Universal, Acento Propio: Primera Generación, Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo 1974-1984* exhibition catalog (Oaxaca: Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, 2007), 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Alicia Azuela, “Oaxaca: savia artística,” in *Hechizo de Oaxaca* exhibition catalog (Monterrey: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, A.C., 1991), 165.

personal....”<sup>12</sup> Again, she doesn’t explain how a place could be both collective and personal, or why it would be more ‘spiritual’ than other parts of Mexico. Azuela describes the art in a way that would appeal to foreigners. Oaxaca holds a naïve charm exotic to many of the places visited by the exhibition. These sorts of broad generalizations and descriptions, Valerio argues, become “a litany that... turns Oaxacan art into the expression of its tourist attractions.”<sup>13</sup> The lack of critical discourse means that writing about Oaxacan art that travels outside of Oaxaca in the form of exhibition catalogs and artist biographies serves only to simplify and distort perceptions of the visual arts in Oaxaca.”<sup>14</sup>

#### *The Taller Tamayo and the Oaxacan Myth*

Kartofel, Manzo, and Azuela also demonstrate how the “myth” of a “utopian” Oaxaca has been reinforced in the visual arts. This myth has its roots in the first years of Spanish colonization. Geographically, Oaxaca was a challenge for the colonial empire based in Mexico City. Large mountains separate it from Mexico City and it experiences frequent earthquakes that made Spanish long-term investment risky. It was difficult for the colonial powers in Mexico City to communicate with and control their regional *alcaldes*. Indigenous groups were able to retain more autonomy over their land than in other parts of Mexico and posed a challenge for colonial rulers, who were unable to consolidate power as they had elsewhere in Mexico. “Perhaps the greatest impediment to Spanish economic success in Oaxaca,” write Murphy and Stepick, “was the indigenous

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>13</sup> Valerio, *Atardecer en la maquiladora de las utopías*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 8.

society's ability to maintain control of its land...because of the Indians' firm control of the land surrounding the city, the Spaniards never succeeded in amassing huge landed estates in Oaxaca, as they did in most other parts of Mexico...."<sup>15</sup>

In January of 1931, Oaxaca experienced one of the largest earthquakes in its history. Most of Oaxaca City was damaged, and 80% of its inhabitants were left homeless. Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, then in Mexico to film *¡Long Live Mexico!*, was able to capture the aftermath of the quake and created the documentary *The Destruction of Oaxaca* with the footage. The natural disaster itself, but especially *The Destruction of Oaxaca* and other short films released with footage Eisenstein had taken for *¡Long Live Mexico!* increased awareness of the region and sparked foreign interest, particularly in the indigenous cultures of the isthmus and Oaxaca in general.<sup>16</sup>

In 1932, shortly after the earthquake and the release of the Eisenstein footage, a celebration was held in honor of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Oaxaca City. The event became an annual festival and adopted the name *Guelaguetza*, derived from a Zapotec word meaning offering, gift, or mutual support.<sup>17</sup> In the 1950s the celebration was officially named *Las fiestas del Lunes del Cerro*, although the term *Guelaguetza* continues to be casually used today. The festival takes place over ten days every summer and celebrates the cultural and ethnic groups that inhabit the Valley of Oaxaca and its surrounding regions. The most important events are two dance and music performances

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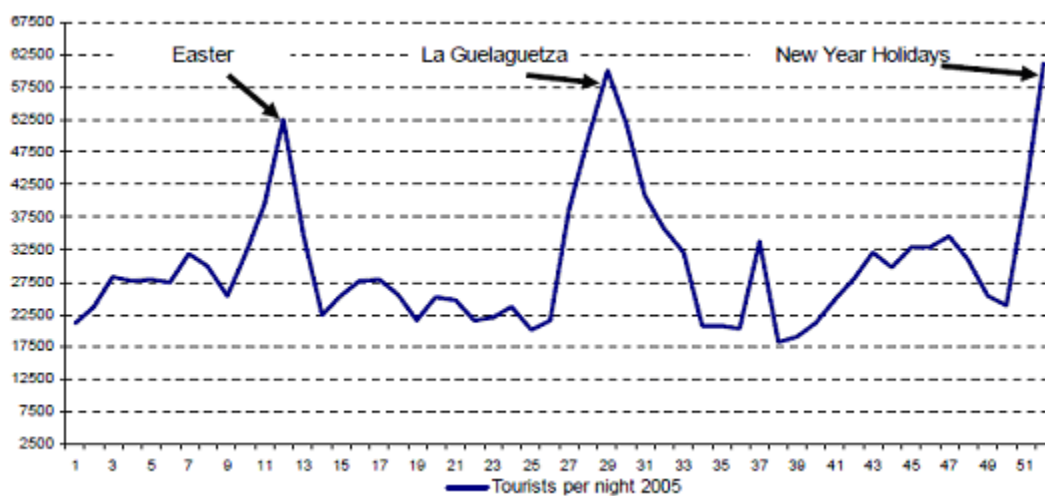
<sup>15</sup> Arthur D. Murphy and Alex Stepick, *Social Inequality in Oaxaca: A History of Resistance and Change*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Jorge Pech Cassanova, "El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano," in *Lenguaje Universal, Acento Propio: Primera Generación, Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo 1974-1984* exhibition catalog (Oaxaca: Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, 2007) 15.

<sup>17</sup> Katalin Janszó, "La Guelaguetza – Una fiesta moderna de México," in *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis, Acta Hispanica Tomus VIII* (Szeged, Hungary: Universidad de Szeged, 2003), 102.

historically performed in a hillside stadium overlooking the city. Other festival events include religious processions called *calendas*, sporting events, performances of theatrical works, and the sale of traditional crafts and food.

Despite political unrest in 2006 and 2007 that negatively affected tourism,<sup>18</sup> the Guelaguetza today draws a considerable number of internal and international tourists. Figure 1 shows the sharp peak of tourist arrivals during the Guelaguetza period in the summer of 2005—comparable to the number that visit the city during Easter or Christmas/New Year. Many foreigners who come for the Guelaguetza see the city under



**Figure 1.** Number of Tourist Arrivals in Oaxaca City, 2005, as cited in Ricardo Rivera Rosas, ““The Measurement of the Economic Impact and Damage to Oaxaca City Tourism Economy After the Socio-Political Movement in 2006,” Secretariat of Tourism of Mexico, Hotelier Monitoring System DataTur, Database on Tourist Activity in Oaxaca City 2005-2007

unusual circumstances. Artists and artisans take advantage of the number of tourists and flock to the city. Groups of dancers parade through the city streets in their traditional costumes. Hotels raise their prices and offer Guelaguetza ticket packages, as well as tours to pre-Colombian architectural sites like Mitla and Monté Albán. Restaurants prepare

<sup>18</sup> See Ricardo Rivera Rosas, “The Measurement of the Economic Impact and Damage to Oaxaca City Tourism Economy After the Socio-Political Movement in 2006,” from 2008 and Jeffrey Cohen, “The Effect of Political Unrest on Migration Decisions: New Evidence and Preliminary Findings from Oaxaca, Mexico,” from 2007.

special menus that highlight traditional Oaxacan dishes. Pre-Columbian and indigenous cultures are emphasized and celebrated, and the Guelaguetza helps to perpetuate the image, particularly for tourists, of Oaxaca as a colorful indigenous paradise of music, dance, and food.

The Guelaguetza depicts indigenous practices as timeless and unchanging while supporting a particular state ideology of indigenous culture as rooted in the past. "...with the link between the past and the present, be it invented or not, and with reference to indigenous roots, the *fiestas* [the Guelaguetza] were converted into "ancient" traditions and part of the identity of the local population that is offered and presented to the thousands of tourists that visit the city every year."<sup>19</sup> Framing the Guelaguetza as a centuries-old tradition appeals to tourists, who over the years Oaxaca has grown to depend on. As a consequence of the state's general poverty and high levels of out-migration in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "tourism came to be one of the biggest forms of income for the region."<sup>20</sup> Other forms of economic support were hard to find in Oaxaca, and for small-scale artisans in rural villages, perpetuating the myth of Oaxacan indigenous "authenticity" was beneficial, even essential, for their survival. By emphasizing particular links between the Guelaguetza and Oaxacan indigenous history and by deemphasizing the influence of colonization and recent history on many Guelaguetza events, the state and Oaxacans who depend on the tourism it generates, continue to take advantage of the Guelaguetza for particular economic, political, and social ends. They continue to reinforce the myth of an idyllic, indigenous utopia

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<sup>19</sup> Jansc , "La Guelaguetza – Una fiesta moderna de M xico," 106.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Not surprisingly, many Oaxaqueños feel today that the Guelaguetza has become less a contemporary celebration of traditional cultures among Oaxaqueños and more a tourist spectacle that caters to foreign expectations and lines the pockets of wealthy government officials. In protest, since 2005, various popular organizations “in coordination with the different sectors of the Oaxacan popular movement”<sup>21</sup> have organized a “popular Guelaguetza”<sup>22</sup> as an alternative to the government-sponsored Guelaguetza performances. The popular Guelaguetza is free and open to all. The poster advertizing the 2010 Guelaguetza Popular proclaims that the 2010 Guelaguetza Popular is done “Fraternally, for education at the service of the community” (figure 2). Despite the city’s dependence on tourism, it is clear that the Guelaguetza maintains an important cultural role beyond tourism for many Oaxacans. The degree to which such expressions of independent solidarity are a result of political unrest that caused the 2006-2007 conflict, or are related to the populist spirit inspired by the defeat of the PRI in 2001 are unclear. What is clear is that traditional relationships between the state, cultural production, tourism, and Oaxaca’s economy are eroding.

Also supporting the growth of the Oaxacan myth during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Mexican state. With the reshaping of Mexican national identity in the 1920s and 1930s, a unifying understanding of Mexico’s indigenous cultures was created and promoted by the Mexican government and European-descended elites. They celebrated certain aspects of indigenous culture, claiming their crafts and cultural practices were not backward

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<sup>21</sup> Oaxaca en Pie de Lucha blog, <http://oaxacaenpiedelucha.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> The term Guelaguetza can be used to refer to either the whole multi-week festival or to just the central dance performances. The “popular Guelaguetza” refers specifically to the dance performances.

curiosities, but valuable aspects of *Mexicanidad*. Indigenous beauty pageants were held and dressing as a *china poblana* or *charro*<sup>23</sup> became trendy.



Figure 2. Poster for the 2010 Guelaguetza Popular, July 17 and 18, 2010

The populism, the charismatic revolutionary heroes, and the idea of the humble, innocent, yet exotic Mexican Indian, were also well received abroad, and Mexican elites took advantage of this, capitalizing on the Western foreign desire for exoticism. The

<sup>23</sup> The *china poblana* was woman with an established regional dress from the state of Puebla, and the *charro* was a typified male character in tight pants and a large hat (today associated somewhat with  *mariachis*) often paired with the *china poblana*.

image of the innocent, simple, and exotic Mexican peasant depicted by the post-revolutionary government as a key part of the “authentic” Mexico, reached foreign museums and art collectors by the late 1920s and was received with enthusiasm. *The Art of Mexico* was held at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts in November and December of 1930. For many U.S. viewers, the exhibition was likely their first exposure to Mexican art. A review, published in the Museum’s Bulletin, describes how the “crude” and “simple” handicrafts of the Mexican peasants were the “national expression of a whole people.”<sup>24</sup>

Like the Mexican government had tried to homogenize indigenous groups in the name of national unity, the Boston exhibition lumped the Mexican artists together as one people with one culture. This culture had been handed down to them over the course of the centuries, and remained unchanged. “They [the peasants] lived close to the soil, as had their fathers. The same pottery jars which they had been accustomed from time immemorial to tip above their shoulders, catching the flowing water in their mouths as it gurgled from the crudely shaped containers, continued to be made.”<sup>25</sup> The peasants live as their forefathers have for centuries, creating the same crafts in the same ways, living simply and innocently. Words like “gurgling” and “crude” suggest both a connection to nature and a way of living still unaffected by 20<sup>th</sup> century technology. “Time immemorial” is an emotional phrase chosen to strike a particular reaction in the exhibition-goers. Locked in the past, the Mexican artists are patronizingly set apart as provincial, exotic others.

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<sup>24</sup> A.W.K., Exhibition of Mexican Art: November 25 to December 14, 113.

<sup>25</sup> A.W.K., “Exhibition of Mexican Art: November 25 to December 14,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* vol. 28 no. 179 (1930): 114.



The review also references the Mexican revolution as the “liberator” of the “real” Mexico. “Then came the revolution of 1910, and in its wake the conquest of Mexico by the Mexicans and the emergence of Mexican culture.”<sup>26</sup> Again, Mexico is a country of one unifying culture finally allowed by the revolution to express itself. The myth that the revolution forged a new nation by and for the previously disenfranchised masses of peasants was constructed outside of Mexico as well as within, and was reinforced visually in exhibitions such as *The Art of Mexico*, .

The Pan-American Highway was completed in the 1940s, allowing for greater access to much of the state of Oaxaca. The Mexican state took advantage of foreign desire for exoticism. Marketed correctly, Oaxaca’s multitude of indigenous groups, historically isolated and less “Westernized” than other groups, could serve a practical, economic purpose. Jansc  writes that “the indigenous peoples also symbolized [to the Mexican government] a resource for tourism and that ethnic groups ‘should be protected’.”<sup>27</sup> Portrayed as exotic living examples of a previous era, they attracted tourists and their foreign capital to the region. The state was unable or unwilling to generate economic opportunities in rural Oaxaca, one of the poorest regions in Mexico, and opportunities offered by tourism were welcomed. Thus, “By encouraging craft production in the countryside, Mexico's leaders hoped to foster rural development, stem the tide of rural-urban migration, and attract tourists to regions where there are large indigenous populations.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>27</sup> Jansc , “La Guelaguetza – Una fiesta moderna de M xico,” 106.

<sup>28</sup> Chibnik, “Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art: Aesthetic Judgments of a Tourist Craft,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* vol.62 no.4 (2006): 499.

Marketing indigenous crafts as an essential, authentic part of indigenous culture, the state formally and rhetorically began to support artisanal craft production. In 1974 the National Foundation for the Development of Craft (FONART) was established, a specialized department devoted to supporting and promoting the economic development of the Mexican craft industry. FONART's mission is to both "preserve the values of their [the artisans'] traditional culture" and to improve the standard of living of the artisans.<sup>29</sup> But Chibnik points out that the state's support of indigenous crafts has always been somewhat contradictory: by offering financial support and exposure to some artists but not others, as in the case of craft competitions, FONART maintains a degree of control over what other Mexicans and foreigners are exposed to. FONART also offers training and technical consultations for artisans. These technical consultations are designed to "improve the quality and the design of the craft production to adapt them to the necessities and the customer's requirements."<sup>30</sup> The tourist market is thus an important factor in the art that FONART supports and the training FONART offers to the artisans. "Merchants sometimes find that "traditional" crafts sell better after they have been transformed in ways that appeal to traditional tastes... The state's ideological and economic goals in promoting popular arts are most compatible when crafts (however transformed by market demands) have a long history of use by "Indians."<sup>31</sup> The state has played an important role in allowing foreign tastes to shape the practices of economically successful Oaxacan artisans, but the state's claim to support "traditional," that is, more "authentic" crafts, often contradicts their desire to cater to foreign aesthetic demands.

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<sup>29</sup> FONART website, <http://www.fonart.gob.mx/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Chibnik, "Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art," 499.

Because of its colonial history of isolation and indigenous autonomy, Oaxaca was easily established as the epitome of the new *Mexicanidad* being championed in Mexico and abroad. The muralists, whose images had great appeal beyond Mexico, and especially in the United States, saw indigenous culture as a key part of the new national identity. “Famous muralists such as Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros extolled Indian themes in their paintings,”<sup>32</sup> and Rivera referenced Oaxaca in ways that have become symbols of *Mexicanidad*.<sup>33</sup> But it was Oaxaca City’s Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo, or Taller Tamayo, that visually cemented Oaxaca’s status as the epitome of indigenous authenticity.

Oaxacan artist Rufino Tamayo returned to Oaxaca in 1948 after several years abroad in New York City. By then an internationally recognized artist, he quickly became an important figure in Oaxaca’s growing art scene. In 1972, Tamayo met Roberto Donís, a painter who had recently arrived in Oaxaca to teach at the School of Fine Arts at the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO). Donís had quickly become frustrated with the traditional teaching methods of the institution, and had created an “experimental studio” within the school for his students. Tamayo liked what he saw from Donís’ students<sup>34</sup> and the two became friends. When the School of Fine Arts cancelled Donís’ experimental studio in 1974, Donís decided to leave his teaching post. On January 15, 1974, Donís and Tamayo founded the Taller Tamayo.

The new school offered classes in lithography, *grabado* (woodcut, etching, linocut, engraving), and painting and employed alternative teaching methods. The school

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 498.

<sup>33</sup> Alicia Azuela, “Savia Artística.”

<sup>34</sup> Cassanova, “El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano,” 16,

brought talented, young, self-taught artists from the countryside, free of the baggage of formal art school training, to the city to study at the school on scholarship. The school was financially supported by Tamayo, but Donís managed its daily operations and supervised the students' artistic development. As in the "experimental studio" he had offered at UABJO, Donís offered the students little formal instruction and let them experiment and explore under his gentle guidance. He developed close relationships with the students. Student and later director of the school Juan Alcázar writes that "Maestro Roberto Donís proposed in the Taller a new nature or mentality. It involved appealing to the creative capacity of each one of the students, emphasizing the imagination and creative memory; in the search for a language that would reflect identity."<sup>35</sup> Approaching art education from a unique position, the Taller Tamayo was "an alternative within the teaching of the visual arts in our state."<sup>36</sup>

The efforts of the students and the school were almost immediately recognized, which Jorge Pech Casanova attributes to Donís' "commercial impulse."<sup>37</sup> Alcázar today cites Donís as the "detonator" and "provocateur" of the art movement that would develop in Oaxaca after the establishment of the Taller Tamayo.<sup>38</sup> In 1975, Mexico's Banco Cremi sponsored an exhibition titled *Graphic Art of Mexico* and a number of Taller Tamayo students were included. That same year, Galería de Arte Misrachi, a popular avant-garde gallery in Mexico City hosted the exhibition *Rabbit 7*, which also included

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<sup>35</sup> Alcázar, "Rescate y memoria: la generación que fundó el Taller de Artes Plásticas," in *Lenguaje Universal, Acento Propio: Primera Generación, Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo 1974-1984* exhibition catalog (Oaxaca: Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, 2007), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Juan Alcázar, "Clausura cursos el Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo," *Noticias*, July 19, 2001, Cultura en Oaxaca section.

<sup>37</sup> Casanova, "El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano," 17.

<sup>38</sup> Juan Alcázar, interviewed by author, August 6, 2010 in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca.

the work of several Taller Tamayo students. In 1976, the school opened an exhibition space of its own (although this space would close in 1979) and several of its students were invited to participate in the San Juan Printmaking Biennial. Pedro Vázquez Colmenares was elected governor of Oaxaca in 1980 and in 1983 created a new initiative for art grants. Several of the Taller Tamayo students were recipients of these grants.

The first students to graduate from the program at the Taller Tamayo are referred to as the First Generation. Today, most of them have successful art careers. They are the first artists to have achieved international recognition without having left Oaxaca to live or study, like other well-know Oaxacan and Mexican artists. Because of this, the identity of the First Generation artists, for many art collectors and critics, is based on them being Oaxacan and having come from rural, usually indigenous communities. Their art represents Oaxaca. In the *Universal Language, Personal Style* exhibition catalog, Tamayo writes that The Taller Tamayo graduates bring prestige to the country, they honor him by honoring the legacy of his school, and they will continue to make Mexico stand out in the international Art World.<sup>39</sup>

Common stylistic tendencies developed among the students while they were living and working together at the Taller Tamayo. From these common stylistic tendencies evolved into a cohesive style sometimes referred to as the Oaxacan Style that was ultimately very commercially successful. This Oaxacan Style inspired by the First Generation artists is colorful and figurative. Common themes are death and nature. It often explores the interaction of nature and humans, especially women. It can be

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<sup>39</sup> Rufino Tamayo, "Arte de Oaxaca, nueva generación," in *Lenguaje Universal, Acento Propio: Primera Generación, Taller de Artes Plásticas Rufino Tamayo 1974-1984* exhibition catalog. (Oaxaca: Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, 2007).

fantastical or even surrealistic. Chibnik describes the style as “magical realism and sometimes-intentional naïveté.”<sup>40</sup> An example is Edie Martínez’s *What Would Be Of These Trees Without Webs?* from 1983, which depicts four women embracing trees (figure 3). The wind blows the leafless branches as well as the long hair and flowing



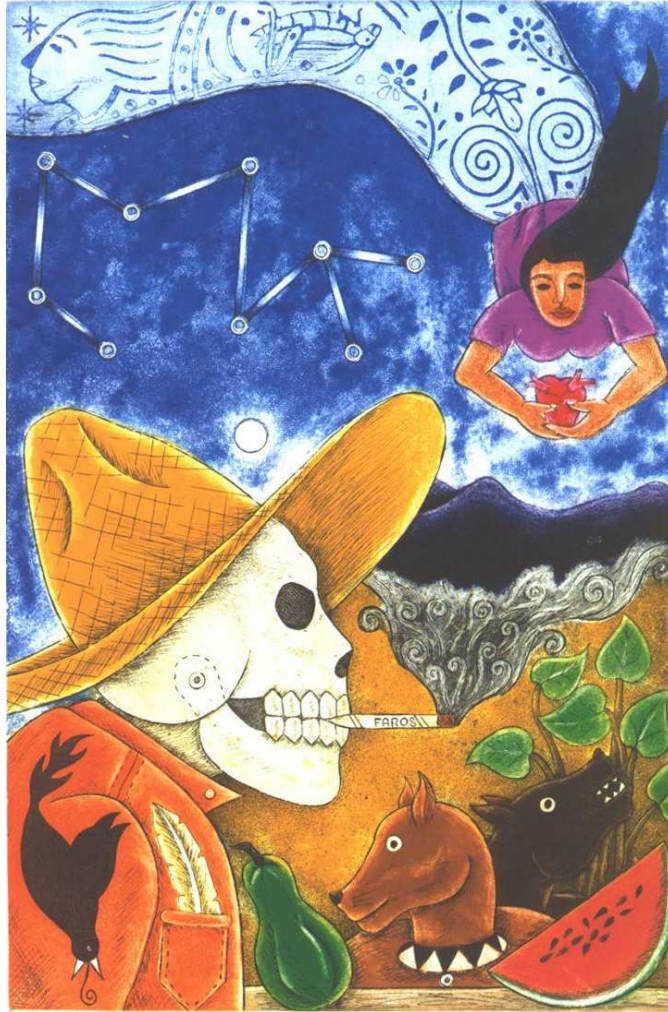
**Figure 3.** Edie Martínez, *What Would Be of These Trees Without Webs?*, 1983  
oil on canvas, 32 x 61 inches (81 x 155 cm)

skirts of the women, uniting them visually, and the women lean into the wind, as if bracing or fighting against it. Below, in the ground, the head of another woman is ringed with a halo of soft light. Chunks of her wild, wavy hair link her to the surrounding soil. Perhaps she symbolizes the eternal, female connection to the earth, or perhaps the

<sup>40</sup> Chibnik, “Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art,” 500.

spiritual connection the women above have to the trees they cling to, understanding the connection between their well-being and that of the trees. There are no external factors to locate the image in time or place. It feels fantastical and timeless.

A 2007 etching by Enrique Flores is similarly detached from a specific time or place and is also executed in the First Generation's Oaxacan Style (figure 4). In *Sin Título (Untitled)*, Flores depicts a smoking *calavera*, an iconic Posada- and post-revolutionary-style Mexican skeleton. On the *calavera's* lit cigarette is the word *faros*, referring to a Mexican figure of speech in which *chupar faros*, or to smoke cheap unfiltered Faros brand cigarettes, means to die. Smoke from the cigarette curls up and outward, morphing into the base of a faraway mountain range. A woman holding a human heart floats above the mountains. Her long black hair billows upward, and the organic symbols in her celestial skirt echo a constellation in the sky below her. Beside the smoking *calavera*, flat representations of a dog, a horse, a watermelon, and a green pepper push toward the front of the picture plane. Everything in the image is connected: death represented by the *calavera* furls into fecund mountains, which are framed above by female fertility and the never-ending cycle of day and night, life and death. Like in the Martínez work, women interact with nature in a timeless, fantastical landscape.



**Figure 4.** Enrique Flores, *Untitled*, 2007  
engraving on metal, various techniques, 18.5 x 12.5 inches (47 x 32 cm)

The Oaxacan Style slowly took over art markets, particularly those geared towards foreigners, and grew to symbolize Oaxaca to many outsiders. For the majority of collectors, First Generation works were the first they had seen by Mexican and especially Oaxacan artists who had not spent time in New York or Europe. These artists had been born in rural villages and had lived their entire lives in Oaxaca, and as such, they were “authentically” Oaxacan. As the popularity of the Oaxacan Style grew, maintaining the initial success of the First Generation artists meant both reinforcing this understanding of



the Oaxacan Style as representative of indigenous life in Oaxaca, as well as adjusting works to conform to foreign expectations of what “authentic” Oaxacan art looked like.

Over time, these foreign conceptions of Oaxacan art and identity were internalized by Oaxacan artists themselves. This is suggested by an underlying “Europeanism” Valerio sees in much Oaxacan art, including later works by Taller Tamayo students.<sup>41</sup> In an interview with Mercedes Caso, Valerio explains that while the style may have developed honestly and organically among the First Generation students—that it really did represent their realities at that time—it is the copying and re-appropriation of their style that should be re-examined:

“Many of the students of the Taller were kids who came from the countryside, kids with indigenous origins, very connected to the land and the traditions of Oaxaca. This... favored the development of a style based on oral traditions, legends, the rural life... now another phenomenon is that this style is copied: others, of whom it is not their way of life, began to do the same. This we can’t attribute to a school or workshop, but is a mercantilist phenomenon.”<sup>42</sup>

Although developed by the Taller Tamayo students as an honest representation of their personal experiences, the market success and subsequent re-appropriation of the style by artists without profound connections to its imagery has contributed to the Oaxacan myth. The style aligned easily with Oaxaca’s place in post-revolutionary *Mexicanidad*, which may have been a reason for the foundational support and museum interest shown the Taller Tamayo and its students early on. It also meant that the style was quickly adopted as representative of Oaxaca. The images of Oaxaca depicted in Oaxacan Style works were of a simple and naïve place, rooted in the past, where people

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<sup>41</sup> Casanova, “El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano,” 18.

<sup>42</sup> Mercedes Caso, “Taller de Artes Plásticas ‘Rufino Tamayo’ de Oaxaca 1974-1984” (PhD diss., Universidad Iberoamericana, 2001). The interview with Valerio is an appendix.

lived according to the rhythms of nature. Artists were usually indigenous and did not address current or provocative topics.

The positive reception of the style both in other parts of Mexico and in the exterior meant profit and fame for the First Generation artists, but also meant that other artistic experimentation in Oaxaca would be neglected and even discouraged. Casanova writes: "...the development of the particular subject matter driven by the Taller Tamayo produced a polemic commercial boom for the Oaxacan painters..."<sup>43</sup> The market focus on this style served to validate it. In order to maintain a high level of commercial success, external demands were slowly integrated into its language.

The style's popularity abroad was taken advantage of by the government and Oaxacans alike to further this myth and perpetuate the tourism the state had grown dependent on. The image of an idealized, indigenous world of "myth and magic" initiated in the colonial period and firmly established by the Taller Tamayo and art movement it inspired, today draws tourists and supports various arts industries in Oaxaca. It indirectly offers a means of subsistence to artists who work within the Oaxacan Style or to craftsmen and women whose products represent "authentic" Oaxaca to tourists.

But beyond tourism and economics, this myth also serves a social and political purpose. While the indigenous past was idealized and used as a unifying tool to inspire national pride among an incredibly diverse Mexican citizenship after the revolution, little was done to recognize or respond to present-day descendants of that past, who remain marginalized. "Overall, post-colonial revisionist history exalted the dead Indians of the

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<sup>43</sup> Casanova, "El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano," 17.

past. Their descendants, Indians and *indomestizos*, continued to be stigmatized.”<sup>44</sup>

Oaxaca is the second poorest Mexican state and over 51% of adults over the age of 15 have not completed the mandatory six years of schooling.<sup>45</sup> Parts of rural Oaxaca are some of the most marginalized areas of Mexico. In recent decades, the Mexican government has taken a number of steps to address issues such as bilingual education and lack of access to infrastructure with programs like Oportunidades or PROCAMPO,<sup>46</sup> but there has not yet been a significant improvement in access to basic services like health care, education, electricity, and clean drinking water for many Oaxacan indigenous groups.

Indians” experience racialization and discrimination. Hospitals and government service agencies often lack indigenous translators, and in many of the most marginalized and isolated towns, few people speak Spanish. The Mixteca, an isolated, mountainous area that covers parts of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero, has experienced staggering out-migration to other parts of Mexico and the United States over the last several decades as a result of such poverty. Stigmatized in Mexico, Mixtecos, for example, learn to be ashamed of their cultural heritage and to deny it publically. Migration to the United States, begun in earnest in the late 1970s, is having very interesting effects on Mixtec identity. Some Mixtecos only begin to identify as Mixtecos once they have arrived in the

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<sup>44</sup> Ana María Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity: “Mestizaje,” Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism,” *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 19 no. 4 (2004): 462.

<sup>45</sup> Candice Lown, “Oaxacan Indigenous Groups: Policy Options for the Integration of a Marginalized People,” (Research Paper IP647 on U.S. Mexico Relations at the Monterey Institute of International Studies at Middlebury College in Monterey, California, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Oportunidades, initiated in 1997 as Progresa, provides cash incentives to impoverished families to keep their children in school and visit health clinics regularly. Procampo was initiated in 1993 to compensate farmers for losses they might experience from competition with cheap foreign prices, particularly due to NAFTA.

United States where they can relate to other Mixtecos and face less outward discrimination for being “Indian.”<sup>47</sup>

This reality stands in stark contrast to the value indigenous culture is granted in the idea of *Mexicanidad* or depictions of rural life in images such as *Cuni Cuni* by Felipe de Jesús Morales (figure 5). In the work, Morales depicts a provincial scene—a farmhouse on a desert ranch, surrounded by sparse cacti and brown dust and sand. The landscape stretches into the distance, where blue mountains meet a rusty red and orange sky. The unusual colors give the scene an air of fantasy. A crescent moon is surrounded by a sun-like, glowing orange sphere in a reddish sky. Not clearly night or day, the scene occupies a liminal space and time where the rules of nature, such as the rising and setting of the sun and moon or the color of the sky do not apply. Adding to this suspension of reality is Morales’ use of perspective. In the foreground of the image, we see a human figure reaching toward a chicken in a nest. At first, the nest seems to be supported by a tree, or some sort of wooden support, but on closer inspection, the branches of the tree, mostly hidden behind the nest, are small and appear to be in the distance. The nest, then, must be floating in the air. Similarly, two cacti initially appear to be on the same plane as the tree and the human figure, but are actually much smaller and seem swallowed up by the empty space of the desert surrounding them. The inconsistent perspectives remove the scene even more from reality.

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<sup>47</sup> Significant scholarship has been done on this topic. See Nagengast and Kearney “Mixtec Ethnicity,” Rivera-Salgado “Mixtec Activism in Oaxacalifornia,” or Fox and Rivera-Salgado “Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States.”



**Figure 5.** Felipe de Jesús Morales, *Cuni Cuni*, 2007  
oil on canvas, 51 x 59 inches (130 x 150 cm)

One-sided depictions of rural Oaxacan life, detached from reality, likely dictated the image art collectors, museum visitors, and the general public—via exhibition catalogs, advertising, tourist agencies—developed of Oaxaca. Such an image served not only to entice tourists and promote an exotic, timeless Oaxacan myth, but also distract from the reality many Oaxacan indigenous groups actually experience. The Mexican state has outwardly celebrated indigenous cultures as essential to the identity of the Mexican nation while failing to work toward sustainable solutions to improving living conditions for many isolated, rural, and indigenous Oaxacans. The power and popularity of the Oaxacan myth supported visually by the Oaxacan Style overshadows the discrimination experienced by contemporary indigenous peoples in Mexico today.

While I do not mean to argue that *Cuni Cuni*, *¿What Would Be Of These Trees Without Webs?*, *Untitled*, or other artworks executed in the Oaxacan style are *incorrect* representations of “Oaxaca”—either metaphorically or literally—I do want to suggest that the lack of alternative images or styles and the persistence of the Oaxacan myth didn’t allow for a wider understanding of Oaxacan identity to emerge in the exterior. Without access to such alternative views, the single romanticized notion of the Oaxacan *artesano* seeped in tradition, naïve and humble, conveniently serves to distract from the actual experiences of many indigenous people in Oaxaca. Unhindered by the darker, dirtier side of colonization and Mexico’s arguably inhumane policies toward indigenous groups during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tourism flourishes.

*“An Ideological Snag”*

Printmaking is a practice that has similarly been subjugated to a myth co-authored by colonizing outside forces as well as internal practitioners. Part of this stems from the lack of critical attention paid to printmaking and its marginalization as an artistic medium, but the myth, like in Oaxaca, also contributes to the perpetuation of this situation. Printmaking is frequently understood as a practice rooted in tradition, unable to adapt to modern technologies. Its obscure technical terms, specific technical knowledge, and complicated processes are seen as inaccessible and intimidating to most people. Western society’s limited understanding of the multiple makes it difficult to locate printmaking within the fine art hierarchy.

Many printmakers themselves participate in promoting the myth that printmaking is a centuries-old practice, rooted in tradition, and defined by obscure technical processes.

Some become obsessed with technical aspects of printmaking such as the type of paper, the viscosity of the ink, the type of ink, or the humidity of the room. They allow, or at least preach, a “conquest of technical fundamentalism over the creative freedom of art making” (Camnitzer 1)<sup>48</sup> in their practices. This focus on technical processes leads to a focus on physical processes. Printmakers often define *how* they create a work before explaining the symbolic or expressive significance,<sup>49</sup> in the way an artisan might explain how they created the shape of a pot or the intricate embroidery on a blouse without his or her audience needing to know “what it means.” Although the expressive possibilities of printmaking may be just as important to the artists as well, they are deemphasized.

Western culture, since the enlightenment, has stressed the importance of the intellectual senses over the bodily senses and of intellectual labor over physical labor. Craft—usually functional, labor-intensive, and often requiring attention to detail—has come to be seen as inferior to more “purely intellectual” processes like painting. Of course, there are technical skills that must be mastered in order to have control over oil paints on a canvas, but painting’s acceptance as a fine-art practice means these skills are considered secondary to the expressive possibilities of the medium and are deemphasized. With printmaking it is the opposite. Viewed as a practice more similar to craft than to fine art, printmaking is usually defined by its physical processes and materials such as the matrix, the process of transference, or the types of paper and inks used. Emphasis is placed on the physical, not the intellectual aspects of the practice.

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<sup>48</sup> Luis Camnitzer, “Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts,” *Working States*, (2008):1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

As practitioners of an activity relegated to a lower status based in part on its physicality, specialized technical knowledge is one way printmakers can claim autonomy from or demonstrate superiority over other media. By guarding technical knowledge of material and chemical processes that, for example, painters and sculptors do not have access to, printmakers establish an alternative set of values to the dominant one in which they are not important players. Sometimes printers keep techniques secret, reinforcing the myth of an obscure and inaccessible practice.<sup>50</sup> For them, sharing specialized knowledge would mean renouncing that which they've used for centuries to define and validate themselves in relation to other media. Opening up the practice to new technologies would mean involving printmaking in a world in which it is misunderstood, as well as allowing outsiders to catch glimpses of what normally goes on behind closed doors. Thus printmaking is seen as a practice stuck in the past and printmakers as unable to adapt to new practices and new ideas about art. While printmaking's inferior status might lead printmakers to isolate themselves so as not to be misconstrued (or worse, ignored) by the art world, such isolation conversely serves to validate and reinforce printmaking's marginalization. Merrill writes that "All disciplines that base their qualitative standards on sophisticated criterion, complex and traditional concepts will find themselves marginalized."<sup>51</sup>

While printmaking has objectively been marginalized by the Western fine art hierarchy, and while some printmakers are limited by these ways of thinking, many others are not. Young Oaxacan printmakers are an example. Their studios bring

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<sup>50</sup> Moro, "Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI."

<sup>51</sup> Hugh Merrill, "Marginal Short," *Writings by Hugh Merrill*, 1996, from the Hugh Merrill website, <http://www.hughmerrill.com/writing/marginal-short.html>.



printmaking into public spaces with cheap materials, openly discuss their practices, fully embrace the possibilities printmaking offers for the innovation of new technologies, and consider their practice, without question, as valid and valuable as other media. The practices of these studios, though, are easily overshadowed by the powerful myths that have grown up around printmaking.

Re-thinking traditional definitions of printmaking has preoccupied the print world in the last few decades, particularly since the rise of post-modernism and the development of new digital technologies. Throughout the 90s, dialogue focused on “redefining the discipline as an expanded territory and overlapping field.”<sup>52</sup> At the 1993 College Art Association Conference, participants tried to re-define printmaking in terms of its cross-disciplinary nature.<sup>53</sup> Ruth Weisberg also called for an expanded definition that would incorporate post-modernist issues as well as new practical possibilities. Incorporating Merrill’s deconstructive ideas of printmaking as a “theoretical language of evolving ideas,” Weisberg suggested her own definition: an inclusive model that involves a generative matrix and a process of reproduction of the matrix, itself involving a form of material/technical resistance or delay.<sup>54</sup>

At the 1994 Southern Graphics Council, Carol Pulin argued a “beyond-material” definition in which printmaking can only be defined by its cultural function, its visual production, and the discourse it spawns.<sup>55</sup> Printmaker and art professor Douglas Dowd claimed that the process of printing exchanges words, images, ideas, symbols in such a

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<sup>52</sup> Hugh Merrill, “American Dialogue Defining Printmaking in the 1990s,” *Printmaking Today* vol. 3 no. 2 (1994), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Merrill, “Marginal Short.”

<sup>54</sup> Ruth Weisberg, “Critical Theory and the Print: New Criteria for Print Qualities in the Expanded Field,” *Contemporary Impressions* vol. 1 no. 1 (1993).

<sup>55</sup> Carol Pulin, “Postmodern Printmaking: A Key,” *Contemporary Impressions*, vol. 2 no. 1 (1994).

way that the act of transference has become a “cultural technique.” He also argued that the ‘edition’ is and should not be the main focus of defining printmaking in relation to other visual art practices, but that there are other important characteristics of printmaking that should be considered such as accessibility, clarity, visual argumentation, aesthetic richness.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Susan Tallman relates new digital technology to printmaking: “The most dramatic potential of the digital domain lies in its capacity for image distribution—traditionally the purview of printing, whether rarified or commercial...the distinction between the image and its physical housing, which has troubled so many people throughout the history of the print, finally achieves a complete separation.”<sup>57</sup> She suggests that digital reproduction may offer Western culture a space to reconsider the place of printmaking within the fine arts. Digital reproduction not only removes an image from any sort of physical housing, it can render things such as scale or intended purpose obsolete. The viewer is forced to confront the cultural consequences of this phenomenal speed and ease of reproduction, thus requiring a reevaluation of terms such as “original,” “authentic,” or “reproduction.” Over time, these ideas will take on new cultural values, which will in turn affect how printmaking is understood in the West.

The final and perhaps most important issue that leads to printmaking’s marginalization is the concept of the multiple. “An ideological snag of great importance, obviously reinforced by the earning possibility, or profitableness that society believes it to have...,”<sup>58</sup> the multiple is understood in relation to a consumer culture that depends on

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<sup>56</sup> Douglas Dowd, “Prints & Politics: Persuasion,” *Contemporary Impressions* vol. 2 no. 1 (1994).

<sup>57</sup> Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, 214.

<sup>58</sup> Moro, *Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI*, 122.

mass production. Fine art, at least since the rise of industrialism and the move from artisanal task labor to manufacturing wage labor, claims to offer a more spiritual alternative to industrialism and capitalism to an enlightened upper-class. Fine art is handmade and expressive; it is the ultimate unification of the worker and his or her product. While fine art claims to counteract the demoralizing consequences of mass production, printmaking maintains an ambiguous relationship with it. A technical “delay” is introduced between the hand of the printer and the finished art product—the mechanical action of the press—which also allows for it to be mechanically reproduced and disseminated.

By allowing for the mass dissemination of visual and textual ideas via the multiple, printmaking serves an important function in Western society. Walter Benjamin writes in his “Little History of Photography” that “mechanical modes of reproduction are a technology of miniaturization and help people to achieve the degree of power over the works without which they simply could not make use of them.”<sup>59</sup> Reproduction allows for images and concepts to be “assimilated” or made “useful” by societies: to present them to society such that they may be easily accepted and appropriated by existing societal structures and cultural norms. For example, the process of visiting a museum exhibition or gallery opening is complex, and requires the actor to enact certain roles and to navigate deeply-held culture, race, and class values about art and the art-world. Viewing works of art in a library book, instead of on the museum or gallery wall, allows the viewer to confront the artworks on his or her own terms (at least more so), without the

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<sup>59</sup>Charles Haxthausen, “Reproduction/Repetition: Walter Benjamin/Carl Einstein,” *October* 107 (winter 2004): 49.

heavy baggage of Western and modernist art tropes; without having to enact a “performance” among others in a (semi) public space. Images in a book are culturally more accessible, but also literally easier to get to for many people, and thus a more effective political or social tool for disseminating value systems. For example, Susan Tallman cites the work of Cuban-American artist Félix Gonzalez-Torres. “His work,” she says, “articulates the profound difference between the singular domineering art object, and the multiple, adaptable, social character of the edition, and he reminds us that repetition is possessed of two very different kinds of power—the mass of something in one place, and the more elusive power of an equal mass dispersed to the limits of visibility.”<sup>60</sup> Much like Benjamin argues, the multiple’s loss of the aura is made up for in its reach.

Conceptualizing this reach in another way, Moro argues that reproductions can also speak across cultural, social, racial, and class barriers. Reproductions of artworks are “culturally more transcendental than the art objects themselves, that is, the technical reproducibility guarantees the universalization of the work and of the artist.”<sup>61</sup> Through their reproduction and diffusion, artworks can have meaning across a much wider and more diverse audience. Dislocated from a single location like a gallery or museum that might carry powerful cultural connotations, reproductions are freer to assume meanings appropriate to different cultures. Thus they have the potential to be meaningful for more people.

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<sup>60</sup> Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, 214.

<sup>61</sup> Moro, “Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI,” 29.

Although today commercial printmaking is ubiquitous in art-history text books, exhibition catalogues, posters, magazines, newspapers, and t-shirts, fine-art printmaking complicates this process of reproduction, consumption, and assimilation in yet another way. When Benjamin cites a “technology of miniaturization,” he is referring to the miniaturization of a work’s aura, a concept he developed in his essay *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The aura might be described as the way an original piece of artworks alters the space around it and the experience of those observers in that space: “its [the artwork’s] presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>62</sup> Originally developed in relation to the technically reproducible photograph, his concept of aura was applicable to modernist ideas about artworks that developed in Europe and the United States in the aftermath of World War II. Despite attempts of pop, performance, ephemeral, and other post-modern media to destabilize the modernist retaking of Benjamin’s “aura,” the concept remains important for the success of Western cultural institutions. Art museums, for example, depend on the belief that experiencing a work of art in person is somehow different and more valuable than seeing a reproduction in a book.

Printmaking complicates this idea of aura, and thus compromises its position in the Western fine art hierarchy. “For better or for worse, art objects that exist in multiple are commonly seen as less authoritative than unique works, less ringed about the with the nebulous, charismatic quality that Walter Benjamin called “aura”.”<sup>63</sup> But while Benjamin might argue that mechanical print reproduction potentially heralds the loss of aura in

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<sup>62</sup> Walter Benjamin, “A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

<sup>63</sup> Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, 69.

much the same way as a photograph, fine-art printmaking also allows, in a certain sense, for the aura to be present in every reproduction. Printmakers and collectors note important differences and value differently each print in an edition. The artist proof is often valued differently than the third print, or the third valued differently from the tenth print of a particular plaque. Sometimes printmakers count on the change that the ink or the plate will undergo over the course of a printing run to achieve a particular result. Sometimes it takes several runs to determine the ideal amount of pressure the press should exert on the paper and the plate, or the ideal dampness of the paper. The aura contained in a print might also be affected by the number of prints in the original edition. Perhaps in an edition of 5, the aura is more present, more valuable, or more meaningful than in an edition of 500, or perhaps a serigraph poster made with cheap materials retains less of an aura than a soft acrylic plate printed on rare French paper.<sup>64</sup>

If each print within an edition can be considered less an exact reproduction and more an expressive variation of the original, as unique in its own right as the ‘original,’ then print clearly complicates Benjamin’s antagonism between the reproduction and the existence of aura. Printmaking serves its important “miniaturizing” function for in Western society, but simultaneously denies and affirms the idea of the aura. In this way then, printmaking goes beyond simply making art more accessible to a wider audience, but offers an experimental outlet for post-modernism’s fascination with the multiple and the social and psychological effects of mass production.

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<sup>64</sup> Acrylic is a soft substance and plates generally only last through nine or ten printings when the marks on the plate are smoothed out by the force of the press.

*Colonial Subjectivities*

Finally, both printmakers and Oaxacan artists are subject to the imposition of an identity from outside the practice or the region by a dominant social or political force. Oaxaca, historically isolated and with more indigenous autonomy during colonization, was constructed as the most “authentic” representation of Mexico, saddled with an “obligatory authenticity.”<sup>65</sup> Elisa Ramirez describes an image of Oaxaca constructed from the exterior,<sup>66</sup> and Valerio writes that “In the Oaxacan case, the importance of the exterior is doubled, owing to the special place that this state occupies within the republic. Like Mexico is seen as exotic in Europe or the United States, Oaxaca is considered, in the rest of the country, under the lens of authenticity, considered a “spiritual reserve”.”<sup>67</sup> Within Mexico, Oaxaca is the exotic and authentic cultural heartland. Outside of Mexico, where Mexico itself is usually exoticised, Oaxaca’s exoticism is doubled. This image was created and perpetrated by post-revolutionary ruling elites, and ultimately served to reinforce Euro-centric values.

These values have become internalized and legitimized today by Mexican art-world and non-art world participants alike. An example would be art critic Alicia Azuela’s interpretation of Tamayo. According to Azuela, “in New York Tamayo obtained, above all, the first tools to interpret, in contemporary terms, the rich formal

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<sup>65</sup> Valerio, *Atardacer en la maquiladora de las utopias*, 79

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15. In an article titled “Hechizos Oaxaqueños,” published in *Memoria de Papel*, Valerio explains that Ramirez attempts to understand what, if anything, sets Oaxacan artists and the Oaxacan Style apart. She identifies seven characteristics, the sixth of which is an “idea of Oaxaca constructed from the exterior.” Valerio sees this as a unique point that has been left unexplored because it uncomfortably asks us to confront and question the “implicit authenticity” in vague phrases used to describe the Oaxacan style such as “rich patrimony” or “Oaxacan light.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

possibilities and symbols of popular and pre-Hispanic Mexican art.”<sup>68</sup> Her suggestion that his Mexican education could not offer him the tools to truly understand his own culture is symptomatic of an internalized Euro-centrism. Many of the most well-known Mexican artists today—Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Francisco Toledo, José Luis Cuevas—all spent significant time abroad. Rivera and the other muralists returned to Mexico after the revolution, ready to help Vasconcelos visually establish a new form of *Mexicanidad*. This new image would allow Mexico to be a viable actor in the increasingly globalized modern world because it would filter the pre-Colombian history of Mexico through a European lens to achieve something valuable and uniquely Mexican.

An event that took place during Mexico’s first centennial celebration of independence in 1921 demonstrates this well. The *Noche Mexicana* was designed as a one-night event (though its popularity led to a repeat performance) and was organized primarily by Adolfo Best Maugard to celebrate the construction of new electric lighting and paved roads in Chapultepec Park. Inspired by regional fairs, the *Noche Mexicana* involved food stands, craft vendors, dance performances, impressive firework displays, and carnival rides. Maugard wanted to present popular, indigenous culture as valuable, but only insofar that it should serve as “raw material for elite artists.”<sup>69</sup> While the *Noche Mexicana* celebrated “Indian” and “popular” cultures and their cultural artifacts that previously had been overlooked as backward or devalued, the ultimate message conveyed by Maugard’s *Noche Mexicana* was that only well-educated, elite, white intellectuals possessed the ability to turn vernacular culture into true art. For the *Noche Mexicana*,

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<sup>68</sup> Azuela, “Oaxaca: savia artística,” 174.

<sup>69</sup> Rick A. López, “The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts: Two Ways of Exalting Indianness,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen E. Lewis, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 29.



musicians re-worked folk songs with modern motifs and choreographers turned traditional dances such as the *jarabe tapatío* into spectacles of light and music appropriate for large audiences. From the valuable but unrefined raw material of indigenous cultures, true artists and intellectuals could create beautiful, uniquely Mexican modern culture, able to compete with that of Europe and the expanding Western world.<sup>70</sup>

Oaxaca also experienced a visual colonization of its identity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Valerio suggests that while the Oaxacan Style likely began as honest artistic expression among the First Generation students at the Taller Tamayo, it has been co-opted and controlled; re-assigned and re-defined by a Euro-centric market and a government eager to take advantage of a tourist industry. Foreign demand for art of a certain style, as well as expectations of what Oaxacan art looked like, dictated artistic development during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Oaxacan artists internalized and accepted these externally imposed aesthetic value systems.

The acceptance of the Oaxacan Style as the authentic representative of Oaxaca and its acceptance and co-authorship by and of Oaxacan artists themselves is comparable to the institutionalization of rural West Virginian art described by Christine Balengee-Morris. Cultural institutions funded by federal and state governments constructed an image of rural West Virginians as naïve, simple “hillbillies,” much like the idea of the Oaxacan or Mexican Indian. In West Virginia, the government effectively gained enough institutional control to decide which artists would become successful and which artists

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<sup>70</sup> This discussion of the Noche Mexicana is indebted to Lopez and his chapter “The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts: Two Ways of Exalting Indianness.” In *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* edited by Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen E. Lewis.

would not. They controlled what sort of identity West Virginian artists would have in the exterior by deciding what was important, or well done, and what was not:

“The government’s impact on the direction of the artists and who is considered a West Virginia artist has been extensive...by methods of funding and institutional networking, the government determines what will be perpetuated and what is important...The paradox is that individuals from the dominant culture become experts and judges, who then redefine the culture and the arts through institutional policies that determine who and what will be a part of the institution.”<sup>71</sup>

Much like Valerio, Ramirez, Manzo, and Chibnik have argued about Oaxacan art and the Oaxacan style, in West Virginia Balengee-Morris claims that “the government in the name of tourism was colonizing their [the West Virginians’] culture and visual culture.”<sup>72</sup>

Luis Camnitzer uses similar terminology to discuss printmaking as a “colonized” art form; an art form that continues to look for validation from those who wield the art-world power—i.e. non-printmakers such as painters or sculptors—much like a colonized people internalize the cultural norms and values of the colonizing force. A printmaker’s “painting-envy,” like a “European-envy” or a “white-envy” comes from working within the “master’s” ideology, afraid to think independently: a colonized mentality. Print studios, Camnitzer argues, often feel a need to invite prestigious artists who don’t traditionally work in printmaking to validate their technical skills and prove their participation in the dominant art world. For him, this is a “deformed image of an industrialized culture”<sup>73</sup> in much the same way that developing nations adopted the import substitution industrialization model to make up for all that they lacked.

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<sup>71</sup> Christine Balengee-Morris, “Perspectives on Colonialism and Self-Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism,” *Studies in Art Education* vol. 43 no. 3 (2002), 237-238.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>73</sup> Camnitzer, “Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts,” 2.

Printmakers are also subject to a particular “fundamentalism,” an obsession with processes and materials that cover feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, which has only served to reinforce printmaking’s subjugated position. Like the colonial subject, and like the “Indian” in the nationalist scheme of post-revolutionary Mexico, the inferiority of the printmaker is internalized and self-perpetuating.

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The doubly-marginalized, mythologized, and colonized practice of young Oaxacan printmakers puts them in unique positions to challenge conceptions of artistic authenticity in Oaxaca City. The practices of both Oaxacan artists and printmakers are simplified and over-generalized. Outside expectations impose foreign, inappropriate expectations onto both practices that over time have been internalized by their practitioners. The lack of critical discourse on both reinforces the myth of Oaxaca as an idyllic indigenous paradise and the myth of printmaking as a musty or inaccessible practice. These myths serve important social functions. The Oaxacan myth distracts from endemic social and racial inequality and supports tourism. The myth of the multiple as an anti-expressive technique or principle antithetical to fine art practice subjugates printmaking and limits more comprehensive understandings of the theoretical possibilities the practice holds.

By challenging the forces that have established printmaking’s place in the fine art hierarchy, Oaxacan printmakers can begin to challenge the factors that shape traditional Oaxacan art markets and evaluations of artistic authenticity. The relationship between cultural production and state power is becoming increasingly complicated in Mexico. Confrontations between civilians and the state in Oaxaca have led Oaxacans and Oaxacan

artists to begin re-negotiating these relationships, an intensely complicated and risky endeavor. Printmaking offers artists a “safer” space from which they can begin to confront the changing realities of Mexican and Oaxacan cultural production. It is often difficult for those intricately involved to evaluate the political and social factors acting upon them. Printmaking allows Oaxacan artists to critique many of the issues affecting Oaxacan artists through the lens of printmaking and from a slightly removed position. The practice of printmaking offers these Oaxacan artists a space to begin considering what a new Oaxacan art aesthetic might look like, and how it might relate to the social and political powers around it.

### 3. The Talleres Gráficos

To understand how contemporary Oaxacan printmakers are using printmaking as a tool to redefine art practice in Oaxaca City, I examine the practices of nine contemporary Oaxacan printmaking studios. The studios described below fall into three general categories: those that belong to First-Generation artists, those that have a direct personal connection to either the Taller Tamayo or First Generation artists, and those that do not have a personal connection to either the Taller Tamayo or First Generation artists. The Taller Tamayo and the First Generation artists were instrumental in establishing and reinforcing a very particular Oaxacan artistic authenticity over the last several decades and thus provide a point of reference from which to understand how newer Oaxacan studios establish their own legitimacy and suggest a new Oaxacan aesthetic.

#### *First Generation Studios*

Juan Alcázar was born in 1955 in Oaxaca City. In 1968 he entered the School of Fine Arts at the UABJO where he studied under Roberto Donís. When Donís left to found the Taller Tamayo, Alcázar followed him, and was put in charge of the graphic art studios at the new school. When Donís left the Taller in 1984 and the school briefly closed, Alcázar and his wife, fellow First Generation student Justina Fuentes, founded the Free Oaxacan Printmaking Studio (TLGO). The TLGO was a “free studio for printmakers” where “any artist can walk in...and work on engraving...no one’s treated

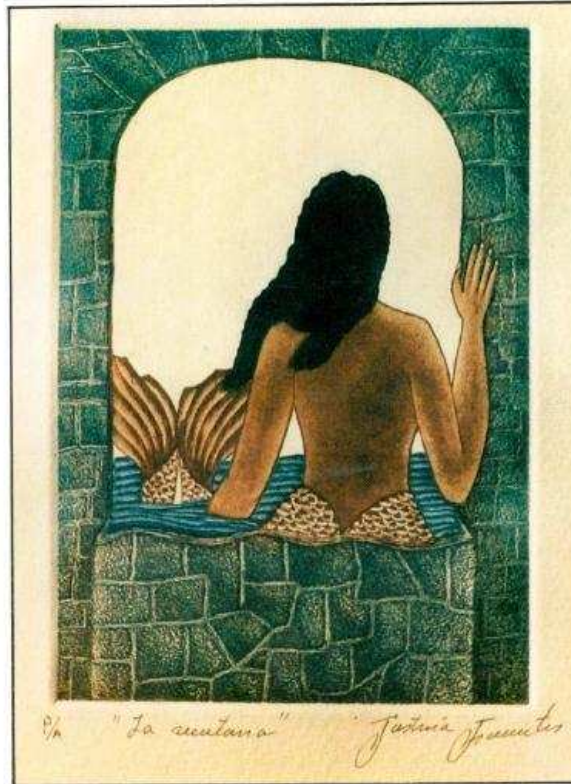
specially.”<sup>74</sup> Several Taller Tamayo students and alumni printed at the TLGO. In 1987, the Missoula Museum of Art in Missoula, Montana held an exhibition of work done in the TLGO by Alcázar, Fuentes, and other Taller Tamayo/TLGO artists Enrique Flores, Jorge López, Eddie Martínez, and Emiliano López Xavier. A press release described the works in the exhibition as “realistic and figurative, but with a distinctive color sense and a magical, visionary quality,”<sup>75</sup> much like Oaxacan art was being described in other foreign exhibitions at that time.

Concerned more than many other First Generation artists with printmaking specifically, Alcázar organized the 1989 exhibition (*Magnificent Oaxacan Prints*), held in the United States at the Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. That same year his work was included in *Oaxacan Printmaking* at the Stone Press Gallery in Seattle, Washington and in 1991 he was included in Loyola Marymont’s Labard Art Gallery’s (*Magic Printmaking*). Alcázar was involved in the organization of some of these exhibitions, and although he was interested in promoting printmaking as a discipline separate from that of painting, a more common First Generation medium, the rhetoric of these exhibitions emphasized the fantastical image of Oaxaca over the theoretical practice of printmaking. Fuentes’ work used on the exhibition card for the Missoula Exhibition (figure 6) exemplifies the Oaxacan Style, and the titles of the exhibitions, as well as press and media materials, demonstrate the use of language that linked the myth of an idyllic Oaxaca to the Oaxacan Style aesthetic.

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<sup>74</sup> Baker, a Missoula artist who has worked with the TLGO, cited by Merriam in “Visions From Mexico: Printmakers leave their impression on an ancient art,” 1987.

<sup>75</sup> Missoula Museum of Art, press release for the TLGO exhibition held at the Missoula Museum of Art, August 20-September 19, 1987.



**Figure 6.** Justina Fuentes, *The Window*  
engraving, 4 x 6 inches (10 x 15 cm)

The Taller Tamayo reopened several years after Donís’ departure under a different organizational and class structure.<sup>76</sup> In 1992 Alcázar became director of the school, a position he would hold for 11 years, and a position from which he would influence young printmakers who have since founded their own studios in the city. Alcázar is referred to as “Maestro” by residents of Oaxaca City and is a highly-respected and well-recognized figure. Today he is the director of The Museum of Oaxacan Painters (the museum that organized and hosted the *Lenguaje Universal, Acento Propio* exhibition

<sup>76</sup> Today the school is funded in large part by a grant from the state government. Classes are offered on a much shorter and more flexible 3-month semester schedule, and anyone who can pay the relatively small enrollment fees may sign up for a class in one of the media offered--drawing, ceramics, and sculpture, in addition to the original painting, lithography, and *grabado*. Classes are usually held every evening for a few hours. Current director Mariano Pineda believes the school continues in the original spirit of relative artistic freedom, experimentation, and self-guided learning.

in 2007 and 2008), and from such a position has been able to more officially dictate art practice in Oaxaca City through his selection of exhibitions and distribution of funds

Alcázar's own printmaking studio is located in the heart of Oaxaca's colonial city center. Alcázar has a number of employees working for him and the studio maintains a hierarchical structure. Alcázar generally does not allow casual visitors from the street to visit during work hours, and the atmosphere in the studio is one of busy, focused work that adheres to a relatively strict schedule. Despite this formal studio structure, Alcázar's internationally successful career, and continued use of the Oaxacan Style, Alcázar has egalitarian and community-oriented visions for the graphic arts. His dream is to develop a network of Oaxaca City printmaking studios in constant contact and collaboration that would be funded by the government and accessible to the public.

The graphic art studio of Fernando Sandoval, another First Generation artist, is one of the oldest in the city and is also centrally located. For Sandoval, printmaking is an art of reproduction secondary to other forms of art-making such as painting. By creating both accessible and cheaper replications of larger canvas works and by charging artists to print at the studio, Sandoval sees the studio as a necessary and practical part of a successful art practice. In the studio a very clear distinction is maintained between artists—creative, intellectual producers—and printmakers—technical employees—and Sandoval stresses the importance of “professionalizing” printmaking studios. Like Alcázar, he does not welcome outside interruptions while he is working in the studio. In 2008, an exhibition celebrating the Sandoval studio's last ten years was held at the Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca (The Institute of Graphic Arts of Oaxaca, IAGO) and included nineteen artists. Among them were Francisco Toledo, Kiki Smith,



Francesco Clemente, and five First Generation artists. Invitations extended by the studio to prestigious, internationally-recognized artists not seen primarily as printmakers, suggests Camnitzer's "colonized" printmaking mentality.

Enrique Flores is often lumped with the First Generation artists, although he did not enter the Taller Tamayo until 1982. He participated in the TGLO for three years before establishing his own studio in 1987 in Huitzo, a small town north of Oaxaca City where he had grown up. In 2000, after his artistic career had taken off, Flores began to expand the studio. He initiated construction of a large, two-story, custom-designed building that today contains an enormous printmaking studio on the bottom floor, a painting studio on the top floor that overlooks the printmaking studio, and several offices (figures 7 and 8). In the summer of 2010, the creation of a lithography studio was underway and Flores had plans to build a ceramics studio and an exhibition gallery. He also expressed interest in equipping the studio with relatively new environmentally friendly printing techniques (Flores and Torres, personal interview). Flores employs young artists from Oaxaca, many of whom he recruits from the UABJO's School of Fine Arts. After enduring a short training period, they are able to help him print his own work as well as outside commissions the studio receives.

Taller Alcázar, Taller Sandoval, and Taller Flores demonstrate several characteristics common among First Generation printmaking studios. The studios were formed only after Alcázar, Sandoval, and Flores had established relatively successful art careers in which printmaking was not, at least outwardly, the focus of their practices. These studios thus depend on the success of their art careers as well as help to sustain them. Flores is able to expand his studio as his works fetch higher and higher market

prices and as he simultaneously increases his artistic output. Sandoval is adamant about the separation of artist and printmaker—a distinction newer Oaxacan printmaking studios would reject. Flores, Sandoval, and Alcázar are respected and recognized in Oaxaca City, although Alcázar's longer career and visible positions as the director of the Taller Tamayo and the Museum of Oaxacan Painters make him the most easily familiar figure. The studios implement formal, hierarchical structures in which Alcázar, Sandoval, and Flores instruct and direct the work of their employees.



**Figure 7.** The Taller Enrique Flores print studio (view from the second-story painting studio)  
Huitzo, Oaxaca, August 2010



**Figure 8.** The Enrique Flores painting studio  
Huitzo, Oaxaca, August 2010

### *Taller Zánate*

Newer studios tend to be less hierarchical and more egalitarian, even those that maintain strong ties to First Generation artists. Taller Zánate, for example, was founded in 2008 by Lorena Montes and Daniel Flores who met as students at the Taller Tamayo. The first space the studio occupied in the city center soon became too small and expensive. In July 2010 Zánate moved to the San Felipe neighborhood, several miles north of the city center. The bottom floor of the large, two-story building the studio now occupies includes an open-air space with two presses and a courtyard. The top floor contains a small apartment, which Lorena and Daniel hope to use in the future for artist residencies. While Lorena and Daniel do hire assistants, the assistants are given a high degree of autonomy, and often help Montes and Flores make personal choices about their work. Many are artists or aspiring printmakers themselves. Zánate invites artists to work at the studio to collaborate with Lorena and Daniel. Zánate and the artist decide on a

percentage-split of each edition that will be produced, and Zánate is then able to sell their editions in order to pay rent and purchase supplies.

Lorena entered the Taller Tamayo to study painting, but was invited to learn printmaking as an assistant in Juan Alcázar's studio. She continues to work for him today. Her own prints, paintings, and drawings are done in the Oaxacan Style. *Moonlight* and *Snail Collector* are good examples of her graphic work (figures 9 and 10).



**Figure 9.** Lorena Montes, *Moonlight*, 2002  
engraving on metal  
13.4 x 9.6 inches (34 x 24.5 cm)



**Figure 10.** Lorena Montes, *Snail Collector*, 2009  
engraving  
12.8 x 9.6 inches (32.5 x 24.5 cm)

Both depict semi-clothed women with long hair immersed in somewhat fantastical natural settings. If we compare these to Edie Martinez's *What Would Be of These Trees Without Webs* (figure 3), Flores's *Untitled* (figure 4), or Justina Fuentes' exhibition card image *The Window* (figure 6), the similarities are evident. All depict women with long hair that visually links them to the natural environment surrounding them. The hair of the woman in Lorena's *Moonlight* is similar to the hair of the women in Martinez's work. In both, tree branches echo the lines of the women's billowing hair, suggesting a symbolic connection between the women and the landscape. In both *The Window* and *Snail Collector*, the women are linked again to natural landscapes, this time to the sea. In Lorena's work, a woman ponders a shiny white shell. The swirling blue lines behind her

connote churning ocean waves. In *The Window*, a mer-woman stares away from us towards an empty horizon. Her thick black hair drapes over her back and shoulder. She floats peacefully in the sea, but lays one hand on the stone arch that curves over her head and seems to contain the ocean water.

Like the works of Alcázar and other First Generation artists, Lorena's works are fantastical. In them, women interact with nature, and rules of time and space are disregarded. Although a citizen of contemporary, urban Oaxaca City who is raising a daughter, runs a business, and was privy to the events of 2006 and 2007, the majority of Lorena's work remains aesthetically within the "Oaxacan Style." The direct influence of Alcázar as both a teacher and an employer has undoubtedly affected her work, but it is difficult to separate his influence from her general experience as a native Oaxacan artist. As a Oaxacan, she would have picked up on Oaxacan Style- artistic authenticity even before enrolling in the Taller Tamayo. The style is a meaningful part of her identity as a Oaxacan woman.

Daniel, on the other hand, creates very different works. Daniel studied Fine Art at the University in Puebla. He came to Oaxaca to take a class at the Taller Tamayo, where he met Lorena. His works do not easily compare to First Generation works or the Oaxacan Style and differ in medium, thematic content, style, and form from Lorena's works. In *Untitled*, for example, Daniel employs both the infrequently used technique of embossing and an unusual juxtaposition of content and style (figure 11). The work is made with two separate metal plaques, one engraved with block-print Zapotec words that mean 'skunk,' and the other with the etched image of a skunk. The first plaque is not inked, and the paper and plaque are run through the press to create raised lettering. The

skunk plaque is then inked and printed over the embossed paper. The sans-serif, capitalized, formal font of the relief lettering is characteristic of modern typeface design while the Zapotec words themselves and the image of the skunk refer to nature and to an oral culture that is usually thought of as anti-modern. The color palate is limited to black and white, unlike most Oaxacan Style works.



**Figure 11.** Daniel Flores, *Untitled*, 2010  
embossed paper and metal engraving

Visiting artists work both in and out of the Oaxacan Style. Francisco Monterroso and Alma Rosa Miereles, for example, recently completed works at the studio and both employ fantastical land- or seascapes with images of women, plants, and animals. The same year, Amador Montes completed an edition at the studio, but his expressive use of line, unique combinations of image and text, and experimental colors and imagery differ greatly from that of the Oaxacan Style. Visiting artists ask Lorena and Daniel for technical as well as artistic advice, and sometimes contract Lorena, Daniel, and their

assistants to print their edition for them. The title page of the Amador Montes edition explains “The technical direction of the prints was carried out by Lorena Montes and Daniel Flores in the Taller Zánate.”<sup>77</sup>

Taller Zánate owes its existence to the Taller Tamayo. Lorena learned printmaking and how to run a studio from Alcázar first at the Taller and later as an employee in his studio. She continues to work for him part-time, helping to fund Zánate’s operations and support her family. Alcázar has also printed works at Zánate, and he and Lorena maintain a close relationship. Lorena and Daniel met at the Taller Tamayo, a strong and centralized artistic community in Oaxaca City. Lorena and Daniel agree that Oaxaca supports a unique culture of art and graphic art that doesn’t exist in other places. In Oaxaca, Daniel explains, there are many more art spaces dedicated to graphic art than in Puebla. Lorena believes the abundance of studios and gallery spaces, which in turn draw artists, might be an explanation. But what attracted the studios and galleries in the first place? Daniel suggests that the legacies of Toledo and Tamayo—including the Taller Tamayo—are responsible for making art a possible and culturally acceptable career choice in Oaxaca.

Zánate utilizes its direct, personal link to the Oaxacan Style and the Taller Tamayo, but doesn’t allow itself to be limited by their spheres of influence or market success. The studio is somewhat hierarchical, in that Lorena and Daniel employ artists to work for them, although the conceptual and practical divide between the artist and the apprentice is much less pronounced than in the First Generation studios discussed above.

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<sup>77</sup> From an image of the title page of the Montes edition that Taller Zánate posted on their Facebook page. Accessed May 2011.



Oaxacan Style-inspired art is produced and valued alongside experimental works that are much different formally and aesthetically. Printmaking is the primary medium, although artists who might not consider themselves printers or printmakers also use the studio and enlist the technical skills of Lorena and Daniel. Zánate is an interesting bridge between the printing practices of the First Generation and those of other young printmakers discussed below.

### *Taller Bambú/Bambulante*

Taller Bambú was established in 2003 by Maestro Abraham Torres, who studied at the Taller Tamayo and at UABJO's School of Fine Arts. Bambú employs a teacher-apprentice structure similar to Taller Zánate, although each student's personal artistic development and an egalitarian respect for all who work in the studio remain the defining characteristics of Bambú. Bambú apprentices have close personal relationships with Abraham, who "doesn't believe in discipline." One student told me, smiling, that he would stay "a whole life" at the studio if he could. Abraham explains that Taller Bambú is built on many of the same ideas as the Taller Tamayo, though he believes Bambú is even more free and relaxed. The students are allowed to come and go as they please. They are respected as equals and expected to pursue their own artistic goals, despite working as apprentices and coming to the studio as "students" to learn from Abraham. Of the twenty or so graphic art studios he believes exist in Oaxaca, Abraham feels Bambú is one of the "more experimental," whereas others are "more professional."

Bambulante, a play on the word *ambulante* which means wanderer, is the traveling workshop of Bambú. Bambulante offers free workshops, designed for all ages,

in public spaces like plazas and parks around Oaxaca City and nearby villages. Abraham, having studied at the two major art schools in Oaxaca and of the same generation as many First Generation artists, is an established member of the relatively small arts community, well-liked and well-recognized around Oaxaca City. *Bambulante* has expanded his identity as a public figure even more. As Uriel of La Pata put it, “everyone knows Abraham.”

Abraham explains that financially, running *Bambú* is difficult. He invites successful artists, who he thinks will make work that will sell, to come and work in the taller. As in other studios such as *Zánate*, Abraham and the visiting artist decide on a percentage-split of the edition, and Abraham is left to sell his percentage of the work. Abraham admits that he relies heavily on the support and favors of his friends, who he has helped out in the past, and who are now willing and able to help him. Many of these favors are in-kind donations or services.

Of the same generation as many of the First Generation artists, Abraham comfortably and naturally exists in two art worlds—the more hierarchical, tourist-oriented Oaxacan-style art world and the younger, experimental art scene that is challenging traditional conceptions of printmaking. His own beliefs about art, though, are decisively non-traditional and non-hierarchical. Abraham served as my tour-guide to the studios of his old friends Juan Alcázar (who was director of the Taller Tamayo when Abraham was a student), Fernando Sandoval, and Enrique Flores. Unlike them, though, he brings printmaking to public spaces in an attempt to break down ideas of the practice as antiquated, complicated, or obscure. I experienced this over the course of a free, two-week printmaking workshop he offered at the La Mano Mágica gallery in the center of

Oaxaca City, where street children, wandering tourists, budding printmakers, seasoned artists, and one enthusiastic graduate student researcher made prints together using cheap scrap materials like Styrofoam, pencils, clay, and wood. For the workshop's concluding "ceremony," the participants cut and pasted the prints made over the course of the workshop onto a wooden construction partition across the street from the gallery; a temporary mosaic-mural of our two week creative process(es) (figures 12 and 13).



**Figure 12.** Cutting up prints to create the mosaic-mural after a two-week printmaking workshop with Taller Bambulante at Galería La Mano Magica, Oaxaca City, August 2010



**Figure 13.** The mosaic-mural created by the Bambulante workshop  
Oaxaca City, Oaxaca, August 2010

Not only did this bring the work we'd been doing out of the gallery into a (more) public space, it also required the creators of the prints, myself included, to let go of personal or sentimental attachments to the works in order to offer them to the city, the public, and the spirit of collaborative art-making. The wall itself was temporary, and at the time of this writing, the wall and the collaborative mural have likely been torn down. Learning about printmaking, creating the prints, and spending time with the other workshop participants were the most important parts of the two week process, not the actual prints that were made. As "bad" as I thought my prints were, cutting them up and giving them away by including them in the mosaic-mural, was something I at first hesitated to do. But Abraham's complete refusal to engage with the idea of physical value attached to creative production left me little choice but to give up such an idea as well. The process was liberating and made me think about what art means and how and why I value it. Throughout the workshop, Abraham also refused to accept observers' claims

they just wanted to watch—that they weren't any good at art or they didn't know how to do it. According to Abraham, “all of us are artists...it's a fundamental part of being human.”<sup>78</sup> His goal with Bambú and Bambulante is to share the joy of creating it with as many people as possible. Sometimes this requires urging people to let go of beliefs that, for Abraham, limit their enjoyment of it. Printmaking, with its long history of popular appeal and egalitarian collaboration in Mexico, is an apt tool to do this. Additionally, few Bambulante participants are familiar with printmaking techniques, and even fewer have created a print themselves. By participating in the workshop, most have thus already opened their minds to absorb new information and new points of view, facilitating the reception of new ideas about art in general.

### *La Huella Gráfica*

La Huella Gráfica, founded in 2008, is connected even more personally to the Taller Tamayo and First Generation artists than Zánate or Bambú. La Huella is the project of Lucio Santiago López, the son of well-known First Generation artist Alejandro Santiago, and Francisco Limón. Across the street from La Huella, which occupies a small building and courtyard behind an unmarked metal gate, is La Telaraña, Alejandro's sculpture garden and art space. La Huella and La Telaraña are located in Colonia Alemán, the neighborhood south of the Oaxaca city center where Alejandro grew up. Lucio and Alejandro live down the street from La Huella and La Telaraña.

Lucio explains that during the first two years, the studio has been focused mostly on producing. They haven't had time to worry about selling their work or about

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<sup>78</sup> Conversation with the author, July 20, 2010.

exhibiting. Artists come to the studio to work, and pay for the space and time either by simply paying, or by leaving part of an edition, as at Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, or La Pata (see below). La Huella had more artists currently producing work than any other studio, and Lucio says he considers the studio less of a “collective” and more of a space for printing and for working than can be used by many.

Alejandro financially helps to support the studio and sometimes uses it to make his own work. He is frequently around the studio, and his presence is important to the atmosphere of easy-going artistic eccentricity and creative experimentation. The success of Alejandro’s career, his First Generation peers, and his connections to the Oaxacan art world are part of La Huella’s identity. La Huella depends on the financial, social, and cultural support of the success of Taller Tamayo students. But the First Generation and the presence of Alejandro in daily studio operation have not served to limit the aesthetic scope of the work made in the studio. Work is not limited to a particular style or media.

The studio is well connected to the younger generation of printmakers as well. Poking through seemingly endless flat files of work made over the last few years in the studio, I stumbled upon several etchings by Daniel Berman of the studio La Pata de Perro, which is discussed below. Daniel and Lucio are friends, and Gilberto explained to me that he frequently works at La Pata as well. Although La Huella is partially managed by a First Generation artist, the very tangible social and artistic hierarchy I immediately experienced upon entering the First Generation studios is not present. Artists are relaxed, excited to talk to me and show me their space, chatting about last night’s party. At the same time, they take printmaking very seriously and convey pride and satisfaction with their lives as printmakers. Alejandro is a driving force behind this studio mentality, and

also serves to uniquely integrate the practice of younger printmakers at La Huella with successful, First Generation artists.

La Huella serves as another bridge between older studio practices and those of younger artists beginning to establish their practices in contemporary Oaxaca. It reminds us that Oaxacan artists do not exist in stylistic, historical, or social vacuums. The proportionately large number of artists that live and work within Oaxaca City's relatively small limits means that artists of all ages are constantly in dialog with one another, regardless of the medium, style, or ideology they work in or under. The rather easy coexistence of artists involved in the Oaxacan Style art market with younger Oaxacan artists who have come of age in a very different era, suggests a disconnect between actual beliefs about art held by First Generation artists and the hierarchical art-market of foreign collectors that has been receptive to their work. At the same time, some First Generation artists have integrated elite art-market mentalities into their practices—such as hierarchical studio structures—while outwardly espousing the collaborative and egalitarian principles that they practiced at the Taller Tamayo and that are part of their collective identity as Mexican printmakers. La Huella reminds us that for artists, navigating these spaces can be very complicated.

### *La Pata de Perro*

While Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, and La Huella were founded by artists with direct, personal connections to the Taller Tamayo and First Generation artists, a number of newer printmaking have also been established by artists without these direct connections. These studios I discuss below share important characteristics with Taller

Zánate, Taller Bambú, and La Huella, but are also less hierarchical and somewhat less “professional” than those discussed above.

La Pata de Perro was founded in 2005 by Uriel Marín, David Dominguez, and Angela Ramos, all graduates of the Universidad Veracruzana. They initially intended to establish a studio in Veracruz, but were attracted by Oaxaca City’s “better art scene” and greater number of like-minded artists. Marín remembers that there were a few small printmaking studios like La Pata when they arrived in Oaxaca, but says that the number of studios has risen rapidly since 2005. Although he has had little direct involvement with the Taller Tamayo, Marín cites the school for creating an atmosphere amenable to the establishment of studios like La Pata and sees it as a possible cause of Oaxaca’s lively art scene.

Since 2005, La Pata has occupied three different spaces in Oaxaca City. Today it rents several rooms in a small, one-story commercial building in La Periodista, a neighborhood to the west of the city center. Dominguez and Ramos have become less-involved with the studio since its founding, and it is now maintained and operated by Uriel and artist Daniel Berman, another graduate of the Universidad Veracruzana. Multi-media artists who work outside of printmaking as well, Uriel and Daniel are both active in the Oaxacan art scene and frequently participate in exhibitions across Mexico and internationally. Over the last three years, for example, Uriel has exhibited in Japan, Los Angeles, and Oaxaca City, and Daniel has been included in exhibitions in Oaxaca City, San Francisco, Mexico City, and London. Uriel and Daniel are founding members of



ArteCocodrilo, a website that focuses on “arte contemporánea Mexicano, Gráfica, Street Art, Cutting Edge Art, Shows, México.”<sup>79</sup>

Uriel and Daniel explain that the studio is funded primarily by the sale of work produced in it, and neither Uriel nor Daniel currently need to work elsewhere to support themselves. They invite artists to work at the studio for a set period of time, much like an artist residency, although La Pata does not offer living quarters. Artists usually come for a few months at a time, and their “residencies” often overlap. Sometimes an artist comes simply to use the studio space and equipment and sometimes they come to create collaborative works with Uriel and Daniel. Their involvement with the studio and the other artists using the space is a personal choice and varies. La Pata and the artist decide on a percentage-split of the editions that result from each project. La Pata is able to sell the works they are left with to pay rent and buy supplies, as well as support Uriel and Daniel.

La Pata has a relationship with the gallery Galería 910 in the city center due to Uriel’s friendship with the gallery owner Arturo. La Pata participates in exhibitions at this gallery once in a while, but there is no formal exhibition schedule or contract. In the summer of 2010, the gallery had several works by Uriel and Daniel on permanent display. La Pata also stores a number of works for the gallery at La Pata.

Uriel’s work has, for several years, mostly been in the form of bright, medium-size, multiple-color woodcuts,<sup>80</sup> but he has recently experimented with monotone and lithography. In *Unwashed Plates*, images of crocodiles, alligators, lizards, and dragon-

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<sup>79</sup> From the banner on the homepage of [www.artecocodrilo.com](http://www.artecocodrilo.com).

<sup>80</sup> Uriel’s *Axolotl*, discussed in Chapter 5, is an example of this type of woodcut.

like fantastical creatures are rendered with delicacy and a sense of speed, due in part to lithography's ability to transfer the expressiveness of a momentary brushstroke or pencil mark (figure 14). The figures are layered, as if they are doodles or sketches whose arrangement was unplanned. The purely white background adds to the flatness of the picture and the sense of quick execution.

A recent aquatint by Daniel is quite different (figure 15). There is a clear horizon in the image and a sense of depth. In the center of the image is a mysterious building. It is difficult to tell how far from us it is. A comic-like speech bubble points down toward the roof of the house and is filled with five exclamation points, perhaps how surprise or shock might be expressed in a comic. Short, dashed lines surrounding the building and along the horizon also reference comics. The edges have an aged, sepia-toned look. Although the scene is barren and somewhat confusing, the ultimate experience is light-hearted; the image quaint. The speech-bubble, the use of depth, and the short comic-like lines imply movement and the depiction of one specific moment in time. Uriel's work, on the other hand, does not seem rooted in time and is less structurally planned. The creatures in *Unwashed Plates* reference Chinese dragons or other 'exotic' creatures and the use of the expressive ink also calls to mind Japanese watercolors, a more "refined" subject matter than Daniel's comic book iconography. Daniel and Uriel themselves, as well as many of the artists who come to La Pata to work, often utilize very different materials and styles.



**Figure 14.** Uriel Marín, *Unwashed Plates*, 2010  
lithograph, 22 x 30 inches (56 x 76 cm)



**Figure 15.** Daniel Berman, 2010  
aquatint from a series show at the Gallery Vertigo in Mexico City

La Pata is egalitarian and collaborative. Artists are treated as equals. Life in the studio is relaxed and easy. There are no rules about work or leisure or how much time is expected to be put in by visiting artists. This contrasts sharply with the First Generation studios and the studio of Fernando Sandoval in particular. In Sandoval's studio, the "printers" are not "artists," but perform a technical skill valued differently than that being performed by Sandoval. This distinction stems from a belief that physical labor equals low, un-intellectual, and less-valuable labor and perpetuates the belief that printmakers are subordinate to highly intellectual, creative artists. At La Pata, on the other hand, artist and printer are one and the same. The artists simply choose print as their medium, and learn to manipulate the chemicals, the plate, and the inks in the way a painter might learn to paint with oils or a sculptor might learn the material differences (and adjust his or her conceptual and practical activity accordingly) between wood or metal. The entire process of printmaking is considered creative and is a unified, singular experience.

Sandoval was also concerned, in his studio, with "keeping the real world out." Abraham (of Taller Bambú) explained to me that Fernando does not like to be bothered by visitors to the studio when he is in the middle of working. It can be distracting from his work and annoying to have to explain himself to outsiders in the middle of a project. Preferring to work with a certain degree of isolation, Sandoval simply "closes" the studio or refuses to answer the door when he is working. His office is located behind the larger studio room where the presses are housed and where the printers work, allowing him his privacy even if the front studio is open to visitors. It is important to the functioning of the studio, and I believe, the success of Sandoval's art, to maintain a distinction between artist and printmaker and between life and work—to keep the idea of "artist" on a unique

and superior plane. In contrast, at La Pata and other newer studios, life and work seem quite comfortably integrated. Artists enter and leave the studio, chatting; Uriel runs out to grab some lunch and pick up some more ink; Daniel wipes ink off of his hands to show me the most recent engravings he's been working on. Uriel, Daniel, and visiting artists are allowed to fit their art-making into their own rhythm of life and integrate their daily lives into their art-making process.

### *La Culebra Gráfica*

Gilberto Delgado, the creator of La Culebra Gráfica, an even less-structured studio project, also integrates his daily life and his art practice. Gilberto established La Culebra in 2008, when he was only 21. Several years before that, he and his family moved to Oaxaca City from Tlahuitoltepec, a small town in the Mixe region of Oaxaca. Gilberto and his family maintain strong ties to the pueblo, visit regularly, and speak Mixe among each other at home. Gilberto identifies strongly as Mixe, or *ayuujk*.

After moving to Oaxaca City, Gilberto obtained a cheap printing press from a friend of his. He installed it in the living room of the modest condo he shares with his parents in southern suburb of Oaxaca City (figure 16). He taught himself to make prints and shortly after established La Culebra Gráfica. Friends use the press when they pass through Oaxaca, some more regularly than others, but unlike La Pata, La Culebra is less spatially-based and maintained by Gilberto alone. He has plans to find the studio its own space, and would like to obtain another press and attract more artists.



**Figure 16.** Printing press of La Culebra Gráfica  
Santa Cruz, Xoxicotlan, Oaxaca, August 2010

Gilberto was recently asked to participate in the “Tercer Bienal Intercontinental de Arte Indígena, Ancestral, o Milenario” in Quito, Ecuador (The Third Inter-continental Biennial of Indigenous, Ancestral, or Ancient Art), where he was awarded a prize for graphic art. He has personal connections to Mexico City, and spends a good deal of time staying with friends and exhibiting in galleries and coffee shops there.

Gilberto explains that his work is influenced by the Mixe culture he grew up among in rural Oaxaca, much like the experiences of the First Generation artists before coming to work at the Taller Tamayo. Despite this commonality, Gilberto’s works do not appear to be influenced significantly by the Oaxacan Style of the First Generation. They are less figurate, employ different color-schemes, and emphasize the material of the plate, usually wood, more than most First Generation artists do. *Footprint of the Devil* is one example (figure 17). It is not figurative or light-hearted. The swirling lines and swaths of

black ink make *Footprint of the Devil* dense and much more multi-layered than many First Generation prints.

Despite these differences, Gilberto's heritage is still very important for his identity as an artist. He is a founding member of the Kamaby Komanduk Art Collective, a group of Mixe artists who write on their website:

“With globalized information, we offer the world our artistic-cultural manifestation. Now we have the opportunity to support our Ayuujk identity, with all of its cultural symbiosis. Our migrant brothers have enriched our culture, learning from other ways of living, but we have still been able to maintain our idiosyncratic Mixe culture, with all of the Western cultural homogenization exercised since the Aztec invasion.”<sup>81</sup>

Gilberto's Mixe identity is as important to his art as to the rest of his life, and is an example of how he, like other younger printmakers, allows his art and life to overlap. The way this identity manifests itself in his work is unrelated to the way that First Generation artists framed their indigenous identities, and reminds us that “indigeneity” does not “look” one specific way, as the Oaxacan Style might imply. Representations of rural Oaxaca in the exterior have been homogeneous for many years. Gilberto's work is an interesting example of how the Mixe culture, only one of the 16 ethno-linguistic cultural groups recognized by the National Indigenous Institute in Oaxaca, can be represented by one Mixe differently than might be expected outsiders.

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<sup>81</sup> From the collective's website, <http://kamabykomanduk.blogspot.com/>, accessed fall 2010.



**Figure 17.** Gilberto Delgado, *Footprint of the Devil*  
colored woodcut, 22 x 39 inches (55 x 100cm)

La Culebra offers fewer options for collaboration between artists than other studios due to its smaller, one-man-operation. Gilberto is open and humble about his work, and like Uriel and Daniel, doesn't differentiate between artistic creation and technical skill within the printmaking process. His work is integrated into his life. Gilberto is also a good example of the innovative, DIY spirit characteristic of many younger printmakers who have established studios in the last several years. Before founding La Culebra, Gilberto had no technical artistic training, limited resources, no printing press, and no studio space, yet he obtained what he could, experimented and taught himself, and established a studio based on other criteria for existence than those of the First Generation studios. Without letting themselves become overwhelmed by



financial demands or the need for space and supplies, artists like Gilberto are finding a way to fit what they love to do into their financial, spatial, and social realities.

*Demián Flores and the TAGA*

The Taller de Gráfica Actual (TAGA) is another space dedicated specifically to printmaking in Oaxaca City. It is structured differently than the studios described above in several significant ways but, I believe, has also helped create new ways of valuing graphic art in Oaxaca City. The TAGA is a project of Demián Flores, perhaps the most well-known Oaxacan artist and printmaker who has not studied extensively at the Taller Tamayo. He is an internationally successful artist, famous for both print and non-print works, and owns two art spaces in Oaxaca City, TAGA and *La Curtiduría*. *La Curtiduría*, the host of the *MoNDAo corp. GRABADO* exhibition, is an “independent cultural space founded in 2006 whose mission is to open up a space for dialogue, interchange, and contemporary artistic production in Oaxaca” (*La Curtiduría* blog/website). *La Curtiduría* consists of a courtyard surrounded by several exhibition spaces and a number of small apartments for visiting artists.

Flores founded the TAGA in 2008. The project’s “objectives” demonstrate that like younger printmakers, Flores is interested in moving conceptions of printmaking beyond the superficial focus on the concept of the multiple in order “to acquire another idea of printmaking through auto-reflexive techniques with respect to the medium, hybrid techniques and languages, as well as to recapture the characteristics of multiplicity and

nature of the imprint.”<sup>82</sup> By using other media in combination with printmaking to form hybrid practices, printmakers can reevaluate the concept of “printmaking,” as well as rethink the theoretical implications of the multiple. Other objectives are to find new ways to distribute and present graphic art, to implement new technologies in the practice, and to rethink the possibility of communicative, editorial printmaking. TAGA offers printmaking classes taught by visiting artists and is located in the center of Oaxaca City, very near the Santo Domingo cathedral and the printmaking studio of Juan Alcázar.

Despite the fact that TAGA is organized differently than the newer printmaking studios and that Flores is no longer a physical presence in Oaxaca City—he has relocated most of his practice to Mexico City—the TAGA undoubtedly contributes to an artistic environment that makes studios like La Pata, Zánate, La Culebra, La Huella, and Bambú possible. TAGA, and Daniel Flores’ visibility in Mexico and abroad, helps make the focus on graphic art and the goal of sharing it with a wider public, more acceptable, thus inspiring young artists like Uriel Marín or Gilberto Delgado to expand and share their own projects.

Critics and curators credit Flores with cleverly combining the contradictions of his indigenous heritage and the issues of the modern, globalized world. Originally from Juchitán, but having spent some of his formative high school years in Mexico City, Flores refers to himself as Juchilango: both Juchiteco—a person from Juchitán—and Chilango—a person from Mexico City. Represented by his Juchilango identity, critics see in Flores’ work contrasts between urban and rural, modern and traditional, the Mexican and the global. Unlike the work of many First Generation artists, Flores manages to

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<sup>82</sup> TAGA blog/website, accessed spring 2010.

combine elements of a mythologized past with contemporary issues—both of which inform his identity. An LA Times art critic writes that Flores “has developed an artistic sensibility that moves fluidly between pre-Hispanic and modern, rural and urban, indigenous cosmology and Madison Avenue, Mexican culture and what Mexicans refer to as “North American” culture -- north, that is, of the Rio Grande” and that he feels “at home in more than one aesthetic universe at the same time.”<sup>83</sup> For example, Flores combines common pop-culture icons like Mexico’s Lucha Libre and baseball, a popular sport in Juchitán that also has connections to the pre-Colombian era. In *Playbol!*, a 2004 exhibition of Flores works at the Casa Lamm in Mexico City, baseball served not only as a symbol of contemporary vernacular Oaxacan culture, but simultaneously represented colonialism in its reference to the ‘pelota Mixteca,’ a pre-colonial ball game played in the Oaxaca region.<sup>84</sup> In the 2009 exhibition *Self-Defense* held at Santa Monica’s Latin American Masters gallery, “Flores uses the spectacle of controlled violence, exemplified by our contemporary fascination with sports, as a means of examining the convergence of ancestral and contemporary identity.”<sup>85</sup> In this exhibition, controlled violence serves as a link between the past and the present, and symbolizes the struggle between them that plays an active role in shaping identity. The works in the exhibition juxtapose past and present in unusual ways that force viewers to confront deeply-held cultural assumptions, both using the past to reframe the present, and the present to reframe the past.

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<sup>83</sup> Reed Johnson, “Conflict Resolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 2006, Arts Section.

<sup>84</sup> Yanireth Israde, “Demían Flores assume el beisbol como reflejo de la identidad,” *La Jornada*, April 16, 2003.

<sup>85</sup> Latin American Masters Gallery, *Self-Defense* press release.

The continuous integration of past and present that we all consciously and unconsciously do, and that is seen in Flores' work, might be more difficult to find in Oaxacan Style works by Martinez, Flores, Morales, Fuentes, (figures 3-6) or other First Generation artists. Thus Flores has proposed a new way of representing the past in conjunction with the present, and of creating a different authentic Oaxacan aesthetic, valid on terms different than that of the Oaxacan Style.

The artists involved in La Pata, Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Culebra, and La Huella, also integrate the past into their practices in new ways, and make a case for a different authentic Oaxacan aesthetic. Like Demián, they rebel against an expectation that their art, based on their indigenous, Oaxacan, or Mexican identity, should look a certain way. "Demián understands the marvel of local culture, but he also knows that it is sometimes fed by foreign elements, forces from outside, that have been important for his own imagination...elements that very few Juchiteco artists take seriously, artists for whom art comes from a past time and the collective imagination."<sup>86</sup> Art in Juchitán that did not support an established collective identity was not "taken seriously" by other artists. Likewise, young graphic artists in Oaxaca City, despite the risk of not being taken seriously as authentic artists, do not feed into the collective artistic identity of the Oaxacan Style. Like Flores and his work, these artists look for new ways to express their cultural histories and contemporary realities in ways that are meaningful to them.

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The studios discussed above, with the exception of the TAGA, can be separated into three groups based on the nature of their relationship to the Taller Tamayo and the

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<sup>86</sup> José Manuel Springer, "Presentación," in *Cambio de Piel* (Mexico City: Galería Quetzalli, 2001), 8.

First Generation artists which have both played powerful roles in shaping artistic authenticity in Oaxaca today. The egalitarianism and experimental teaching style of the Taller Tamayo is important, and is cited by several of the printmakers mentioned above as the inspiration for the mentality or structure of their own studio. But I do not want to imply that the hierarchical studio structure employed by First Generation artists and also adopted in less pronounced ways by newer printmaking studios, is something taken directly from their experience as Taller Tamayo students. Instead it was a way of thinking that developed as they experienced success in markets dominated by Western hierarchical concepts of fine art. These successful careers were partially a result of their experience as Taller Tamayo students, and in this sense, the Taller Tamayo indirectly led to ways of thinking that influenced the hierarchical studio structures. But the spirit of the Taller Tamayo itself was actually quite antithetical to such ideas, created to be an alternative to the seemingly arbitrary hierarchies Donís became frustrated with at the UABJO's School of Fine Arts. Thus the Taller Tamayo both serves as an inspiration to the collaborative and egalitarian nature of new printmaking studios and young Oaxacan printmakers, but also created artists whose work was well received in foreign markets with different ideas about art. These ideas about art were absorbed and internalized to various degrees by the artists themselves, and who have now integrated these ideas into their practices.

Juan Alcázar, Fernando Sandoval, and Enrique Flores are three First Generation artists whose successful careers grew out of their experience at the Taller Tamayo and whose studios exhibit some ideas that might be in opposition to the original Taller Tamayo spirit. All three, once they had achieved a certain degree of success, were able to establish studios dedicated specifically to printing their own graphic work, reproducing

popular works of theirs in other media, and printing the works of other artists. While Taller Alcázar, Taller Sandoval, and Taller Flores do not operate in identical manners, similarities include (1) a physical hierarchy in which the studios employ assistants or apprentices to perform the technical duties of printmaking; (2) a symbolic hierarchy in which the idea of an intellectually and artistically revered *Maestro* respected for his or her age and artistic talent is preserved; and (3) the production of work by the artists themselves in a style relatively unchanged from that which they employed at the beginning of their careers.

Studios established in the last decade that have direct connections to the Taller Tamayo such as Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, and La Huella Gráfica, draw on aspects of the First Generation studio structures, but also reject aspects of them. Zánate and Bambú maintain a somewhat hierarchical studio structure, but offer their employees or apprentices artistic authority and promote collaboration. Lorena produces work in the Oaxacan Style but she and Zánate also support artistic experimentation, and neither style is valued over the other. Bambú attempts to expand the reach of printmaking and how it is understood by the general public, but invites well-known artists to the studio to print for financial reasons. La Huella Gráfica depends on the financial support of a successful First Generation artist, and undoubtedly benefits from his networks of artists and collectors, but also operates on an informal, collaborative, and egalitarian structure.

Finally, La Pata de Perro and La Culebra Gráfica, have no formal ties to the Taller Tamayo or First Generation artists, although they suggest their success as studios is partially due to the unique, receptive atmosphere for art and graphic art in Oaxaca City created by the Taller Tamayo and the success of its graduates. Demián Flores' TAGA

doesn't fit easily into any of these categories, but helps illustrate how contemporary printmakers in Oaxaca City express in their work identities shaped by the past as well as the present in order to establish a new, authentically Oaxacan aesthetic.

#### **4. Mexican Artistic Authenticity: From *Lo Mexicano* to *Los Grupos***

I will now consider cultural and historical factors that have established various artistic authenticities for Mexican and Oaxacan printmaking. Since the revolution, the Mexican state and Mexican intellectuals have established value systems for Mexican visual arts. These systems dictated the visual characteristics of a Mexican aesthetic, the social/educational purposes art should serve, the role of the artist in society, and the relationship that art should have with the state and the ideological space of the nation. Printmaking was an appropriate medium for promoting revolutionary values and in the post-revolutionary period was given very specific criteria for what would be considered valuable printmaking. The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw drastic changes in the relationships between the state, European-descended elite intellectuals, cultural production, and aesthetics within changing conceptions of Mexico and *lo mexicano*. Mexican printmakers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century navigated the ideological and aesthetic frameworks constructed by these relationships in ways that made sense to their own unique realities, challenging state ideologies in some ways, and internalizing them in others, and contemporary Oaxacan printmakers are no exception. Today the Mexican state, intellectuals, and Mexican cultural production exist in ambiguous tension. Attempts at democratic reform in Mexico ask us to consider how political transitions might affect relationships between the state, intellectuals, and cultural production under conditions of globalization and high-speed communication in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Mexico. It is important to understand how the unique political and social reality of Oaxacan artists influences their conceptions of artistic authenticity. Examining how they challenge and rethink such



conceptions sheds light on possibilities for cultural production in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Mexico and the rethinking of the relationship between democracy and the visual arts.

### *A Visual Mexicanidad*

Mexico in 1921 was still reeling from the devastating effects of the revolution. Nearly ten percent of the population had been killed or fled the country and the new nation imagined by the revolutionaries was far from a reality. The elite ruling class needed to unite the vastly diverse, impoverished, and fragmented people. They created a new Mexican nationalism based on a shared past, a modern, *mestizo* present, and a belief in the ideals that had supposedly underlain the revolution. José Vasconcelos, elected Secretary of Education in 1921, became the post-revolutionary government's "chief of propaganda"<sup>87</sup> and played a key role in forging this new conceptual and visual language of *Mexicanidad*. Vasconcelos drew from his own experiences growing up in the Texan borderlands and on the thinking of anthropologist Miguel Gamio to champion the idea of *mestizaje*. In their "mythohistory of mestizaje,"<sup>88</sup> Vasconcelos and Gamio believed that pre-Colombian societies mixed with European blood created a superior Mexican race.

Scholars have stressed the important part played by intellectuals in the creation of modern nationalism.<sup>89</sup> The ideas of Vasconcelos and Gamio, as well as other Mexican intellectuals of the period, were intertwined with their understanding of the Porfiriato, their experiences of the Mexican revolution, and the collective memories they shared

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<sup>87</sup> Wright-Rios, "Making Art and Revolution: The Prints, Politics, and History in Mexico's *Taller de Gráfica Popular*, 1937-1940," 20.

<sup>88</sup> Alonso, "Conforming Disconformity," 463.

<sup>89</sup> See Gramsci 1971, Chatterjee 1986, Hobsbawm 1990, and Lomnitz 2001. Taken from Lomnitz and Boyer's extensive literature review of intellectuals in anthropology done in *Intellectuals and Nationalism: Anthropological Engagements*.

with other intellectuals. They used rationalism to legitimize the meanings of the revolution and the post-revolutionary state that emerged afterwards. Boyer and Lomnitz explain that “The nation is a kind of communitarian relation that has framed, justified, or been directly performed in the work of scientists, planners, and organic intellectuals who are attached to emerging social movements, Vasconcelos and Gamio were recruited by the state to demonstrate the enlightened,”<sup>90</sup> rational philosophies behind the revolution and the new Mexican state and legitimize their new Mexican aesthetic.

The *Exhibition of Popular Arts* was an event that demonstrates how elite intellectuals collaborated with the state to construct a new *mexicanidad*. Like the *Noche Mexicana* discussed in Chapter 1, The *Exhibition of Popular Arts* was a centennial celebration event that sought to establish the terms, limits, and visual motifs of the new *mexicanidad*. Organizers Jorge Enciso and Roberto Montenegro envisioned the exhibition as a comprehensive display of the country’s most impressive indigenous crafts that would demonstrate a cohesive national aesthetic and support the nationalist project. Pulling together such a collection provided an unexpected challenge, as many of the state governors who they had to rely on to supply them with the craft objects had different ideas about what sorts of objects were worth including in the exhibition. Problems arose because of “gaps that emerged between his [Montenegro’s] own modernist validation of authenticity, the collective subconscious, and the modern cultural nation, and local prejudice against “backward” Indians and their “curiosities.””<sup>91</sup> Others did not yet share

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<sup>90</sup> Dominic Boyer and Claudio Lomnitz, “Intellectuals and Nationalism: Anthropological Engagements,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005):113.

<sup>91</sup> López, “The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts,” 32.

an understanding that indigenous crafts were to be considered valuable art and did not share a common understanding of *lo mexicano*.

The final exhibition was very well received. It was attended by people from all social classes and taught visitors that not only were indigenous crafts valuable representations of *mexicanidad*, they were also valuable in their aesthetic and cultural unity.<sup>92</sup> Artist Dr. Atl wrote the essay for the exhibition catalog. The pivotal text was a “thesis on race, authenticity, and post-revolutionary populist nationalism”<sup>93</sup> in which he argued that authentic Mexican art was traditional, spontaneous, and made by hand. The innocent, naïve, and non-European creators of this art were given no agency by Atl; they simply expressed a shared “deep Mexican spiritual subconscious.”<sup>94</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries elites with European ideas about artistic value had ignored indigenous crafts, but “After the Mexican Revolution in the first part of the twentieth century, however, intellectuals and politicians began to praise and publicize popular (usually Indian) arts and crafts.”<sup>95</sup> The “political ethnification” of indigenous crafts was part of the post-revolutionary project<sup>96</sup> and artists and intellectuals became interested in “the study and preservation of the authentic *artesanías*....”<sup>97</sup> Elites adapted their previous views of indigenous crafts and culture in support of the nationalist project, instead promoting their appreciation and preservation.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>95</sup> Chibnik, “Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art,” 498.

<sup>96</sup> Scott Cook, “B. Traven and the Paradox of Artisanal Production in Capitalism: Traven’s Oaxaca Tale in Economic Anthropological Perspective,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* vol. 11 no. 1 (1995): 105.

<sup>97</sup> Azuela, “Oaxaca: savia artística,” 169.

The *Exhibition of Popular Arts* demonstrates how this “postrevolutionary aesthetic statism”<sup>98</sup> that would dominate Mexican art and culture for nearly half a century was created in the years immediately following the revolution and how the state and state-aligned intellectuals in the new Mexican nation idealized aspects of indigenous culture in ways that were beneficial to their vision of modern Mexico. Elite intellectuals, recently returned from Europe, were “allied with the state” and “forged nationalist aesthetics and cultural criteria for reassessing the nature and value of art, the meaning of the nation, and the significance of indigenosity.”<sup>99</sup> Events like The Exhibition of Popular Arts were a way for the new regime to establish an acceptable visual language for representing the new nation.

Vasconcelos’ aggressive cultural policies were instrumental in establishing these aesthetic criteria throughout the country. He understood the potential power of a common visual national aesthetic among a largely illiterate population, and saw in muralism an effective and efficient tool. Artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros were commissioned to cover the walls of public (and not so public) buildings with romanticized images of Mexican history in a social-realist style.

For example, Rivera’s *The Legend of Quetzalcoatl* (figure 18) is one section of a much larger mural painted in the staircase at the National Palace in Mexico City that depicts the history of Mexico. *The Legend of Quetzalcoatl* represents Mexico’s pre-Columbian history in an idealized, idyllic way. The people are dressed in clean, white garments. There appears to be little conflict, and the sun shines brightly from a clear blue

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<sup>98</sup> Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity,” 467.

<sup>99</sup> López, “The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts,” 40.

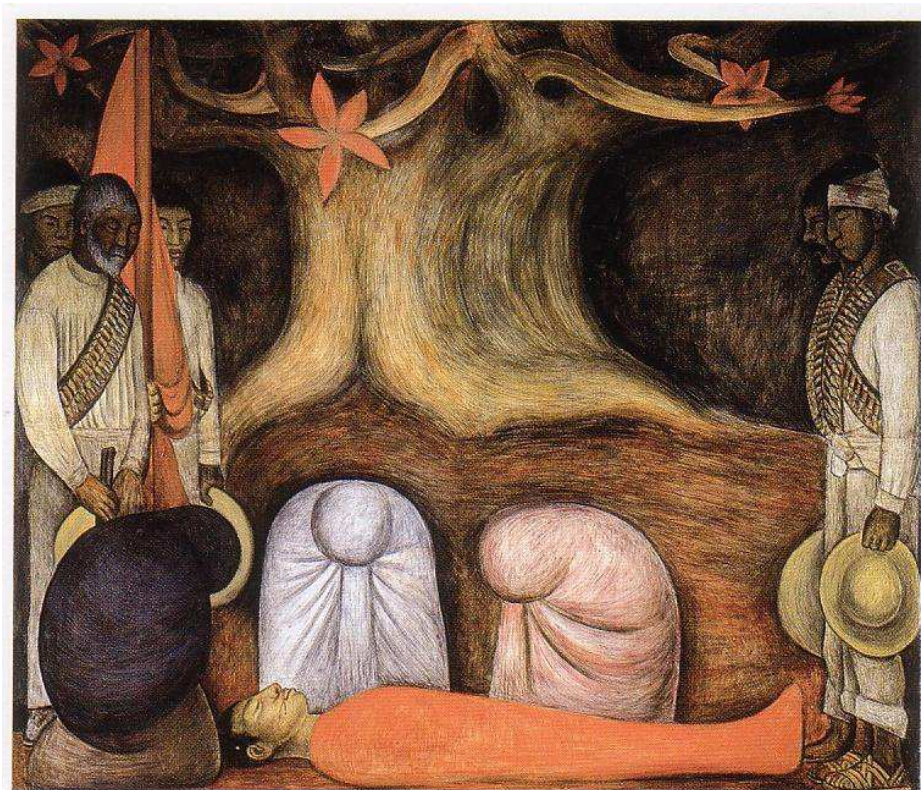
sky. To one side, a group of people harvest *maíz* and prepare it to be eaten. In the center, directly below the sun and the Aztec temple of the Moon, sits a white-skinned Hernán Cortéz. This not only paints pre-Colombian Aztecs as primitive and naïve, but legitimizes European colonization by depicting the white man as a spiritual leader surrounded by hard-working, loin-cloth-clad Indians.



**Figure 18.** Diego Rivera, *The Legend Of Quetzalcoatl*, 1929  
fresco in the National Palace, Mexico City

In *Revolution—Germination* (figure 19), Rivera commemorates those who fought in the revolution and the suffering their sacrifices created for loved ones. But he also relates their sacrifices to the continuous circle of life in which birth and death are given spiritual meaning as part of a much larger system. The dead soldier is placed underneath a flowering tree, symbolizing the eventual decomposition of his body to earth which will

feed the tree and allow it to continue germinating for many years. The faceless mourners symbolize the noble suffering of the humble working classes of Mexico which has allowed the glorious new, modern nation Mexican nation forged in their name, to emerge.



**Figure 19.** Diego Rivera, *Revolution – Germination*, 1926  
fresco in the chapel at the Autonomous University of Chapingo

In such a way, “the work of artists such as Posada, Siqueiros, Rivera, and Orozco helped construct the shared meanings and norms that underlay the hegemony of the historic bloc which consolidated power after the Mexican Revolution.”<sup>100</sup> Vasconcelos, from an elite, intellectual position within the state, powerfully dictated an aesthetic value system and a cultural ideology that allowed little possibility for contention from working-class or rural Mexican citizens. The Mexican revolution was a heroic triumph of the

<sup>100</sup> Edward J. McCaughan, “Gender, Sexuality, and Nation in the Art of Mexican Social Movements,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* vol. 3 no. 1 (2002): 100.

popular masses and pre-Colonial history (separate from present-day indigenous peoples) was idyllic. The muralists expressed this ideology in the form and content of their murals. The visibility of the murals created a visual language that expressed the new Mexican nation. Their world also emphasized that spreading the ideals of the new nation in a clear, social-realist style was the ultimate responsibility of authentic art. Thus the post-revolutionary nationalism determined conceptions of public and political art and was “externally and internally epitomized in and by muralism and the representational sedimentation of *mestizaje*”.<sup>101</sup>

### *Recuperating Posada*

As Vasconcelos and the muralists joined forces and aligned ideologies, the muralists, taking their cue from French immigrant and artist Jean Charlot, recuperated printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and claimed him as their mentor. Charlot instigated a printmaking revival—particularly of woodcut—among artists and art students in Mexico in the early decades of the twentieth century, and was the first to frame Posada as a Mexican revolutionary hero and precursor to the mural movement.<sup>102</sup>

Born in 1852 in the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, Posada studied at the Municipal Academy of Drawing and in 1868 began an apprenticeship in the lithography studio of Trinidad Pedroza. Pedroza was a vocal critic of corrupt local politics and disagreed with the Mexican government’s international policies. Some of Posada’s first prints appeared in Pedroza’s political magazine *El Jicote*. The magazine was eventually

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<sup>101</sup> Amy Sara Carroll, “A critical regionalism: Mexico's Performative Range-of-Motion in Madre por un día & the Rodríguez/Felipe Wedding,” *e-misférica* vol 2 no. 2 (2205): 1.

<sup>102</sup> Sofía Rosales in “The Printmaking Revival,” and Ilan Stavans in “Posada, Lamponer.”

cancelled, and Pedroza and Posada were forced to flee political persecution in Aguascalientes when Posada was only 19. Posada eventually made his way to Mexico City, where he found employment with the printer Antonio Vanegas Arroyo through friend and fellow printmaker Manuel Manilla. The workshop's audience was the lower-class urban residents of Mexico City, and Arroyo had Posada draw and print what would sell—broadsheets illustrating crime stories, news events, religious paraphernalia, and event posters. Posada would produce the vast majority of his work at Arroyo's studio until his death in 1913.

Posada died poor and unknown, but today has been called the “spokesman for Mexico’s soul”<sup>103</sup> and “The Man Who Portrayed an Epoch.”<sup>104</sup> The reason for such a drastic change lies in his adoption and interpretation by artists such as Charlot, Rivera, and Siqueiros and the ambitious restructuring of Mexican national identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Like murals, Posada’s prints had been created for non-elite audiences, embracing an easily-understood visual language that referenced popular culture. *Dance of the Dead* depicts *calaveras* in common skirts, wide-brimmed hats, and serapes dancing and drinking in a working-class saloon (figure 20). Again like muralism, printmaking was (more) cheaply and easily disseminated and thus could be an effective tool to inform and educate. “The popular spirit of Posada’s art seemed to dovetail nicely with the agenda of the burgeoning mural movement... Posada seemed to stand, as the revolution itself had, for values that were native and Mexican and popular over those that were foreign and

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<sup>103</sup> Stavans, “Posada, Lamponer,” 59.

<sup>104</sup> The title of Antonio Rodriguez’s biography of Posada.



elitist.”<sup>105</sup> Rivera and Orozco “were so enchanted with his artistic spirit that they embraced him as their master.”<sup>106</sup> Recognizing Posada as a hero of Mexican populism and voice of the masses was a perfect tool for legitimizing the revolution, establishing printmaking as an acceptable art practice that fulfilled the demands put forth by muralism and the post-revolutionary government, and emphasizing the popular imagery employed by Posada as representative of the “real” Mexico.



**Figure 20.** José Guadalupe Posada, *Dance of the Dead* woodcut

The reframing of Posada as a Mexican revolutionary hero created the belief that Posada was staunchly political, anti-authoritarian, critical of the Porfiriato, and supported the revolution of the disenfranchised masses. Frank and others suggest this may not have exactly been the case, and the relationship between the general population, the Arroyo print shop, Posada’s political position, and the government was complicated and ambiguous. Frank argues that “in their attempts to speak both to and for that group [the

<sup>105</sup> Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets: Mexican Popular Imagery, 1890-1910*, (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 230.

<sup>106</sup> Stavans, “Posada, Lamponer,” 69.

urban working-classes of Mexico City], Vanegas, Arroyo, and Posada stood on such ledges as the dictatorship granted them” and avoided political subjects: “...the shop trod a fine line, expressing not opposition to the government, but a sort of alienation from it which at times grew obvious.”<sup>107</sup> The shop managed to neither support nor criticize Díaz’s government. Arroyo’s son claims that Díaz and Arroyo were acquaintances, even friends.<sup>108</sup> If this is the case, Arroyo may have felt obliged to not paint the regime in a negative light or to refrain from political subjects at all, and may explain the studio’s neglect of explicit political statements. It would also detract from the view of Posada as a radical, popular voice denouncing repression of the masses, or at least suggest that he managed to keep such sentiments in check in the work he did at the Arroyo studio.

Posada is contradictory in other ways as well. He both drew on traditional Mexican culture in order to appeal to non-elite Mexicans, but was also an early practitioner of the modern concept of mass-media. His prints were ultimately meant to communicate with urban, working-class residents of Mexico City, but he ironically and satirically manipulated visual forms to make larger political and social statements. Posada pushed the limits of the practice of commercial printmaking at that time. He likely did not see himself as an “artist” in the modern, Western sense of the term, but was nonetheless using imagery in subtle ways that few other printers, if any, had done before. His artistic independence from the state and his innovative use of mass media is important and had implications for graphic art production in Mexico later in the century.

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<sup>107</sup> Frank, *Posada's Broadshets*, 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Regardless of Posada's status as artist, printmaker, or the first manipulator of mass media, the above arguments, combined with scarce bibliographic data available about Posada's life and political beliefs, illustrate how the muralists proactively used Posada's work to their own ends. Posada helped them legitimize their claim that authentic Mexican art should be figurative, easy to read, didactic, and should educate, inspire, and exalt the revolution and the Mexican "raza cósmica." While scholars will likely never be able to understand exactly how Posada viewed his own work, the way he was authenticated by artists such as Charlot, Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco highlights how Posada's work and legacy were manipulated to support the post-revolutionary government's agenda.

### *The Taller de Gráfica Popular*

The emergence of the Popular Graphics Studio (TGP) in 1937 further solidified the acceptance of Posada as "the spokesman of Mexico's soul." It also reinforced the role Mexican printmaking would be expected to play and the relationship it would have with the state in the decades to come. Founded by a group of left-wing artist-activists, the TGP was reconstructed out of the remains of the League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (LEAR), which had been undermined by political bureaucracy and its close and often contradictory relationship to the state. This ironically would also be a factor in the TGP's eventual decline. The TGP was a staunch supporter of the post-revolutionary project and remained aligned with the state throughout its existence. Few TGP artists were able to

support themselves solely through their work at the TGP, and many were employed by the state as teachers.”<sup>109</sup>

Like the muralists, the TGP artists also claimed to be the inheritors of Posada’s “revolutionary” art, and created work that was anti-elitist, collaborative, and depicted the Mexican revolution and humble working people. “The goal of the TGP was to make revolutionary art for the masses, to educate them, to be their political guide, to disseminate "ideological propaganda," and to outmode bourgeois, individualist art,” explains Carmen Boullosa.<sup>110</sup> Elena Poniatowska writes that the “genius” of Leopoldo Méndez, co-founder and most visible member of the cooperative, along “with the Genius of Posada...can only be compared to that of José Clemente Orozco...like Posada, [Méndez] decided that the graphic messages in flyers, posters, newspapers, would be the best way to reach the common and active Mexican....”<sup>111</sup>

Many TGP works contained powerful political messages, such as José Escobedo’s *How to Combat Fascism*, an advertisement for a lecture for a hosted by Antifascist German Culture League (figure 21). Red used in the poster is not only the color of the Communist Party, but a fiery, passionate, eye-catching color. The message is simple and easy to read, and the figures are outlined with soft, edges and warm chiaroscuro-like effects, inviting a friendly connection with them. They walk in stride with linked arms, toward the viewer, representing the “revolutionary triumvirate of worker peasant and

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<sup>109</sup> Jerald Green, “Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular,” *Latin American Art* vol. 4 no. 2 (1992): 67.

<sup>110</sup> Carmen Boullosa, “Their Boots Were Made for Walking: El Taller de Gráfica Popular,” *Words Without Borders*, accessed online April 2010, <http://wordswithoutborders.org>, 2008.

<sup>111</sup> Elena Poniatowski, “Cien Anos de Vida,” *La Jornada*, May 23, 2002, accessed online, [http://www.lainsignia.org/2002/mayo/cul\\_059.htm](http://www.lainsignia.org/2002/mayo/cul_059.htm).

soldier.”<sup>112</sup> The lecture was held in the Palace of Fine Arts, a building decorated with murals by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco, which would create a continual visual and conceptual link between the muralists and the leftist, popular, post-revolutionary project the TGP continued to promote.



**Figure 21.** José Escobedo, *Fascismo: 8<sup>th</sup> Lecture: Como Combatir El Fascismo*, 1939 lithograph, 16.75 x 18.5 inches (42.5 x 47 cm) Philadelphia Museum Of Art.

*Better Corn Seeds Will Secure Your Future*, by an unidentified TGP artist from 1950 (figure 22), is typical of the more commonly used linocut within the TGP and of the expressive use of black and white to imply intense movement and emotion. The farmer uses his bare hands to shuck the corn, his tired eyes half-closed. Behind him we see small structures, possibly storage silos, with thatched roofs, framed by the graceful arc of a leaf from another corn plant. It is difficult to separate the sinuous lines of the farmer from

<sup>112</sup> James Weschler, *Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts, 1920-1950* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006), 68.

those of the corn or the background, effectively integrating the farmer with his humble surroundings. The poster is sympathetic to the needs of farmers and rural workers, and urges the viewer to support the Corn Commission.



Figure 22. Unidentified TGP artist, *Better Corn Seeds Will Secure Your Future*, 1950  
linocut

Wright-Rios argues that the TGP is a way to examine the political left's relationship to the post-revolutionary Mexican government in the years after the revolution. Despite its support of the nationalist project and alignment with the state, the TGP also critiqued the mural movement for failing to achieve its ultimate goal—to create art for the people—by becoming too controlled by the state. Much of the legitimacy of the TGP is derived from their use of political propaganda to serve leftist aims and speak

for the masses. The subject matter they used—revolutionary figures, rural and working-class people, contemporary social and political events—were the iconography of the true, authentic Mexico. “The TGP can be seen as a prolongation of the revolutionary ideals of the 1920s that held ordinary people to be the natural consumers of art”<sup>113</sup> and helped “democratize the image.”<sup>114</sup> They made prints that appealed visually to all classes of Mexican society and were cheap enough that even members of the working class could afford them.

By continuing to reference Posada and, like the muralists, claiming him as their artistic and ideological mentor, the TGP further reinforced an aesthetic of *lo Mexicano*, particularly as expressed through printmaking, and laid out by Vasconcelos’ post-revolutionary project and the muralist movement. Like both Posada and the muralists, the TGP artists were also talented artistic innovators that visually represented new ways of relating cultural production and the state that appealed aesthetically and emotionally to all classes of Mexican society. The TGP linked left-wing political movements to art, and promoted the idea that art can and should serve social liberation causes through political positioning. Ultimately, the TGP inherited a certain set of values that equated figurative, romanticized representations of Mexico and the working classes of Mexico with artistic authenticity and value. The TGP was as profoundly impacting as the mural movement<sup>115</sup> and its adherence to a particular set of values likewise had important implications for the future of Mexican printmaking.

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<sup>113</sup> Sofia Rosales, “The Printmaking Revival,” in *Mexican Modern Art 1900-1950* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1999), 131.

<sup>114</sup> Rondán, “Los Lenguajes de la Madera: Oswaldo Ramírez,” 3.

<sup>115</sup> Tíbol, cited by Rondán in “Los Lenguajes de la Madera: Oswaldo Ramírez,” 3.

*La Ruptura and The Cactus Curtain*

The dominance of the post-revolutionary *mexicanidad* over other aesthetic forms of expression was partially dependent on the alignment of intellectuals with the state. Issues of cosmopolitanism versus the hegemony the Mexican state were gaining attention as the century progressed. By the 1950s and 1960s, some of these issues had reached a critical point, and intellectuals who believed in international cosmopolitanism increasingly found themselves at odds with state policies. The emergence of *La Ruptura*, an artistic movement that broke with systems of artistic authenticity established after the revolution, was a direct result of the disintegration of traditional relationships between the Mexican state and intellectuals. Artistically and culturally, *Ruptura* artists decried what they saw as a state suppression of free artistic expression. They called for an integration of international, cosmopolitan values and various artistic styles they felt had been denied value by the state in order to assert control over a specific post-revolutionary nationalism.

José Luis Cuevas, a leader of *La Ruptura*, published an essay in 1959 called *The Cactus Curtain*, in which he claimed that all his life he had fought against conformity to the social-realist, pro-Mexico style of the muralists. He had “fought...against vulgarity and mediocrity. Against superficiality and conformity.”<sup>116</sup> As a student, Cuevas never had access to art being produced in other parts of the world and was taught the social realist style of art he learned in school was the only style. Artists who wanted to work in a different style were intimidated and afraid to speak up against the dominance of the

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<sup>116</sup> José Luis Cuevas, “The Cactus Curtain,” in *Readings in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. Patrick Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 192.



state-sponsored, visual *mexicanidad*. They were denied entrance to schools and couldn't find jobs.

The dominance of the state-sponsored style, Cuevas felt, was hypocritical. Muralism and the work of the TGP claimed to be art for the people, but in fact, most of those people never saw the murals nor were ever taught to appreciate them. In the essay, Cuevas creates a semi-autobiographical figure named Juan who has a common, lower-class father. "Juan's father was of the people, and it is for him and those like him that walls have been painted in Mexico for thirty years...But all of the techniques have been useless. Juan's father and...everyone else of his class have never seen a single mural. Or if they have, they have agreed with the janitor of the building that it is terrible."<sup>117</sup> Simply because the Muralists and their supporters claimed that the movement liberated, empowered, or educated the Mexican masses did not mean that it actually did, or that the masses responded in ways the elites had expected.

Cuevas, though, has been described as a fiery personality who suffered from the trauma of a particularly domineering father.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps muralism and its hypocritical claims offered Cuevas a scapegoat for this failed relationship. Cuevas was also writing nearly thirty years after the height of the muralist movement, at a time when Mexican muralism had come to represent something different than it did in the 1920s and 1930s. Critics such as Carlos Monsiváis, Shifra Goldman explains, have argued that Cuevas' *Cactus Curtain* was published not only to critique dominant cultural agendas, but to make himself known. "In order to guarantee himself public attention...Cuevas had to manifest

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>118</sup> Beth Rosenblum, lecture, UC San Diego, April 27, 2010.

arrogance... .”<sup>119</sup> Cuevas’s patron Carillo Gil has said “I admit that Cuevas’ expansive and polemical temperament and his indiscriminate aggressiveness have contributed greatly to his being a well known and controversial personality in our country and in the rest of America....”<sup>120</sup> Regardless of Cuevas’ intentions, the lack of international art available to him as an art student and feelings of a need to conform to a certain style in order to succeed as a student and secure a job, even if dramatized, are still valuable for understanding the effects of the post-revolutionary visual nationalistic project on art in Mexico thirty years after the first murals had been painted. Cuevas and *La Ruptura* promoted a new system for evaluating artistic authenticity in which the Mexican artist was a cosmopolitan member of the modern world. Art’s purpose, according to *La Ruptura*, was, rather than conveying a message, to express individual experiences in ways that focused on formal, aesthetic qualities and personal expression.

Rufino Tamayo was a Oaxacan-born artist who, like Cuevas, never participated in the visual nationalism espoused by the state. As a young man, Tamayo had studied art at the elite Academy of San Carlos and had been nominated by fellow Oaxacan José Vasconcelos to serve as the head of the Department of Ethnographic Drawing at the National Anthropology Museum in Mexico City—a position that intimately involved him in the inner workings of the new government’s artistic programs and through which he was able to develop relationships with Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco. He held the position from 1921 until 1926, when he decided to leave for New York and disassociate himself with the artistic production happening in Mexico. For Tamayo, aesthetic

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<sup>119</sup> Shifra Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time Of Change* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 111.

<sup>120</sup> Carillo Gil, cited in Goldman, *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time Of Change*, 111.

considerations were more important than expressing political or social issues. He “asserted artistic independence from the confines of Mexican muralism. He often criticized their prescriptive style, claiming that the muralists had become so preoccupied with presenting classically “Mexican” scenes that they were more engaged with the picturesque than with important content.”<sup>121</sup> We can speculate on the personal and political reasons Tamayo may have felt inclined to leave Mexico. Although he would visit periodically between 1926 and 1948, when he returned permanently, his rise to international artistic fame happened while he was living and working in New York.

In 1948, the values espoused by the post-revolutionary artistic project were beginning to wear thin, and Tamayo returned to Mexico. He quickly became a leader of *La Ruptura* with Cuevas and Manuel Felguérez (McCaughan 104).<sup>122</sup> One of the first Oaxacan artists to have achieved international fame and one with a fiercely independent personality, he is often cited as being a key factor in the development of a self-conscious Oaxacan artistic identity and independent spirit. His cosmopolitanism and individualism, not to mention financial success, and belief that art should be expressive and aesthetically motivated, as opposed to didactic, gave credence to the ideals of *La Ruptura* and legitimized his disengagement from the muralist movement. Thus he helped pave the way for new concepts of art in Mexico to develop in the 50s and 60s, and led to the formation of the Taller Tamayo, which would have serious consequences for Oaxacan art specifically.

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<sup>121</sup> Lucie-Smith, *Latin American Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 112, cited in Congdon and Hallmark, eds., *Artists from Latin American Cultures: A Biographical Dictionary*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 264.

<sup>122</sup> McCaughan, “Gender, Sexuality, and Nation in the Art of Mexican Social Movements,” 104.

### *1968 Propaganda Brigades*

The 1960s saw graphic art again used as a powerful tool to inform the masses in a way that would seriously reconfigure traditional state-intellectual and state-culture relationships in Mexico. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1960 led to state introspection and a celebration of traditional, post-revolutionary nationalism. A general increase in government nationalism led to the limiting of some forms of cultural expression. The Díaz Ordaz regime that entered in 1964 conflicted more directly and openly with the intelligentsia than previous regimes and the long-standing “synergy” between the state and intellectuals began to disintegrate. The 1968 massacre at Tlateloco became a “turning point in the Mexican psyche”<sup>123</sup> and demonstrated that the state was clearly not upholding the revolutionary values it had stood on since the end of the revolution. Instead it had become a tool of repression. State legitimacy, for many, was forever weakened, if not completely destroyed.

The student movement of 1968 that culminated in the tragic Tlateloco massacre asked artists and printmakers to design propaganda materials that would draw attention and could be produced cheaply and quickly (figures 23 and 24). The posters and flyers were designed to be easily attached to busses, walls, building, and lampposts, and drew on recognizable imagery from Mexico’s graphic history:

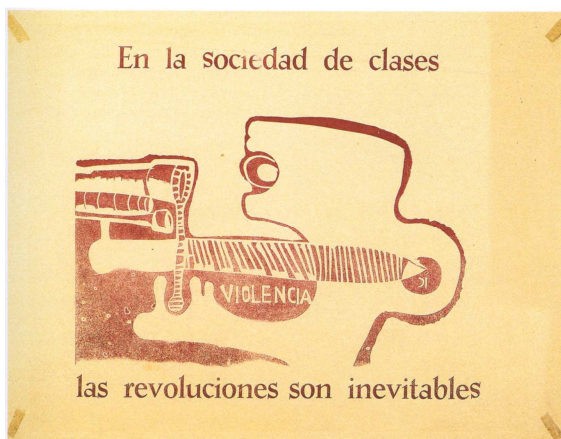
“These were anonymous images, produced collectively with a pragmatic goals: disseminating the ideas and objectives behind the protests...the activists took recourse to various techniques...preferring the cheapest and quickest meant, which also encouraged experimentation and innovation. The student’s graphic styles were varied, taking typography and imagery

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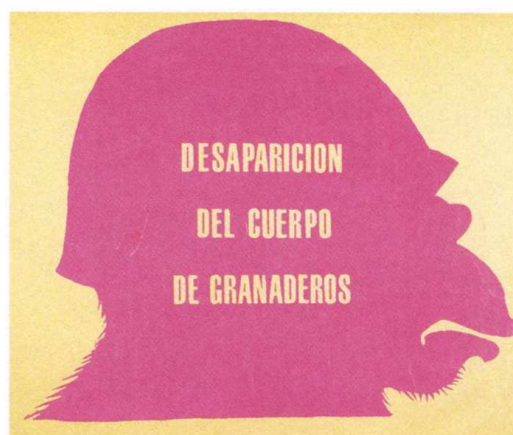
<sup>123</sup> Deborah Cohn, “The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950-1968: Cosmopolitanism, National Identity, and the State,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* vol. 21 no. 1 (2005): 179.

from sources ranging from the socially committed Taller de la Gráfica Popular to contemporary Op and Pop trends.”<sup>124</sup>

Printmaking was being used for its mass-production and communicative properties, and again aesthetics were subordinated to a political cause. Many of the artists who created these designs remained anonymous, but their works have become emblematic of the popular struggle of students against the repressive state.



**Figure 23.** Unknown artist, 1968



**Figure 24.** Unknown artist, 1968

Artists responded with other media as well. An example would be the “ephemeral mural” painted by art students and artists such as Cuevas, Manuel Felguérez, and Francisco Icaza on corrugated metal surrounding a defaced statue on the UNAM campus in southern Mexico City. Felguérez explains how artists and the Universities, particularly UNAM, were closely connected, making it impossible for artists not to be involved in some way with the student movement,<sup>125</sup> whether it be printing propaganda materials,

<sup>124</sup> Álvaro Vázquez. Mantecón, “Visualizing 1968,” in *La era de la discrepancia/The Age of Discrepancies*, Oliver Debroise, ed., (México D.F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006): 39.

<sup>125</sup> Pilar García de Germeños, “The *Salón Independiente*: A New Reading,” in *La era de la discrepancia/The Age of Discrepancies*, Oliver Debroise, ed., (México D.F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006): 50.

helping create the ephemeral mural, or simply agreeing ideologically with the demands of the students

### *Los Grupos and Beyond*

*Los Grupos*, a number of art collectives that formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s responded directly to the events of 1968 and the increasingly conservative political climate in Mexico. They were inspired by the failure of Mexican art and society thus far to create a society truly for “the people.” *Los Grupos* experimented with other forms, meanings, and applications of art in ways that challenged traditional thinking about cultural production, especially those established in the 1920s and 1930s. They wanted to create radical art that would not be limited by suffocating national rhetoric or easily quantified and valued. Carroll suggests that *Los Grupos* were looking to redefine the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Artists who had witnessed government repression, brutality, and corruption had become wary of state support that “deployed” the “allegorical” in its own service and had ultimately deceived the people. They looked instead toward ephemeral art, performance art, and body art to challenge many of these structures of art and authenticity and create a radically different relationship to the state.

As some of *Los Grupos* had begun doing in Mexico, artists around the world started to experiment with new concepts of art in the 1960s and 1970s, and particularly with the concept of the multiple. FLUXUS was a group originally based in New York City whose artistic “mischievousness” and unique ideas of reproduction Tallman suggests may have influenced the “thread of multiplicity that appeared in the late 60s, and

surfaced in art-making across the globe in the 70s and 80s.”<sup>126</sup> Like many of *Los Grupos*, FLUXUS harbored social and utopist visions of the role that art could have in society. They played with the links between art, the state, and intellectualism and were inspired by previous movements that had innovatively embraced modern technology and mass media. While many of their utopist artistic visions didn’t solve the social ills they had hoped they might, the concepts FLUXUS put forth and experimented with “remain vital presences in the art of our time.”<sup>127</sup> Mexican artists in the 1980s and 1990s responded to the alternative relationships between art and society suggested by FLUXUS artists in order to create artistic authenticities that had less to do with visual, formal properties, and more to do with global, conceptual modes of expression. These new authenticities continued to rethink the relationship between the state, intellectuals, and cultural production, but for the most part rejecting the close relationships they had shared in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, Carroll says, “many contemporary cultural producers...express a decidedly Mexican unease with a certain nationalized vision of political/public art.”<sup>128</sup>

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I have attempted to outline three broad “authenticities” developed over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico. The first was a post-revolutionary authenticity in which authentic art was established to be didactic, executed in the easily-understood social-realist style, for at non-elite audiences, and depicting themes of the revolution and the humble working classes. Social and political messages were valued over aesthetic

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<sup>126</sup> Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, 72.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>128</sup> Carroll, “A Critical Regionalism,” 1.

considerations and art was supported by an alignment of intellectuals and the state. The second authenticity was *La Ruptura*. This movement rebelled against the power of the state over artistic expression in Mexico and the limited access to foreign aesthetic value systems. It supported individual expression over articulating a collective identity through social or political messages and began to challenge the traditional relationship between art and the state. Traditional ties between intellectuals and the state began to deteriorate. The final authenticity that I believe continues to be influential in post-modern and contemporary art around the globe today is a post-1968 aesthetic. This aesthetic experimented with conceptual and ephemeral art forms over which it would be harder for the state to exert control. This aesthetic was also cosmopolitan and international, and shared experimental ideas about art with art collectives and artists around the world. The relationships between the state, intellectuals, and cultural production were much more ambiguous than they had previously been in Mexico.

Beyond these value systems, Oaxacan printmakers have experienced uniquely Oaxacan authenticities as well. The “Oaxacan Style,” discussed in more depth in Chapter 1, established that authentic Oaxacan art was realist, figurative, and communicative. It represented indigenous myths and peaceful, universal themes that affected rural Oaxacans. It was timeless and didn’t address social or political themes. It represented women as the ultimate expression of the close, spiritual relationship indigenous groups had with the Earth. Its legitimacy was derived from Western concepts of fine art and hierarchical value systems that structured the markets in which it was successful.



*Social and Political Upheaval*

Another very important artistic value system in Oaxaca was established in response to political events of 2006-2007 that deeply affected Oaxacan civilians as well as artists. In 2006, Governor Ulises Ruíz refused to recognize the demands of striking members of the state-wide Teacher's Union who had been camped out in Oaxaca City's Zócalo (central plaza) for several weeks. Early on the morning of July 16, Ruíz sent troops to attack the strikers as they slept in their makeshift tents. Instead of quickly snubbing the strike and demoralizing the strikers, as Ruíz had planned, the attack incited other Oaxacan civilians—non-teachers and non-strikers—to join the teachers and fight back. By the afternoon, civilians had effectively taken back control of the Zócalo from the military forces. Ruíz had taken office under accusations of election fraud, and had, for the first two years of his term, run a corrupt and repressive regime that had limited free speech and violated human rights.<sup>129</sup> For many Oaxacans, the assault on the teachers was the final straw. Putting aside the original demands of the teachers, other civilians joined with the teachers to call unanimously for the resignation of Ruíz. Members of disagreeing political parties and different social organizations united to form The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). The APPO's mission was to reclaim Oaxaca for the people by forcing Ruíz out of office.

Fighting between the civilians and the government continued through the fall of 2007. Several activists and bystanders were killed over the course of the conflict. Many others were disappeared, kidnapped, and punished for political participation in popular

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<sup>129</sup> *Un Poquito de Tanta Verdad*, DVD, directed by Jill Irene Freidberg (Seattle, WA: Corrugated Films and Mal de Ojo TV, 2007).

anti-governmental organizations or activities. Civilians erected barricades throughout the city and took over media outlets such as radio and television stations. The 2006 Guelaguetza was cancelled, and “Oaxaca’s economy suffered and tourism in the city collapsed.”<sup>130</sup>

Four years later, the economy has recovered slightly and tourism has neared previous levels, but the conflict has had lasting effects on social life and identity in Oaxaca. The APPO remains an important part of daily life in the city and continues to fight for disenfranchised Oaxacans experiencing neglect or unfair treatment under the state (figure 25). Its creation was something only possible under the extreme circumstances that developed in Oaxaca City during the summer of 2006. Organizations and regional associations that had traditionally held opposing political and social views put differences aside and united under one cause. “Amazingly, the APPO united almost every opposition group in the state of Oaxaca...and...opened a social space for people who have always been shut out of the everyday workings of politics.” There was an “unlimited opening of spaces of resistance on equal footing—all are members, rock throwers, and coffee brewers alike.”<sup>131</sup> Those who had never participated in politics or been involved in community organizations joined in the common struggle and experienced a profound sense of social, anti-governmental, popular cohesion. Although Ruíz never resigned, the APPO and the movement in general succeeded in both

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<sup>130</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, “The Effect of Political Unrest on Migration Descions: New Evidence and Preliminary Findings from Oaxaca, Mexico,” Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, La Jolla, California. Working Paper 154, 2007: 1. Despite the cancellation of the official Guelaguetza, the popular Guelaguetza, initiated in 2005, was still held in 2006. For more information about the Guelaguetza and the popular Guelaguetza, see Chapter 1.

<sup>131</sup> John Gibler, *Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt*, (New York: City Lights Publishers, 2009): 185-186.

questioning Ruíz's legitimacy on a national scale and in proving the ultimate power of popular unity, a spirit that still exists in the city today.



**Figure 25.** Banner hanging in Oaxaca's Zócalo reads

“Ulises Ruiz represses the businessmen and artesanos of the APPO; we request a space where we can work with dignity; Organization of Businesses in Resistance: we were beaten but not defeated”  
Oaxaca City, July-August 2010

These events also opened new spaces for cultural expression, and particularly the visual arts. The response of graffiti artists to the conflict was immense and powerful, and has been well-documented in books such as *Protest Graffiti Mexico* and *Mexico: Stencil*, as well as on YouTube and in documentary films.<sup>132</sup> Like Posada, the TGP, and the students and artists of 1968, the Oaxacan street artists felt that, among other things, the conflict was being misrepresented in the media and used art as an efficient communication tool.

<sup>132</sup> See *Un Poquito de Tanta Verdad* produced by Corrugated Films/Mal de Ojo TV or *Oaxaca, el poder de la comuna* by ContraImagen, both from 2007.



**Figure 26.** “July 16 we don’t forget and we don’t pardon” refers to July 16, 2007 in which several people were killed in an attack on civilians by military forces in the city Oaxaca City, July-August 2010



**Figure 27.** Street art  
Oaxaca City, July-August 2010

Almost five years after the conflict began, explicitly political stencil and street art is still common in Oaxaca, but non-political, aesthetic and experimental forms of street art have become prevalent as well. The political art inspired an artistic movement in which artists today use public spaces to experiment with new artistic forms and criticize the social ills of modern society in general (figures 26 and 27). The events of 2006 and 2007 created a group of young cultural producers hyper-critical of unequal balances of

power that cause unnecessary suffering and devalue entire indigenous cultures. Carmen Boullosa suggests the progressive, political spirit of the TGP inspired the street-art movement and that the graffiti and stencil artists are the TGP's contemporary legacy. Deborah Cablow links Oaxacan stencil imagery to TGP images of Mexican revolutionary heroes.<sup>133</sup> These stencil artists may have been inspired by artistic authenticities established in the post-revolutionary era and drawn from their legacies of public, anti-elitist, and political art established by muralism and the TGP, but they also leave behind what had become (or always was) "dated and deeply problematic" about the TGP,<sup>134</sup> which was its complicated and often contradictory relationship to the state. The Oaxacan street artists have shunned any connection to the state, acting instead in opposition to it. The state is corrupt and all-powerful, and will always aim to limit free expression. The only way to make authentic art free of state power, for them, is to take to the streets and make radical, public art. Very different from the authenticities and value systems of the Oaxacan Style, the street art movement nonetheless established that contemporary Oaxacan art could also be legitimized by speaking out against the repressive state in the name of the people. Such art should be ephemeral and should be done in public places to circumvent government control.

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<sup>133</sup> Deborah Cablow, "Arte Callejero de la Oaxaca Contemporánea en el Contexto Mexicano," *El Alcaraván*, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>134</sup> Boullosa, "Their Boots Were Made for Walking: El Taller de Gráfica Popular."

## 5. Power and/over Authenticity: Redefining Art Practice in Oaxaca City

Amy Sara Carroll frames contemporary Mexican cultural production as existing “in a space in-between, dodging binaries, including those that would oppose the allegorical to the anti-allegorical.”<sup>135</sup> Like Oaxacan graffiti and street artists, contemporary Oaxacan printmakers occupy spaces in-between total disavowal and total submission to authenticities established by Mexico’s 20<sup>th</sup> century history of relations between the state and cultural production, by Oaxacan art history, and by Oaxacan civil conflict.

### *Rejecting and Reappropriating*

The studios draw from the anti-elitist collaboration and egalitarianism that defined muralism, the TGP, and the 1968 student movement propaganda brigades. Muralism called for an end to European bourgeoisie notions of avant-garde art, claiming that true art should speak to the people and be easily understood by everyone. The TGP held regular meetings and group critiques where artists valued the comments of their peers and artistic equals.<sup>136</sup> Artists, students, and intellectuals during the 1968 student movement were considered equals in a similar fight.

In the Oaxacan printmaking studios, all artists are similarly respected as equals and the creation of work is a creative process that benefits from the help and interaction of others (figure 28). Like the TGP and the muralists, the studios reject European bourgeoisie notions of fine art by equating the role of artist and printmaker. The

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<sup>135</sup> Carroll, “A critical regionalism,” 2.

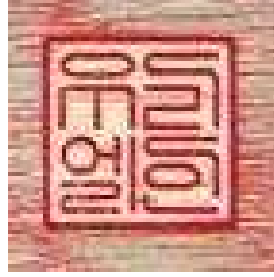
<sup>136</sup> Green, “Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular.”

intellectual creation of fine art is not separated from the technical, physical aspects of printing.



**Figure 28.** Artists discussing an edition in La Pata. Daniel Berman looks on. Oaxaca City, July-August 2010

Uriel Marín, co-founder of La Pata de Perro, references the collective nature of the TGP and of La Pata by using a personal “tag” in some of his works similar to that used by artists in the TGP (figures 29 and 30). Both “tags,” or logos, are small, recognizable, and rectangular and used to quickly and visually recognize the creator of a work. In the case of the TGP it referenced the studio, as the works were often anonymous. Uriel’s work is never anonymous, but he uses the logo like a signature. By creating such a logo, Marín is referencing the TGP and the collaborative nature of the group’s production that inspires the structure of La Pata.



**Figure 29.** Uriel Marín's logo  
detail of *Axolotl*, 2009 (see figure 31)



**Figure 30.** TGP logo

Significant differences, though, exist between the collaboration inherent in La Pata and the mentality of the TGP, as well as the artistic styles of the studios, and are also demonstrated by comparing the logos. Uriel's logo is less didactic and more abstract. It does not clearly state his name or the studio's name, and the lettering references hieroglyphics. It is not clear what it represents. Perhaps it serves to signify his work only to those who have learned to recognize it. The TGP logo, on the other hand, is clear and direct. It uses familiar, emotionally loaded and universal symbols such as the moon, the sun, flags, and a clenched fist. The ultimate mission of the TGP was to educate the masses and disseminate ideological propaganda. The studio operated around a political ideology and expected their artists to support its political stance both personally and artistically and they only accepted outside commissions that aligned with their political



beliefs.<sup>137</sup> The collective criticism they all participated in, while egalitarian, “served to discourage individualistic deviation from the TGP principles.”<sup>138</sup> 1968 artists also sometimes printed propaganda posters and flyers anonymously, forgoing individual recognition for the unity of the collective. A shared social and political purpose linked them and their art.

La Pata and other newer Oaxacan printmaking studios, on the other hand, while they support collaboration and value all artists as equals, do not emphasize the collective at the expense of personal artistic careers. Artists are able to maintain membership in the collective, and a collective identity as a member of a studio while also maintaining an identity outside the collective. Uriel, for example, has created a website for La Pata but maintains one for himself as well. Studios such as Zánate, Bambú, La Huella, La Pata, and La Culebra do not ask that the artists who work in the studios share a particular social or political ideology. The didactic function of art is not their primary focus and they have no one political or social agenda that defines their activity as creative producers.

Politics, in fact, are deemphasized. Unlike TGP prints, 1968 student propaganda, or the murals, works by the new printmaking studios rarely deal explicitly with contemporary social or political issues. Boullosa sees the TGP as an example of the negative effects of linking politics and art. Instead of “asking questions and raising doubts” they clearly and “emphatically” pushed a particular agenda. “If their goal was to be “revolutionary,”” she writes, “their link to the PRI was a colossal ball and chain.” The printmaking studios, perhaps inspired by the contradictions state sponsorship created

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<sup>137</sup> Boullosa, “Their Boots Were Made for Walking: El Taller de Gráfica Popular.”

<sup>138</sup> Green, “Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular,” 67.

within the TGP, reject using their art to push explicit agendas. Political and social agendas were important to the TGP, but they are also important to contemporary Oaxacan street artists. Newer printmaking studios, but being anti-political, have rejected the dominant artistic trends in Oaxaca and focus on aspects of printmaking beyond cheap and easy reproducibility or mass-dissemination.

Their style is more often abstract or oblique, “raising questions” instead of providing emphatic answers. For example, Uriel’s woodcut *Axolotl* (a type of small salamander) (figure 31), or Gilberto Delgado’s *The Parrot Cart* (figure 32) are comprised of mostly abstract, organic forms. Their titles refer to images and things we, as viewers, can’t always explicitly see. The titles urge us to look deeper into the images and see what emerges. Both woodcuts use line in varied and innovative ways. Marín cuts thick, chunky, decorative patterns into thin lines, disrupting their powerful sense of horizontality. Delgado’s very fine lines evoke shimmering light and spinning wheels and he manages to create a strong sense of depth using the contrasts between the black, white, and blue. These works stand in stark contrast to the explicit messages visible in TGP prints and 1968 propagandist materials, or the didactic messages in the murals of Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco.



**Figure 31.** Uriel Marín, *Axolotl*, 2009  
woodcut, 56x76 cm

Collective art-making has been legitimized and authenticated by 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican history, and thus is something Zánate, Bambú, La Huella, La Pata, and La Culebra can use as the basis for their art practices. Collective authenticity in printmaking is more pronounced and more accepted than in other media, and by working in printmaking, they are drawing on this. Printmaking has also been authenticated as an egalitarian artistic tool that should be made accessible to more than just the art-world elite. In contrast, the success of the Oaxacan Style in the exterior promoted a Western hierarchical set of values within the Oaxacan art market that was adapted in some ways by successful First Generation artists. This established a conflicting set of values and standards for evaluating art production in Oaxaca City.



**Figure 32.** Gilberto Delgado, *The Parrot Cart*  
colored woodcut, 56 X 36cm

The newer printmaking studios challenge the hierarchy of First Generation printmaking studios by utilizing ideas about Mexican art and printmaking that have been legitimized by other Mexican artists over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They recognize the importance of these artists and their ideas. On the Bambulante website, for example, Abraham writes “Bambulante wants to recall the history of printmaking: its social character. We remember José Guadalupe Posada, and later, the artists of ’68, as crucial examples. Artistic expression is brought to public places....”<sup>139</sup> Like the TGP that wanted to serve as an alternative to European, bourgeoisie art, or as Boullosa puts it, to “outmode bourgeois, individualist art,” Bambulante brings art to public spaces and references printmaking’s history as a social, popular art. Oswaldo Ramírez is a printmaker who

<sup>139</sup> <http://www.proyectobambulante.blogspot.com/>.

leads the woodcut workshop at the Taller Tamayo. He cites Posada and Leopoldo Méndez, the most visible member of the TGP, as well as the supportive artistic environment of Oaxaca City, as inspirations for his work.”<sup>140</sup> Like Ramírez, young Oaxacans create their identities as printmakers by referencing historical Mexican printmakers. But they also reject parts of Mexican printmaking’s history and the authenticities it established in ways that respond to their contemporary realities. By doing so, they are forging new authenticities for Oaxacan printmaking.

### *Art or Craft?*

These studios also negotiate relationships to the state by challenging traditional divisions between art and craft. Such divisions are particularly important in Oaxaca where many people depend on tourism for their livelihood. Art/craft distinctions have major implications for where products are sold, who buys them, how much money they are sold for, and how the creators conceive of their products, their work and their practice. Perpetuating an exterior image of Oaxaca as an indigenous utopia depends on these divisions as well, which were introduced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Mexican state to promote tourism and firmly established by Western systems of value that authenticate the Oaxacan Style. Creating an image of Oaxaca inhabited by naïve Indians who produce authentic, high-quality, handmade crafts in the traditions of their ancestors serves to draw tourists and make them believe that they are consuming an “authentic” Mexico. Internal and international tourists alike head to Oaxaca when they want “the best” artisanal crafts or the best examples of authentic Mexican culture.

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<sup>140</sup> Rondán, “Los Lenguajes de la Madera: Oswaldo Ramírez,” 6.

Often divisions between fine art and popular art have to do with the intended use of the art object, the reason why it was produced, and how it was produced. Valerio devotes an entire chapter, titled “Art/Craft: The Undefined Line,” to considering such distinctions. He asks Oaxacan artists “Is there a difference between art and craft? And if so, what is the difference?”<sup>141</sup> I quote some of their responses, cited by Valerio on pages 200-203, here:

I think so. If you have a little clay figure and you go to an artisan and say “I want ten of these,” the artisan will make them for you. But if you ask me to make ten oil paintings, I am not interested in doing it. That is the difference, the best I can think of. Popular art also fascinates me, but in the repetition is where you make the distinction.

Filemón Santiago

Perhaps what distinguishes an artist from an artisan is that the artist makes unique Works, or perhaps similar but not exactly the same, and the artisan repeats a form in a pot...that would be the only thing that I would find as a difference...Graphic art reproduces, but in a limited way. The artist’s hand is in every impression, because it isn’t a totally mechanical reproduction.

Juan Alcázar

...If the same painters are considered artisan painters, it’s very positive... because if they have a family to feed and they do it in this manner, it’s valid...but you feel that there is a thing, you see the work of someone and you see that artisanal part that doesn’t provoke a reaction...

Alberto Ramírez

Printmaking has traditionally been defined in terms of a matrix and the creation of multiples from these matrices, which doesn’t lie clearly on either side of the lines delineated above. Santiago suggests that high art is a divine inspiration that can only be expressed once. Painting ten oil paintings would not only be tedious, but impossible. Creating multiples is the job of the artisan. I have heard a printmaker refer to the

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<sup>141</sup> Valerio, *Atardacer en la maquiladora de las utopias*.

tediousness of printing a large edition; it becomes more of a job than an enjoyable, creative process. But the same printmaker has expressed the meditative, physical character of that same process.<sup>142</sup> It's not clear if printmaking fits either side of Santiago's distinction.

Alcázar admits the complicated nature of printmaking. It often "repeats the form" like an artisan, but is not entirely "artisanal" because the prints always maintain a trace of the human hand. But this isn't exactly true. The artist's 'hand' is always once removed. The matrix is the medium onto which the artist's hand acts; the printing process transfers that image mechanically. This means, also, that the concept of free, spontaneous expression is hindered. The artists must be continuously thinking several steps into the future to obtain a particular end result. Moro cites Théophile Gautier: artists making prints must work with "decisiveness, assurance of mark, and a capacity to anticipate the final result, skills not possessed by everyone, but those with talent and vision combined." Printmakers must create images that are negative or backward to the final image they wish to produce. Material manipulation is not intuitive. They also have to understand how the press will act upon their creation or if a particular weight of paper requires them to make deeper etching. Moro himself explains that "the intermediate character of working on a plate and the suspension of the final object, makes the artist confront the creative process from a special psychological position."<sup>143</sup> Tallman talks about the "social and psychological consequences of reproduction."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Abraham Torres, conversation with the author, July 2010.

<sup>143</sup> Moro, *Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI*, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, 201.

Lastly, Ramírez hints at the forces that drive one to create fine art versus popular art. Creating images or objects to feed one's family is characteristic of an artisan whereas an artist will create works regardless of their economic necessity. Printmaking, for many artists, is a way to create works that more people can afford, giving the artist a chance to make more money and perhaps support themselves with their art practice alone, something not possible for many lesser-known painters, for example. But printmaking, at least that practiced by the artists involved in the new Oaxacan studios, is also their primary chosen form of artistic expression. Rondán asks printmaker and Taller Tamayo woodcut instructor Oswaldo Ramirez if his work is defined by "technical virtuosity or creativity" and he replies that at first, when he was learning to make prints, it was more technical but now it is more artistic, expressionistic, and creative. He believes that technical proficiency can create beautiful and impressive works of art, but "technique by itself will not save your art." Without "creativity and imagination...it will not be a work that produces emotions nor that transmits the true interior world of the artist."<sup>145</sup> His life and art are intimately connected, and printmaking, for him, is a spiritual tool that has the potential to change the world. Such views are in line with modernist conceptions of how an artist, not a craftsman, should conceive of his or her work. The physical characteristics of printmaking as understood in the West do not align with how many printmakers understand their practice.

Printmaking, by definition, destabilizes distinctions between art and craft. Although developed initially in the West as an industrial means of communication and reproduction, printmaking quickly was undertaken by artists who began to experiment

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<sup>145</sup> Rondán, "Los Lenguajes de la Madera: Oswaldo Ramírez," 15.



and develop its creative and expressive potential. Both the expressive and the communicative trends continue to be important functions of printmaking today. This continual double standard has had an effect on printmaking's status as a fine art because of the ways that the West defines fine art.<sup>146</sup> The distinction between art and craft translates into a distinction between "high" art and "low" art internalized by artists, art critics, and the general Western public. Auther talks about a "craft aesthetic" created under modernism<sup>147</sup> and cites Terry Smith, who describes craft "as a set of effects of [Modernism's] own priorities."<sup>148</sup> Modernism raised the lone, artist-genius figure above the masses. Intellectual and brooding, they had a basic need to express themselves and the world around, and had been given unique creative faculties with which to do so. This idea of the modern, tortured artist-genius structures Western art-historical discourses that validate the vast amounts of money spent at art auctions and the reverence that visitors to a museum are expected to display. Auther argues that modernist art critic Clement Greenburg's theories of art created and maintained a distinction between art and craft (high and low) during the modernist era, which developed associations of high art with the intellect and low, popular, or craft art with unreflective manual labor.

Marcia Tucker explores the notion of physicality associated with craft and the way it serves to differentiate high and low forms of art in her catalog essay for the exhibition *A Labor of Love* held at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1994. A focus on the body is characteristic of art forms relegated to the realm of craft. In Western

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<sup>146</sup> Moro, *Un ensayo sobre grabado: a principios del siglo XXI*, 30.

<sup>147</sup> Elisa Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenburg," *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 27 no. 3 (2004): 353.

<sup>148</sup> Terry Smith, from his essay in *Craft and Contemporary Theory*, cited by Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenburg," 356.

society, enlightenment-era ideas dictate that in intellectual activity should be valued above prized all other activities, especially physical. Craft forms of art, usually requiring intense physical labor and high attention to detail, tend to be conceptualized as practices in which bodily senses are more important than intellectual senses. Thus craft has come to be seen as inferior.

Printmaking, with its use of mechanical reproduction and traditional focus on technical, material processes, has historically been relegated to the physical camp. Movements such as pop art or new media art have challenged that reproduction can be an intellectual activity, but these challenges have focused on the existence of the multiple, not the literal creation of each multiple. The technical specifics of Warhol's Marilyn prints, for example, were not as important to Warhol as the group of prints conceived of and viewed together. "The rubber-stamp method I'd been using to repeat images suddenly seemed too homemade; I wanted something stronger that gave more of an assembly-line effect," writes Warhol. "It was all so simple, quick and chancy."<sup>149</sup>

Oaxacan printmakers would not share Warhol's desire to create an "assembly-line effect" in their work. My own experience watching them work demonstrated a practice of careful, meticulous, slow labor that was very much "handmade," if not "homemade." Their practice stands apart from the way that Warhol used screen-printing. Ginny Merriam writes that "Printmaking is one of the oldest arts and often one of the most misunderstood...it is often confused with commercial printmaking, which stresses volume instead of quality...original prints are different." Certainly Warhol was concerned with quality, and thus the distinction is not black and white, but exists

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<sup>149</sup> Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties*, (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1980), 28.

nonetheless. While pop-art was based on challenging distinctions between high and low art, and deconstructed notions of the multiple, it did not necessarily ask modern society to reconsider the social and cultural value of physical labor, which does remain important to many printmakers in ways that allow them to be creative and expressive. Printmaker Luis Camnitzer writes of the physical relationship he has to his materials: “I am still addicted to the aromatic melodies that emanate from solvents and inks; I consider the indelible stains around my nails to be cherished status symbols; I cringe with pain when somebody holds a sheet of paper without allowing it to find its catenary weight curve, and I believe that printers who don’t clean the edges of their plates before printing are, eventually, duly punished in hell.”<sup>150</sup> Such “technical fundamentalism,” despite being an important part of many printmakers’ creative processes, offers, in printmaking, the possibility of a physical relationship with materials not found in other media. Thus printmaking continues to be situated, if not entirely in the camp of craft and physical labor, then at least out of the intellectual camp, and continues to maintain an ambiguous member of both the craft and the fine art world.

Michael Chibnik examines the complicated line between art and craft by analyzing the practice of six woodcarvers in the Valle de Oaxaca who make *alebrijes*, brightly-painted animal figurines these wood carvings have generated recent museum and gallery interest (figure 33). Chibnik asked the six artists/artisans whether they conceive of their practice as that of craft or of fine art, of themselves as artists or artisans, about their motivations for producing their art, and to explain how they carried out projects or commissions. The artists frequently used the terms authenticity, individuality, and

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<sup>150</sup> Camnitzer, “Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts,” 1.

originality to explain if their practice, for them, was part of the “tourist art world” or the “fine arts world,” as Chibnik framed it. Chibnik found that the economic situation of many left the carvers little time or energy for “art for art’s sake,” and that some of the carvers whose work that had been deemed “fine art” by United States or European museums, actually work in a manner opposed to that normally expected of Western fine artists. Instead, some worked communally, admitted to adapting their work to market trends, and having little or no spiritual relationship to their practice. According to Chibnik, The way the artist conceives of him or herself may be the most reliable or illustrative method for understanding how their practice relates to state power—in this case of both the United States and Mexico—and the various authenticities established in the locales of reception. Such established art/craft guidelines can lead to contradictions and confusions, as well as incorrect assumptions about an artist or their work. Chibnik demonstrates that distinctions between art and craft art not particularly useful, especially cross-culturally or between classes.



**Figure 33.** Small alebrijes

Printmaking studios in Oaxaca City, such as Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Huella Gráfica, La Pata de Perro, and La Culebra Gráfica similarly destabilize distinctions between high art and low art or art and craft in their practices. The studios both support collaboration, but also allow each artist a personal style and individual trajectory. The artists create work in multiples but have been involved in the fine-art world of art school or gallery shows and biennials and consider their work something meaningful beyond a means of supporting themselves or their family. They both enjoy and sometimes tire of the mechanical reproduction printmaking lends itself to. They relish in technical knowledge and physical processes but consider the creative, intellectual part of their art creating equally as important. They unite the physical and the intellectual process into one creative practice not separated along blue collar/white collar, low/high, manual/intellectual labor adopted and internalized by modern Western society.

### *Creating a New Aesthetic*

By challenging historical definitions of Mexican art and printmaking through their unique use of artistic collaboration and abstinence from employing social or political themes, and by destabilizing the traditional art/craft distinction, contemporary Oaxacan printmakers are challenging existing artistic authenticities that have been constructed in and around the social space of Oaxaca over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The art/craft divide highlights how certain Western cultural values determine what is considered art or not, and how such decisions get to be made on an institutional or cultural level by those that have power and money. According to Eugene Metcalf, writes Tucker, “the establishment of a separate folk category is a way of preserving the status and power of

the leisure class by creating a “dumping ground” for all maverick forms of expression made by artists who don’t share the high art values of that portion of society and might therefore pose a potential threat to it.”<sup>151</sup> Chibnik calls such elites “tastemakers.”<sup>152</sup> Traditionally, it has been these elites—state actors, European-educated intellectuals, wealthy foreign collectors—that have established artistic authenticities in Mexico. The Oaxacan uprising of 2006 and 2007 and subsequent art movement was perhaps one exception to this norm, but the street art used as a tool to combat repression by frustrated and disillusioned Oaxacans quickly became a market phenomenon in the United States. The popularity of the street images was “authenticated” by artistic institutions, publishing houses, and a globalizing and commercializing street-art movement.

The way that the Oaxacan printmaking studios deconstruct the aesthetic value systems that have shaped their worlds parallels situations in other countries.<sup>153</sup> Tourism is an enormous global industry often driven by authenticities imposed from outside the culture in question. Balengee-Morris cites the re-evaluation and commodification of Native American culture by colonizing Europeans as an example. Europeans imposed their radically different systems of value onto the material cultural of the Native Americans, and marketed Native American “crafts” based on the values they claimed it had. “Art that is marketed for tourist consumption is often judged according to a perspective to determine authenticity.”<sup>154</sup> Europeans considered their measures of value and authenticity to be universal, when of course they were not.

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<sup>151</sup> Marcia Tucker, *A Labor of Love* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), 47-48.

<sup>152</sup> Chibnik, “Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art,” 509.

<sup>153</sup> See Balengee-Morris, “Cultures for Sale” and Price “Into the Mainstream.”

<sup>154</sup> Christine Ballengee-Morris, “Cultures for Sale: Perspectives on Colonialism and Self-Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism,” *Studies in Art Education* vol. 3 no. 43 (2002): 241.

Sally Price argues that sometimes such standards of authenticity are adopted and “authenticated” by the colonized cultural producers themselves, demonstrating the limits of our concept of “authenticity.” She cites Kasfir’s work on South African art and the “highly organized art world of Johannesburg, in which members of a resident white intelligentsia who constituted the core of critics, gallery owners, curators, and collectors acted as brokers for, and sometimes collaborators with, their black counterparts.”<sup>155</sup> The proscribed limits for art, or proscribed “authenticities” placed on black artists by white colonizers forced the artists into creating a “township” art based on social realism, much like the limits placed on indigenous Oaxacan artists who developed a “Oaxacan” style full of “bright colors, depictions of local culture” and “a misleading apparent naïveté” (Chibnik 509).<sup>156</sup> The “township” art as well as the Oaxacan Style were over the course of many years “collaboratively authored by inside artists and outside culture brokers,”<sup>157</sup> and as they continued to appeal to a particular market of collectors. Oaxacan artists began to internalize the demands of the market as inherent characteristics of their art, and today, many genuinely feel that the Oaxacan Style is a personal and meaningful expression of their Oaxacan identity. In other words, the style has “hung on the wall long enough to have achieved its authenticity.”<sup>158</sup> Price does not, and nor do I mean to suggest that artists who claim personal connections to styles inspired by foreign or exterior values are anything but earnest, or that “authenticity” is a concept that is ever stable. But Price does point out the “growing awareness of the pervasive, and potentially powerful, role played

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<sup>155</sup> Sally Price, “Into the Mainstream: Shifting Authenticities in Art,” *American Ethnologist* vol. 34 no. 3 (2007): 608.

<sup>156</sup> Chibnik, “Oaxacan Wood Carvings in the World of Fine Art,” 509.

<sup>157</sup> Price, “Into the Mainstream: Shifting Authenticities in Art,” 615,

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 617.

by external culture brokers”<sup>159</sup> in the formation of artistic value on a global level. Such external culture brokers have played an important role in the proliferation and success of the Oaxacan Style and the establishment of a particular artistic authenticity that shapes the contemporary practice of Oaxacan printmakers today.

Contemporary printmakers, for the most part, do not work in the Oaxacan Style. Because the Oaxacan Style has been collaboratively authored by Oaxacan artists themselves, challenging it is a rebellious and risky activity, and working outside of it, Casanova reminds us, is much easier said than done. He says that “an art of profound social content, an art that explores less folkloric aspects of the Oaxacan and Mexican world, has been excluded from the creative possibilities available to artists in Oaxaca,”<sup>160</sup> but that as an artist, confronting the market and its power over one’s financial solvency, can be scary. Creative survival doesn’t always equal economic survival. The navigation of authenticity and structures that exert power over the lives of artists, including those that supply them with money, are complicated and difficult to navigate.

Daring to see beyond the stability established authenticities offer can be a dangerous gambling act. Newer Oaxacan printmakers have taken such a risk by working outside of the “Oaxacan Style,” by working in printmaking to reject hierarchical values inherent in the authentication of Oaxacan Style such as the distinction between art and craft, and by being anti-political in a city and country where printmaking is expected to carry political and social messages. Despite their own political beliefs or social agendas, the didactic function of art is not the primary focus of these printmaking studios. They

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 609.

<sup>160</sup> Casanova, “El Taller Rufino Tamayo y su aportación al arte mexicano,” 19.



have no single ideology or cause that defines their activity as creative producers. Their artistic style is more often abstract or oblique, “raising questions” instead of providing emphatic answers to issues.

Willing to forgo the lucrative possibilities of conforming to the “Oaxacan Style,” these artists have instead ventured into new formal and thematic territory, independent of art market trends. Most Oaxacan Style art is sold to tourists in Oaxaca’s city center who pass by galleries on foot and stay in nearby hotels. Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Huella Gráfica, La Pata de Perro, and La Culebra Gráfica are instead located, with the exception of Bambú, far beyond an easy walk from the city center. The studios symbolically and literally distance themselves from the expectations foreigners might have about what their Oaxacan art should look like.

While printmaking in Mexico has traditionally been validated by its ability to serve the popular masses, the artistic or creative practice of printmaking sidelined for larger political or social causes, studios like Zánate, Bambú, La Huella, La Pata, and La Culebra rarely deal explicitly with contemporary social or political issues in Oaxaca. These studios by no means abhor politics or distance themselves from the graffiti and street-art movement, they have simply decided not to engage in them outwardly. During the 2006 and 2007 conflict, one of the studios helped a group of artists to clandestinely, and very quickly, print an anti-Ruíz, pro-APPO edition. Despite having risked political persecution and still dealing with lasting health issues from the rapid printing of the edition—too many chemicals over a short period of time in a badly ventilated room—the artist called the remaining editions he owned as “my treasure” yet refused to talk about politics. He had allowed the artists to use the studio not because of political beliefs, but

simply because they were artists who needed a space to print. “People can believe whatever they want,” he said. “Who am I to judge?” The artist’s refusal to engage with politics and the power of the state is a powerful affront to a cultural history that has been defined by an engagement with the Mexican state for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also a response to the artist’s personal experience of witnessing Oaxaca City upturned by violence and chaos in the name of political ideologies.

These studios thus propose new basis for Oaxacan artistic authenticity. They disengage from the state, an institution loosing legitimacy as globalization breaks down national barriers but also, in the Mexican case, one desperately seeking a new image. They use shared understandings of collectivity in new ways. Stylistically varied, though not explicitly dealing with contemporary social issues, their works are emotional expressions of the various images, thoughts, and identities that create their daily lived experiences, deeply rooted in the present spaces they inhabit, and suggestive of a new Oaxacan aesthetic.

## 6. Conclusion

In 1994, Marcia Tucker wrote that the “crisis of cultural authority is clearly still with us.”<sup>161</sup> Her claim remains applicable seventeen years later, in 2011, as cultural producers continue to push the limits of creative expression. The fixed idea of “culture” becomes less valid as globalization erases national boundaries. In a world where even those with limited means can reach millions of people for free via the internet, how is cultural or artistic authenticity established? Who gets to establish it, and who gets to authenticate it? Cultural power traditionally available to only a very select group of politicians or colonizers is rapidly becoming accessible to greater numbers of people with greater ease, and putting in “crisis” traditional ways of authenticating culture, including the visual arts. The move toward a more democratic state in Mexico and recent socio-political upheaval in Oaxaca particularly raises the question of artistic authenticity in Oaxaca City. Examining the practice of Oaxacan printmakers allows us to see how a small group of artists are manipulating previously established artistic value systems to create their own within these shifting contemporary political spaces.

In Mexico, the state has been more involved with cultural production than in other countries, and because of this, Mexican cultural production has traditionally been defined by its alignment or opposition to the state. After the revolution, the emerging Mexican leadership recruited artists, writers, and intellectuals to help construct a unifying new conception of *Mexicanidad*. By doing so, very particular parameters for what would be considered valuable art during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were established. The muralists, aligned with the state, recuperated printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, framing

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<sup>161</sup> Tucker, *A Labor of Love*, 25-26.

him as a left-wing political propagandist who worked to expose Porfirian political corruption. They linked the mass-dissemination properties of printmaking with both the post-revolutionary state and with a moral obligation to inform and uplift the popular masses. The Taller de Gráfica Popular (Studio for Popular Graphics, or TGP) was founded by leftist artist-activists who wholeheartedly believed the state was upholding the revolutionary myth and cemented a powerful ideological aesthetic around Mexican printmaking. *La Ruptura* was the first major challenge to the aesthetic hegemony of the post-revolutionary government. *La Ruptura* artists resented the use of art to promote the state's best interests, and looked beyond Mexico's borders, and the control of the state, for inspiration and legitimacy. The Mexico City student protests of 1968 were in direct opposition to the state, and this time used the cheap, quick, and visually engaging nature of graphic art to decry government repression.

Recent Oaxacan history has called for art again to be used as a social tool and has again articulated a clear position in relation to the state. In 2006, years of civilian frustration with corrupt leadership, state neglect, and continuous rural poverty boiled to the surface. The conflict has had lasting effects on life in Oaxaca City, and the response of artists was prolific. Like Posada, the TGP, and the artists of 1968, Oaxacan artists used art as a tool for communicating a political message staunchly in opposition to the government. The state had violated their human rights and limited their free speech. Public, anti-governmental art was the only "authentic" art they could produce free from state control.

Oaxacan printmakers today draw on the collaborative and egalitarian spirit of the muralists, the TGP, and the student movement artists of 1968, but reject the idea that art,

and particularly printmaking, needs to be explicitly political or carry a social message in order to be valuable. In Mexico, collective, egalitarian artistic production has been legitimized and contemporary Oaxacan printmakers use this to claim artistic legitimacy. In their studios, they collaborate, share information, offer advice, and respect other artists as equals. The creation of work is a creative process that benefits from the help and interaction of others. They reference the TGP and the artists of 1968 both visually and verbally as their artistic predecessors, but refuse to engage in social or political themes that defined the work of those artists. The events of 2006 and 2007 were violent and disruptive, and while they were a successful affront on the power of the state and the idyllic image of Oaxaca in the exterior, they were also full of violence and tragedy. The familiar streets where young Oaxacan artists had grown up became blockaded battlegrounds. The refusal of contemporary Oaxacan printmakers to acknowledge printmaking's moral imperative in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico is a response to their contemporary experience as Oaxacan citizens and a statement that Oaxacan art can be anti-political.

Because of printmaking's important role in the creation of Mexican and Oaxacan artistic authenticities, as well as its marginalized and often misunderstood position within the Western fine art tradition, printmaking offers contemporary Oaxacan artists unique theoretical tools to propose new ways of authenticating art in Oaxaca City. Like Oaxacan art, the practice of printmaking has been subjected to exterior value systems that have been imposed and internalized by insiders. Printmaking, collaboratively made in multiples with a focus on the physical processes of production, challenges the art/craft divide, especially when printmakers conceive of themselves and their practice in ways

the West expects of artists, not craftsmen. By rendering such distinctions inappropriate, Oaxacan printmakers challenge art/craft divisions that support a vibrant Oaxacan industry for indigenous crafts—the physical manifestations of the Oaxacan myth—as well as maintaining the market dominance of the Oaxacan Style and perpetuating an oversimplified image of Oaxaca in the exterior. This image was used to create a tourist industry and stimulate Oaxaca’s economy, but has also allowed for the continued subjugation of indigenous peoples within the state.

Studios such as Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Huella Gráfica, La Pata de Perro, and La Culebra Gráfica, also challenge external authenticities by being located outside of the city center, where most Oaxacan-style art is sold to tourists who pass by galleries on foot and stay in nearby hotels. The studios are located, with the exception of Bambú, far beyond an easy walk from the thriving tourist center. They literally but also symbolically distance themselves from the expectations foreigners might have about what their Oaxacan art should look like. Willing to forgo the lucrative possibilities of conforming to the “Oaxacan Style,” they have instead ventured into new formal and thematic territory, independent of art market trends and the foreign capital of tourists.

The studios’ independence from traditional Oaxacan art markets is also apparent in their lack of formal gallery contracts. The issue of the market and the financial needs of artists versus freedom of expression is vast and complicated, and moves beyond the limitations of this thesis. But it is nonetheless important to point out that none of the newer Oaxacan printmaking studios discussed here have financial agreements with galleries. Their ambiguous relationship with market demands parallels the controversy within the TGP over commercialism. The TGP ultimately chose to sell their works

cheaply, so as to be affordable to even the working class, and the artists were forced to find other sources of income. Oaxacan street artists in 2006 and 2007 distanced themselves from art markets by producing ephemeral, anti-governmental works and made art for an entirely different audience than Oaxacan Style foreign collectors. Similarly, for contemporary Oaxacan printmakers, the market is not a driving force in their daily operations or artistic output. They are less focused on institutional acceptance of their work than on the process of creation, and make work that is formally and thematically experimental in relation to the “Oaxacan Style.”

Also challenging Oaxacan artistic hierarchies is the fact that within these studios, printmaking is the primary practice. Printmaking is not being used to reproduce more expensive works in other media. Artists and printmakers are one and the same; the physical and intellectual processes of printmaking have been united as a single act. This contrasts with First Generation studios that have to some degree internalized a traditional hierarchical value structure in which technical knowledge and creative vision are mutually exclusive. Instead, in newer Oaxacan printmaking studios, the entire process of printmaking is considered creative and artistic, and all parts are equally valued.

Despite having led to the adoption of foreign authenticities or the promotion of an artistic ideology that patronizingly framed Oaxacan craftsmen and women in ways that deny them agency, Roberto Donís and his Taller Tamayo have played an important, often overlooked, role in shaping an experimental, do-it-yourself artistic mentality in Oaxaca. In Oaxaca, “everyone is an artist,” and First Generation artists have proved that one does not need a foreign education to create art that is meaningful. The studios discussed here have varying degrees of connections to the Taller Tamayo. Those with no personal

relations to the school or to First Generation artists still cite the Taller Tamayo as a factor in their decision to establish their studio in Oaxaca or as responsible for creating an artistic atmosphere in Oaxaca supportive to the creation of the studios. As the domination of the Oaxacan Style and a utopian image of Oaxaca are waning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and as Oaxacan artists experiment with new ways of relating to the state, printmakers draw on the legacy of the Taller Tamayo to think about their own art in provocative new ways.

Defining what is valued as “authentic” art has until recently been the privilege of power-wielding elites, or “tastemakers,” who in Oaxaca have traditionally been foreigners. That is changing, as new means for the dissemination of images and ideas are accessible to more and more people. Taking advantage of this, Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Huella Gráfica, La Pata de Perro, and La Culebra Gráfica suggest a new Oaxacan aesthetic and a new system for evaluating authentic Oaxacan art. Their re-visioning of Oaxacan printmaking is based on the collaborative, egalitarian nature of Mexican printmaking, but rejects its didacticism and adherence to social realism. Their version of authentic Oaxacan art is collaborative and egalitarian—in opposition to the hierarchical and market-oriented Oaxacan Style—but does not explicitly reference social and political themes. Their practices are a reaction to their lived experiences as both Mexican printmakers, the heirs of a powerful visual and social tradition, and as witnesses of the Oaxacan uprising that saw their childhood home violently altered forever. Contemporary Oaxacan identity is far more complicated than the indigenous utopias represented by the “Oaxacan Style,” and printmaking provides theoretical and material tools to challenge artistic hierarchies within both printmaking and Oaxacan art.

By working in printmaking and drawing from legacies of Mexican and Oaxacan



art in ways appropriate to their unique contemporary experiences, Taller Zánate, Taller Bambú, La Huella Gráfica, La Pata de Perro, and La Culebra Gráfica destabilize traditional, hierarchical understandings of Mexican art and printmaking, as well as Western fine art more broadly. These studios are thus “context-providers” rather than “content providers.”<sup>162</sup> Their practices “help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse,”<sup>163</sup> suggesting a contemporary Oaxacan aesthetic beyond the confines of established authenticities.

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<sup>162</sup> Dunn, cited by Kester in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Conversation in Modern Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 76.

<sup>163</sup> Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 78.

## APPENDIX: GALLERIES AND STUDIOS

### **Taller Gráfica Actual**

Demián Flores  
Allende 207  
Colonia Centro  
Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca  
[www.tallergraficaactualtalleres.blogspot.com](http://www.tallergraficaactualtalleres.blogspot.com)

### **Taller Bambú/Bambulante**

Abraham Torres  
Martires de Tacubaya 507  
Colonia Centro  
Juárez de Oaxaca, Oaxaca 68000  
[www.tallerbambu.blogspot.com](http://www.tallerbambu.blogspot.com)  
[www.proyectobambulante.blogspot.com](http://www.proyectobambulante.blogspot.com)

### **Taller La Culebra Gráfica**

Gilberto Delgado  
Fraccionamiento Ayuujk  
Manza C, Lote 6  
Colonia El Arenal  
Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán, Oaxaca  
[www.gilbertodelgadogarcia.blogspot.com](http://www.gilbertodelgadogarcia.blogspot.com)  
[www.laculebragrafica.blogspot.com](http://www.laculebragrafica.blogspot.com)

### **La Curtiduría**

Demián Flores  
Mónica Villegas, director  
5 de Mayo 307  
Barrio de Jalatlaco  
Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca  
[www.lacurtiduria.blogspot.com](http://www.lacurtiduria.blogspot.com)

### **Demos Taller**

Demetrio Barrita  
Hidalgo 202  
Barrio de Jalatlaco  
Oaxaca, Oaxaca  
[www.demostallergaleria.blogspot.com](http://www.demostallergaleria.blogspot.com)

### **Taller La Huella Gráfica**

Lucio Santiago López  
Venustiano Carranza No. 113  
Colonia Alemán  
Juárez de Oaxaca, Oaxaca

### **La Mano Mágica**

Macedonia Alcalá 203  
Colonia Central  
Juárez de Oaxaca, Oaxaca  
[www.lamanomagica.com](http://www.lamanomagica.com)

### **Taller La Pata de Perro**

Uriel Marín, Daniel Berman, Angela Ramos, David Dominguez,  
Calle Manuel Orozco I. Berra #109  
Colonia El Periodista  
Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca  
[graficapatadeperro.blogspot.com](http://graficapatadeperro.blogspot.com)

### **Taller de Gráfica Zánate**

Lorena Montes and Daniel Flores  
La Yerbabuena No. 1  
San Felipe del Agua  
Juárez de Oaxaca, Oaxaca  
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