



"Human Existence Cannot be Silent" 2009 for SEIU by Dylan Miner

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

GRAPHIC PROTEST

DYLAN MINER & ALYNN GUERRA

January 11-February 12, 2011
 Opening Reception: Thursday, January 13, 4-6pm

"Human Existence Cannot be Silent," proclaims the bearded protestor in the print by Dylan Miner. The quote is from Paulo Freire, a Brazilian social reformer who believed in the power of education to reform cultural inequities. Alynn Guerra and Dylan Miner give voice to Human Existence through their protest art in the exhibition -*Graphic Protest*.

Protest art is generally defined as forms of creative expression that support a particular cause or criticize the status quo. It is often used in acts of protest or civil disobedience, commonly in the forms of posters, banners & slogans. Another characteristic is it is often done outside of art world institutions and commercial galleries because the intended audience is the community - not the elite. Extensive training in art and knowledge of art history is not necessary, in fact, Protest Art is often done collectively or anonymously, which downplays ownership by an individual artist.

Alynn Guerra and Dylan Miner both make work with a message - they comment on political issues and social concerns. They both work in printmaking, a media known for its democratization of information and art - being inexpensive and therefore accessible for people. Guerra and Miner have both worked collectively and collaboratively in art. Guerra has been active in her community with her Red Hydrant Press and is a member of Pinafore Print Collective. Miner is a member of Just Seeds Artists' Collective and has participated in art activist communities and events nationally and internationally.

Guerra and Dylan do differ from one aspect of protest art in that they are both educated in art. This may become more of the norm in protest art, especially among printmakers, since, in the last century the way to learn printmaking has moved from the workplace to the academy. Another aspect that differs is this protest art is being shown within the academy/art world institution of the University Art Gallery.

Protest Art is global. Alynn Guerra was born and educated in Mexico. Dylan is an Assistant Professor of Transcultural Studies at Michigan State University, where he also holds appointments in American Indian and Chicano/Latino studies. Both artists acknowledge being influenced by the printmaking protest art tradition of Mexico.

This tradition is best known through the work of José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913.) He was a Mexican cartoonist, printmaker, illustrator and artist known for his satirical political work. As a teenager he trained with a printmaker and for forty-two years worked as a commercial artist for newspapers and publishers. He is best known for his works depicting Calaveras (skeletons from the Mexican Day of the Dead tradition.) Dressed as industry bosses, revolutionaries, politicians and common people, these skeletons acted out scenes of cultural and political satire. Posada worked during the tumultuous and transformative time of the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution engendered a cultural move away from colonial identification with Europe to a growing sense of a true and distinct Mexican identity. The Calaveras are part of that unique identity and Posada became the emblem of a truly Mexican Art.

This, however, did not happen until after Posada's death when some of the best-known Mexican modernists- Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros - championed his work - assuring his place in history. These same artists famously supported the revolution through their politically charged prints and mural works.

Though Posada is now gaining recognition outside Mexico there is a much larger story to tell of Mexican printmaking. The TGP, Taller De Grafica Popular, was a collective of printmakers (Leopoldo Méndez, Ángel Bracho, Fernando Castro Pacheco and José Chávez Morado to name a few.) Founded in 1938, it was dedicated to using art to support progressive causes such as trade unions, education and agrarian reform. Though a single lauded "genius" is often what becomes history, the TGP and the protest poster work of numerous artists during the 20th century is the true story of the profound impact of Mexican printmaking.



What is Mine, Alynn Guerra, 2008



Under Construction, Alynn Guerra, 2009



Indians and Immigrants Pendants, Dylan Miner, 2010

Alynn Guerra tells of this legacy in her development as an artist. She grew up with the politically charged printed posters wallpapered on the streets of her hometown - Mexico City. She moved to Grand Rapids in 2000 and established Red Hydrant Press in a warehouse close to downtown. She works with a bold black mark on white paper with occasional color, creating strong images that are easy to read. She follows the poster tradition including words to make the intent unmistakable. In her print series on seeds and corn Guerra gives voice to people's centuries-old reliance on seed. She also protests the commodification of seeds by high-tech corporations. In *Sacred Corn*, she celebrates the beauty and importance of corn in Mexico's culture and history. Guerra invites the public to participate in the saving of seeds in her installation *Propagation*. Here the viewer can take an artist-printed seed packet of traditional Mexican green corn in exchange for their views or drawings on seeds.

The Calaveras (skeletons) in *What is Mine, Death's Gatherings and Death Contemplating Wind Power* evoke Posada and Mexican identity. In her *Construction Season* series Guerra juxtaposes nature with the orange hazard cones of construction. She is decrying the ever-pushing encroachment of development on our natural environment. Yet, there is also a quality of stasis in these images. Nature exists and persists despite development, often growing up around and obscuring the orange cones.

Dylan Miner is an activist, artist and art historian. He was born and grew up in Michigan. During his youth he befriended Latinos in his small Michigan town and became interested in Mexican American concerns and culture, feeling a connection with his identity as a Native American (Mischif.) He formalized this interest by earning a PHD in Art History from The University of New Mexico with an emphasis in Arts of the Americas. In his installation, *Rooting for the Home Team*, he has assembled two opposing baseball teams - the Indians and the Immigrants. His teams are depicted with relief prints printed off of incised Louisville Slugger baseball bats, which rest against the wall under each print. The work uses the quintessential "American" sport - baseball - to question the concept of being "American." He continues with the Baseball metaphor in *Niizhwaaswi G'mishomisinaanig*. These hand printed felt pendants do not root for a team but rather assert the seven sacred teachings of Miner's Anishinaabeg peoples. He places his cultural identity in the normative guise of sports pendants, giving voice to his traditions and exposing their absence in "American" identity.

Reoccupied is an installation consisting of a large graffiti marked sign, scenes and figures painted on the wall and hand painted cardboard figurative sculptures. The work depicts the 1969 occupation of the Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay by a group of Native American activists. The Native American figures are doing everyday things while being watched by a group of unnamed suited male figures. The painted images are black ink tracings, which get the information across without nuanced art markings. Once again Miner gives voice to a people who have faded from history, drawing our focus to the existence of an active indigenous resistance movement.

This exhibition, *Graphic Protest*, introduces the viewer to the work of these two exciting and accomplished artists. Hopefully it sparks an interest in political protest art, political printmaking art and the rich influence of Mexican art in these fields. Michigan residents are fortunate to have a great example of Mexican activist art with the Diego Rivera mural *Industry* fresco cycle at the Detroit Institute of Art. I also recommend a visit to The National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. They have an extensive collection of a Chicago printmaker Carlos Cortez (1923 - 2004) who is considered by many activist artists (Miner included) as a leader in Mexican American printmaking and protest art.

Anne Gochenour, Director
University Art Gallery

LIST OF WORKS IN EXHIBITION

Alynn Guerra
born 1975 in Mexico City, Mexico
lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Let Go
2006
woodcut on fabric
and stamp ink

Retreat I
2006
monotype

War I
2006
monotype

Patented Seeds
2007
linocut

Construction Season
2008
color linocut

Hayfield
2008
color linocut

What is Mine
2008
linocut

Development
2009
reduction print

Fall
2009
linocut

May
2009
color linocut

Sacred Corn
2009
linocut

Summer Scenery
2009
linocut

Under Construction
2009
linocut

Death Contemplating Wind Power
2010
linocut

Death's Gatherings
2010
linocut

Life is Founded on Seeds
2010
linocut

Nightfall
2010
woodcut and transfer

Propagation
2010
linocut

Propagation
2010
print installation

*The Revolution Also Belongs
to Lakes, Rivers, Trees, Animals*
2010
linocut

Seeds are Common Property
2010
linocut

Dylan Miner
born 1976 in Alma, Michigan
lives in East Lansing, Michigan

Songs of Joe Hill; Rebel Girl
2005
relief print on recycled grocery sack

Songs of Joe Hill: The Sab Cat
2005
relief print on recycled grocery sack

History of Anarchist Football
2006
relief print on recycled grocery sack

Damos Gracias
2007
relief print on recycled grocery sack

Human Existence Cannot Be Silent
2008
color relief print

Indigenous Sovereignty
2010
digital image of ink and watercolor

*Rooting for the Home Team:
Indians vs. Immigrants*
2010 - 2011
relief prints, incised baseball bats

*Niizhwaaswi G'mishomisinoanig
(The Seven Grandfathers)*
2011
hand printed and hand sewn pennants

Reoccupation
2011
installation (paint, wood, cardboard, ink)



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

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michigan council for
arts and cultural affairs