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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences,
Fine Arts Studio Department,
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

WE SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

by

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We Support Our Troops

Thesis Abstract

We Support Our Troops is a series of three mural sized prints in panoramic format. The images can be described as Rochester urban landscapes in which the commercial images of the billboards were replaced with images of Latin American resistance movements. The title is an appropriation of the United States pro-war slogan twisted into the support context of these movements. The prints are made in the contemporary and non-toxic printmaking technique *4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type* developed by Master Printmaker Keith Howard. The Intaglio-Type techniques are the ones in which the photopolymer film ImagOn® is used.

A technical and historical approach is used in this written document. Included is a detailed explanation of the process with descriptions of the photographic equipment and software used for the image capture and creation of the landscapes. A step by step description of the *4 Color Intaglio-Type* technique follows, from making the plates physically to the printing process. This technical walkthrough illustrates why this *Intaglio-Type* technique is the optimum fusion of the digital imagery with traditional printmaking techniques. The description also highlights the large format printing difficulties overcome in this research, with new possibilities yet to discover with the Akua Colors® inks.

The Latin American resistance movements referenced in this work are: The *EZLN* (National Zapatista Liberation Army) from Chiapas, México, the *APPO* (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), from Oaxaca, México, the *EPB* (Popular Boricua Army) or *Macheteros* from Puerto Rico, and the *Piqueteros* from Argentina. A historical overview of each of these movements is included.

Through this thesis I intend to shed light on the economic disparity between the United States and Latin American countries caused by their political relationship. To identify myself with a political movement rather than to educate or criticize the status quo. In order to effectively make this statement, the images were carefully worked in terms of composition, color and content. These elements included in the large panoramic format are strong enough to entice the viewers to stop, look, enjoy and ultimately reflect on the meaning behind the images.

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Introduction

Through this exposition I will reference the relationship between the economically privileged and the so-called Third World countries, especially between Latin America and the United States. This work will put into historical, economic and political context the exploitation of cheap labor and natural resources by powerful countries. It will represent my alignment with those who resist this exploitation caused by the phenomenon known as neo-colonialism.

Using Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home* series (1967-72 and 2004) as a reference, this conflictive relationship between countries will be represented through the juxtaposition of photographic imagery within urban landscapes. Reference will also be made to Carl and Ann Purcell, Edward Hopper, Richard Estes and Martín García Rivera. These artists employ different media to explore different themes; this work will reference their aesthetic, content and technique. My intention, through this work, is to make a political statement that is in harmony with the political and economical solidarity felt among Latin American countries.

To create a unique output I will use the 4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type printmaking techniques. This creates the possibility of the digital and manual manipulation of the imagery.

Through the printmaking medium my goal will be to shed light on the economic and political disparity between the United States and Latin American countries. To identify myself with a political movement, rather than educate or criticize the status quo. It is my expectation that this body of work will be interpreted through singular historical and political ideological filters. These images will have a strong contrast in terms of content and color and hopefully will impact the viewers by enticing them to stop, look, enjoy and ultimately reflect on the meaning behind the images.

“El otro soy yo (I am the other)”¹

The title *We Support Our Troops* is an appropriation of the United States government pro-war slogan. In a contemporary context, it means that *we* support the war in Iraq.² But to whom does the slogan refer to as *we*? Under a war propaganda context, it refers to the entire United States population because it encourages this nation’s citizens to support their government’s military attack on a Middle Eastern country. Therefore, the slogan is a marginalization of those against this war or the U.S. foreign policy in general.

By re-defining this slogan I have identified myself with those who are against the war. Also, with those that believe that any U.S. intervention, be it military, political or economical, outside of its borders is wrong. The premise being that such interventions are solely made to further the government and big corporations’ economical interests, and that they bring political and economical instability in those countries being intervened. Latin American countries have a long history of being intervened by their Northern neighbor. Professor and author Noam Chomsky explains this relationship between countries from a U.S. perspective: “The South is assigned a service role: to provide resources, cheap labor, markets, opportunities for investment and, lately, export pollution”.³ Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano does the same but from a Latin American perspective:

It is Latin America the region of the open veins. Since the discovery until present days, everything has been always transmuted into European capital or, lately, North American, and as so has been and is accumulated in the far centers of power. Everything: the land, its fruits and its depth rich in minerals, the men and



Fig. 1. One of the official *We Support Our Troops* designs

¹ Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* from Argentina; from a speech (January 2003) shown in the film *The Fourth World War*, by Big Noise Films, New York, 2005.

² The Anti-War movement also appropriated the slogan by changing it to “Support Our Troops: Bring Them Home Now.”

³ Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues*, South End Press, Boston, MA, 1993, p. 33.

their capacity for work and consumption, the natural resources and the human resources.⁴

Drastic examples of North American interventions in the South took place between the 60's and 80's, when the U.S. government brought down or helped bringing down lots of local democratically elected governments that were not in favor of U.S. interests and replaced them with military dictatorships. One of the best examples was Chile in 1973, when president Salvador Allende was overthrown by the CIA supported military general Augusto Pinochet who was responsible for one of the most terrible dictatorships known in history.

I believe that every country has the right to self-determination. The island of Puerto Rico has been politically and economically under the United States control since 1898. I support the island's right to self-determination and support all that believe as I do. As a Latino, I feel solidarity with many Latin American movements that are fighting for self-determination and social justice.

Within the context of the pro-U.S. government and policies spectrum, I have appropriated the slogan *We Support Our Troops* and re-defined *we* as **the other** or as those who think differently; and the troops that *we* support are grassroots resistance movements in Latin America.

Bringing the War Home

One of the most important references and inspirations for my work is Marta Rosler's series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-72) and her new version *Bringing the War Home* (2004). In the original series she collaged magazine cutouts of U.S. domestic scenes with images from the Vietnam War. Recently, she repeated this with images from the Iraq War using digital collages. Both series explore the same concept: the juxtaposition of images that physically belong to separate worlds but are politically connected. My concept is similar: I inserted images of Latin American

⁴ Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, Siglo XXI Editores, Uruguay, 1971, p. 6-7.



Fig. 2, Martha Rosler, *Red Stripe Kitchen* from the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-1972)
Photo-collage, 24 x 20"

grassroots resistance movements into U.S. urban landscapes. In addition, Rosler's series title *Bringing the War Home* was taken from a slogan by *The Weather Underground*, a grassroots left-wing organization from the late 60's and 70's. The title of my series is also an appropriation.

Another important reference is a photograph by Carl & Ann Purcell taken in Nicaragua. The image consists of a sideways view of a rustic road and on the background there's a billboard that shows Santa Claus drinking Coke. On the foreground, there's a young kid walking the road on his bare feet. This time the juxtaposition of elements was already there at the

moment the picture was taken, but their conflict is very present in an incredibly dramatic way. Advertisements of Coca-Cola can be found almost everywhere in the world and they became a symbol of U.S. economical dominance, but what really adds to the irony of this image is that Santa Claus has nothing to do with the Nicaraguan culture, specially to a kid with no shoes who probably won't receive many presents during Christmas.

From this photograph I decided to use the element of the billboard as a window that brings the South and the North together, but in relation to Carl & Ann Purcell's picture⁵, I did the opposite: I brought Latin American elements into U.S. billboards.

My first successful work dealing with this subject is shown on Figure 3 and is titled *We Support Our*



Fig. 3, *We Support Our Troops: EZLN* (2006)
4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 24 x 32"

⁵ Carl & Ann Purcell are commercial photographers and, after looking at their other work, I believe they had no intention of making a political statement with the image described above. I couldn't find the picture on the web at the time that I was writing this document, so it was probably removed.

Troops: EZLN.⁶ The element of the billboard appears as the dominant figure in the composition because of its size and location, but yet a balance is created with the colorful background. This print is part of my pre-thesis body of work (so it was not in the thesis show), but still successful enough to be the image that I chose for my thesis show postcard. On my thesis prints, the billboards appear in a more subtle way and the images are bigger.

Painters like Edward Hopper and the photo-realist Richard Estes helped me settle an urban U.S. landscape vision. The street's perspective in relation to the architectural

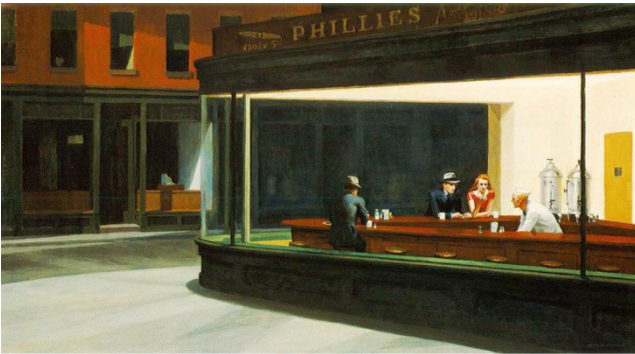


Fig. 4, Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks* (1942)
Oil on canvas, 30 x 60"

elements is something very important in the work of these two artists. I also noticed how the integration into the landscape of the storefront's elements and the signs' texts play an important role. As well, the color balance is masterly worked. But besides that, what really intrigues me about

Hopper's work is how the human element participates in the landscape in an almost ghostly way. Figure 4 is his icon image titled *Nighthawks* in which 4 persons appear inside a café and, even though 3 of them seem to be interacting, the way they are frozen and their size in relation to the whole scene gives the notion of a desolated town. I decided to explore this ghost town notion in my landscapes and perhaps exaggerate it.

Richard Estes' work is usually known for its perspectives and reflections. Figure 5 is a screen print with lots of reflections and a front perspective of what seems to be a diner. The color blue dominates the



Fig. 5, Richard Estes, *Not Titled (Grant's)* from the portfolio *8 Urban Landscapes* (1972)
Colour screenprint, 36 x 52"

⁶ EZLN is an acronym for *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista National Liberation Army) from Chiapas, México, and the person shown on the billboard is their leader Subcomandante Marcos.



Fig. 6, Martín García Rivera
Animinchin (1990)
Woodcut, 14 x 4'

composition in a very graphic way because of its saturation and flatness. Similar to Estes, I saturated my colors to enhance the graphic quality of my prints.

Another important reference is Martín García Rivera who is a worldwide recognized Master Printmaker from Puerto Rico. His mural sized woodcuts have won him several international awards. Figure 6 is a 14 feet print from 1990 titled *Animinchin*. For this image, Martín used 7 separate blocks: the legs, the body and the hands are 3 blocks, two for the head and two for the crown. Because I decided to take the printer's challenge of making mural sized prints on the same sheet of paper, the long format and the modular printing technique helped me solve some technical issues like the size of the press and the size of the exposure unit. Another important aspect of the *Animinchin* is that García Rivera used some of the modules

as individual prints, like the hands and the legs. One of my goals is to be able to do the same.

We Support Our Troops

The series titled *We Support Our Troops* consists of 3 mural sized prints in long panoramic format. Figure 7 shows the installation of the prints at the Bevier Gallery with a person shown for the scale. The images can be described as panoramic Rochester urban landscapes in which the images of the billboards were replaced with images of Latin American resistance movements. Included as a subtitle in the prints was each of the movements' names. On a separate letter sized sheet of paper, a brief explanation of the movements was also included. This explanatory paper can be seen in Figure 7 at the far right. The size of each of the images is 2 x 9' and each of the papers is 10 feet long.



Fig. 7, Installation of the series *We Support Our Troops* (2007) at the Bevier Gallery

Capturing and Creating the Images

Before capturing the images I did a lot of site research. The principal element that I was looking for was a few commercial urban scenes with more than one billboard to substitute. After identifying the three sites I aimed to capture the images with snow on the ground to add more drama to the landscapes from the north. Following some snowy days, I proceeded to capture the images. The equipment that I used was a Canon 20D® camera and a tripod with a QTVR® head. This tripod head allowed me to adjust the camera angle and position, in relation to its axis and the image to be captured, in order to make the perfect rotation when taking multiple shots for panoramas. These images were later stitched using the program Photomerge® from the image processor Adobe Photoshop®. For each of the panoramas there are from 5 to 8 shots.

After the panoramas were built, I continued working the landscapes using the image processor. The saturation of the colors was something that I worked deeply, using several tools on Photoshop®. The main purpose of this was to enhance the graphic quality of the prints and cause impact on the viewers; something to attract them so they would see and enjoy my work. Another important digital work was the substitution of the billboard images with the ones from Latin America, which were taken mostly from the

web. Also, some elements were inserted into the images in order to add more perspective and color to the landscapes.

Making the Plates

The technique used for printing these images is a Non-Toxic Printmaking technique developed by Master Printmaker Keith Howard which he named *4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type*. The *Intaglio-Type* techniques are the ones in which the photopolymer film ImagOn® is used. “*4 Color*” has to do with the CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) mode in which most color images are mechanically printed and “*Inversion*” makes reference to the way in which we place the plates in relation to the paper on the bed of the press. Normally, in the Intaglio techniques, the paper is placed on top of the plate so it is pushed inside the inked grooves of the plate by the pressure of the press. In Keith’s technique, the plates are placed facing down on top of the paper.

For this technique, a digital color image is separated into four channels, one for each color (cyan, magenta, yellow and black), using Photoshop®. A transparency for each channel is then printed on an ink jet printer to be used as stencils for exposing to four different plates. Each of the plates was laminated previously with the photopolymer film ImagOn®. The exposure is done using a UV light exposure unit. The plates are then developed in a solution of water and sodium carbonate, also known as soda ash. This will create the grooves in the film which are needed so the plates hold ink according to the image.

The size of each of my images is 2 x 9 feet so I had to divide them in three sections. The reason for the division had to do with some size limitations among the equipment, like the bed of the press and the exposure unit. Because each section needed four plates, each of my images needed a total of twelve plates.

Printing the Images

Part of the printing process involves inking and wiping the plates, which is done as any common Intaglio technique such as etching or aquatint. Using the Akua Intaglio® inks, two of the printing colors are substituted. Instead of Cyan, Phtalo Blue cut to 50%

with transparent base is used. The other is Crimson Red instead of Magenta. These substitutions create a unique and more painterly aesthetic to these prints in comparison to the digital and offset CMYK prints.

The *4 Color Inversion Intaglio-Type* technique has a very peculiar way of printing and registering. Here, the plates facing down are placed on top of the paper for registration purposes. The printer sees through the transparent plates and lines up the image previously printed on the paper with the image on the plate about to be printed. After wetting the paper once, the four plates are printed one after the other using the wet on wet method. The printing order of the colors goes from the lightest to the darkest: yellow, red, blue and black.

The size of my images and the fact that I decided to print them on the same sheet of paper, instead of printing the sections separately and pasting them together, created some technical difficulties that I had to overcome by figuring out my own methods. Each of my images was divided in three 24 x 36" segments, and the best way was to print the four colors of each segment one at a time. To facilitate the handling of the paper, I decided to print the middle section first. Getting the paper wet was another part of the process that I needed to solve. After some research, I figured out that the best way to wet the paper when handling such long sheets and using the Akua Intaglio® inks is to mist only the part and side of the paper about to be used. After using a mister, slightly blotting the paper by placing a piece of blotter on top and rubbing it gently with your hands is recommended. Misting the paper instead of soaking it gives you more vibrant colors and some degree of graininess, which adds graphic quality to the images. A soaked paper will give you more photographic smoothness with matt colors.

Printing the first segment, the one in the center, was done as any 4 Color Intaglio Type is printed. For the other two segments, I had to change the method to avoid as much as possible the contact of the drum of the press with pressure on a printed image on the paper. The reason for that is to avoid ink offsetting because the Akua Intaglio® inks don't completely dry on the paper. For this, I used an electric press (the bed moves and stops by pushing buttons) with a hydraulic pressure system because it allowed me to release the pressure by just turning a valve. For printing, I first aligned the yellow plate with the already printed center image. Then I adjusted the pressure on the edge of the paper where there's nothing printed. I continued by running the bed of the press in slow speed and as

soon as I heard the bump⁷ that announces the end of the plate, I released the pressure by turning the valve. Next, I ran the bed to the other side (with no pressure), and while an assistant is taking care of the blankets, I'm removing the yellow plate, looking for the red one and registering it. The same procedure is repeated with the next plates and the third image of the other side.

EZLN y APPO

The first image that I worked is titled *We Support Our Troops (EZLN y APPO)* and is shown in Figure 8. The blue color is a very dominant element in the composition, comparable to Estes' image on page 5. The warm colors of the buildings were carefully worked on Photoshop® so they will balance the cool colored sky and center building. I also decided to repeat the black & white vs. color contrast, explored previously in my pre-thesis print *We Support Our Troops (EZLN)* shown in Figure 3, by turning the images on the billboards into grayscale mode. The street sign was added digitally in order to bring more perspective to the panorama.⁸



Fig. 8, *We Support Our Troops (EZLN y APPO)*, (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

The first movement that I referenced in this print is the *EZLN*. The brief explanation included in the sheet of paper that was pasted next to the installed prints at the Bevier Gallery about this guerrilla movement read as follows:

EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional; Zapatista National Liberation Army).

The *Zapatistas* came out on January 1st, 1994, the day the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) came in effect. Their main goal is to give a voice to the indigenous

⁷ A *bump* occurs when the press drum just finishes pressuring a plate because of its thickness.

⁸ The street sign was really part of the scene. It had to be added digitally because it was not in any of the shots that were chosen to make the stitch.

population of Chiapas, México so their demands will be heard. “We are the *EZLN*: the voice that arms itself to be heard, the face that hides itself to be seen, the name that hides itself to be named, the tomorrow that is harvested in the past”. –*Mayor Insurgente Ana María, Comandancia General del EZLN*⁹

Figure 9 is a detail of my print that shows the billboard in which I inserted the *Zapatista* images. Figure 10 is a close-up of the billboard which is divided in three images: a *Zapatista* girl in a village, *Mayor Insurgente Ana María* holding an assault rifle and a *Zapatista* bathing a baby in a river. The reason why I chose this combination of images was to show both their human and military side. An *EZLN* banner with a red star was also inserted on a store front near the billboard.



Fig. 9, *We Support Our Troops (EZLN y APPO)*, [detail], (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

⁹ Mayor Insurgente Ana María, from a speech shown on *Zapatista*, by *Big Noise Films*, New York, 2002.



Fig. 10. *We Support Our Troops (EZLN y APPO)*, [detail] (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

The *EZLN* is a peaceful guerrilla movement. They claim that since 1995 there hasn't been a shot fired from their rifles. Their firepower display is used to attract the public, the media and the government's attention of the issues they address. They also keep their weapons as a last resource in case they have to defend their self-sustained communities against a possible military intervention. Whenever the military starts surrounding their area (mountains of Chiapas) to set up bases and checkpoints, they send unarmed Zapatistas to protest them peacefully.

Another difference the *EZLN* has with other guerrilla movements is the importance of the indigenous component. For the Zapatistas, a key element of their struggle is to "state the concept of dignity"¹⁰ for the indigenous population of Chiapas. What they mean by 'dignity' is to bring forward a community that has been pushed back and forgotten by the Mexican society. They demand the basic needs of "land, dignified work, dignified housing" and "education"¹¹. Also, because many businessmen from the city buy their products at an undervalued price, they claim their right to set the price of their harvest. It is a guerrilla movement that has more political than military victories. The Zapatistas don't want to takeover the Mexican government as their leader Sub

¹⁰ Sub Comandante Marcos, from an interview shown on *Zapatista*, Big Noise Films, New York, 2002.

¹¹ Comandante Zebedeo, from an interview shown on *Zapatista*, Big Noise Films, New York, 2002.

Comandante Marcos said in an interview: “We do not want to overthrow the government to put ourselves in its place. We want to open a democratic space where society can participate and decide what political path it is going to take.”¹²

Even though they have the term ‘national’ in their name and they are established in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico, the *EZLN* see things through an international point of view. They identified a common enemy for them and most economically oppressed people around the globe: neo-liberalism and its practices, most of them taking the form of free trade treaties. That is why they symbolically came out the exact day in which the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) came in effect. The Zapatistas knew that this treaty was going to bring disastrous consequences to local business, especially farmers. Their call is for unity and solidarity among all the oppressed people around the world to stand against this globalization monster that is benefiting only a few wealthy and powerful individuals.

The other movement that I’m referencing in this print is the *APPO*. The brief explanation at the Bevier Gallery read:

APPO (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca; Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca). The APPO was officially born on June 17, 2006; three days after Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz ordered a brutal police repression against a teacher’s strike which ended with three deaths, including a child who suffocated after inhaling tear gas, and over twenty people injured. 365 social organizations and individual citizens decided to build a grassroots democratic coalition in which the decisions are taken by the people, in open assemblies, from the bottom to the top. “That day the people of Oaxaca decided to take their destiny and history into their own hands and fight for one unique goal: take the tyrant, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, out”. –APPO¹³

Figure 11 is a detail of the print with the APPO billboard. I also inserted their logo on a storefront below the billboard (the one with a red star at the bottom).

¹² *Zapatista*, Big Noise Films, New York, 2002.

¹³ www.asambleapopulardeoaxaca.com, official APPO web site.



Fig. 11. *We Support Our Troops (EZLN y APPO)*, [detail], 2007
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

Meeting in popular assemblies is a very typical way of organizing in Latin America that comes from indigenous tradition. In these assemblies, any participant can have a voice on any issue being discussed, following a grassroots democracy model. In Oaxaca they used this model to organize themselves and make a stand against the violent State repression that started in the summer of 2006 at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University during a teacher's strike. After the APPO was created, one of the most important decisions made was to not recognize Ulises Ruiz Ortiz as their governor and to focus their energy into taking him out the seat. Their strategies went from organizing rallies and marches (which were called mega-marches because more than a million people assisted), taking over radio stations for maximizing the communication, and building barricades to protect the strike picket lines and the occupied radio stations.

The barricades became a symbol of their struggle, as they gave the message that the people of Oaxaca are willing to defend themselves. The barricaders covered their faces with masks and handkerchiefs to protect their identity. Pictures of these militant APPO members holding handmade weapons began spreading around as urban guerrilla heroes. I decided to use barricaders in my billboard because of the unique look they give to the Oaxaca struggle, but also to assume the political position that I support these self-defense tactics under certain conditions. The billboard (Fig. 11) is a combination of two images with the first one from the left consisting of four APPO soldiers kneeling while posing for the picture. The second one on the right is a barricader defending his post.

The governor's reaction was to call for help to the Mexican central government who responded by sending the Federal Preventive Police to Oaxaca. The PFP (in Spanish) is an anti-riot equipped police squad that took over the streets with extreme brutal force. The barricades and streets of Oaxaca became the scenarios of fierce battles between APPO members and the PFP. On November 2, 2006 the APPO succeeded in defending their last radio station, Radio APPO, by holding a very strategic barricade at the university. The PFP decided to retreat after a few hours of violent confrontation, not without injuring and arresting a good number of barricaders and supporting people. After November 28, the government started using fascist tactics like kidnapping, disappearing and torturing people. Oaxaca became a State ruled under Martial Law with mysterious agents in vans randomly taking people in and barricaders tied by their feet lifted by helicopters that flew over the last barricades to give the message. Also, the whole APPO leadership was arrested one by one. This forced the people of Oaxaca to change their strategies and meet in hidden places. The mega-marches are still being organized as millions of people take the streets and peacefully demand for the release of the political prisoners and the immediate resignation of Ulises Ruiz as the governor of Oaxaca. Some confrontations with the police are still happening, as the APPO wants to give the message that they are not willing to turn the other cheek.

EPB: Macheteros

The second image included in this body of work is shown on Figure 12 and is titled *We Support Our Troops (EPB: Macheteros)*. Even though there is a deep blue sky, warm colors dominate the landscape. The intention was to create a balance with the previous print, *EZLN y APPO*, which is composed of predominantly cool colors. Another important characteristic of this image is the aerial perspective of the scene as the shots were taken from an elevated position. In order to capture a good perspective of both billboards, I had to walk over a closed road that connected to an elevated highway. Also, the area is a desolated part of town. This gave the panorama a ghost town look, comparable to Estes's urban landscapes. A very peculiar technical quality of this print is the difference in blue tonality of the sky in the section where the second set of plates meets the third set. It can be seen on Figure 12 between the pink building and the tree, and on Figure 13 on the right. Sometimes these accidents can be very positive because they highlight the handmade process of the print.



Fig. 12. *We Support Our Troops (EPB: Macheteros)*, (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

The group that I'm referencing in this print is the *Macheteros*. The brief explanation read:

EPB: Macheteros (*Ejército Popular Boricua*, Boricua Popular Army). The *Macheteros* is a clandestine organization that fights for the independence of Puerto Rico. They started claiming responsibility for several actions since 1978. Although they were quiet for the last decade, on September 23, 2005 (the anniversary of *el Grito de Lares*, the first Puerto Rican uprising for independence) the FBI surrounded and murdered their leader, Filiberto

Ojeda Ríos, an old man living with his wife in a humble house on the west side of the island.



Fig. 13. *We Support Our Troops* (EPB: *Macheteros*), [detail], (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

Figure 13 is a detail that shows one of the *Macheteros* billboards. Their name makes reference to the *machete* which is the typical tool used by workers in the sugar cane fields that can also be used as a weapon. The billboard with a group of men raising their machetes with one them holding a Puerto Rican flag shows people that are willing to fight for their country, in this case; the liberation of Puerto Rico. To the left I inserted the EPB logo, a green machete with a red star.

The EPB came out in 1978 as the clandestine army of the *PRTP* (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Puertorriqueños*, Puerto Rican Workers' Revolutionary Party). They declared the war on the U.S. military forces claiming that the Northern country militarily invaded the island on 1898.¹⁴ The Macheteros also claim, and "it has been proved by experts of international law"¹⁵, that the Paris Treaty of the same year, in which Spain gives Puerto Rico to the United States, is illegal because it conflicts with the Autonomous Pact (*Carta Autonómica*) of 1897 signed between Puerto Rico and Spain, which stated that any change to it as a political Constitution should be consulted

¹⁴ "On 1898, the U.S. government ordered its powerful Navy to invade the Puerto Rican territory, executed through a merciless bombing over San Juan, the Puerto Rican capital city." Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, from the essay *El Nacimiento de los Macheteros*, published on www.indymediapr.org, 2005.

¹⁵ Ojeda Ríos, Filiberto. *El Nacimiento de los Macheteros*. www.indymedia.org, 2005.

with the Puerto Rican government¹⁶. Another argument that they use in their favor is the abolition of all the colonies after World War II and their right to fight for independence. The EPB is very lucid in stating that their “struggle is not against the people of the United States”¹⁷, but against their government and foreign policies. Because they’re a military army, they completely reject the idea of targeting members of the civil population. The Macheteros therefore restricted themselves to attacking military installations on the island, but their major and most famous attack was of a different type. On September 12, 1983, they were responsible of stealing the biggest amount of money in the U.S. history, 7.1 millions from a Wells Fargo truck without any casualties. The hit was made in Hartford, Connecticut, and the EPB claimed that the money was going to be used to finance the Puerto Rican independence struggle. Two years later, three men were seen on cargo truck disguised as the Three Wise Men¹⁸ giving toys to the kids in a Puerto Rican community of the same city where the hit was made. The Popular Boricua Army also claimed responsibility for that action. Later that year, the FBI arrested around 15 Puerto Rican independence supporters suspected of being Macheteros under the charges of terrorism and armed robbery including the leader Filiberto Ojeda Ríos. On September 23, 1990, the anniversary of *El Grito de Lares*, Filiberto “entered clandestinity after cutting the electronic shackle while waiting for the Wells Fargo robbery trial.”¹⁹

The EPB was disarticulated after the 1985 arrests. Even though they kept sending press releases, they stopped coordinating attacks and other types of actions. Still, the fact that Ojeda Ríos was a fugitive gave hope to many Macheteros and independence supporters since it represented an act of defiance to the federal authorities. On September 23, 2005, the Machetero leader was murdered by the FBI in Hormigueros, a rural town on the west side of the island. It is obvious that the federal agency wanted to make a statement by making their move on that particular date. The people’s response included rallies, marches and protests with EPB banners and graffiti messages being written on the walls, which the most common was “FBI Assassins”. Some murals were also made and

¹⁶ “Article 2 of Additional Articles: Once the present Constitution is approved by the Kingdom Court for the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico, it can not be changed unless is made by law amendment and by petition of the Island Parliament”. *Carta Autonómica del 1897*.

García Martínez, Alfonso. *Fundamental Laws of Puerto Rico*. Editorial Edil, Inc. Río Piedras, 1989.

¹⁷ Ojeda Ríos, Filiberto. *El Nacimiento de los Macheteros*. www.indymedia.org, 2005.

¹⁸ The Three Wise Men is the Puerto Rican Christmas myth equivalent to Santa Claus in the U.S.

¹⁹ Carmen Jovet reporting the incident. News excerpt from the Daisy Sánchez interview. Teleonce, 1990.

the most important and probably the only one that still exists is the image that I chose for the other billboard of the print and can be seen on Figure 14.



Fig. 14. *We Support Our Troops* (EPB: *Macheteros*), [detail], (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

The man with the white beard holding his hands up is Filiberto Ojeda Ríos. The graffiti artists²⁰ decided to portrait him this way meaning that he surrendered before he was shot. I also included a Macheteros sign under the billboard. Since there are Puerto Rican communities inside the United States with independence supporting organizations, the billboard appropriation could be a reality. Some people have asked me if this scene is from either New York City or Chicago. I think this realistic notion adds another interesting element to the print. Even though there are many political murals made by immigrant groups, like Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, and U.S. native minority groups, like African-Americans, this type of billboards don't exist. There can be more than one answer to the question of why. One of the most important is related with the companies that manage the billboards and the amount of money required to rent one. Professor and

²⁰ The mural was made by *El Coro* graffiti crew (Exor, Rmix, Bik and Son)

author Noam Chomsky describes the media ownership element as the first of five filters of his “Propaganda Model”:

In sum, the dominant media firms are quite large business; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with major corporations, banks, and government.²¹

Rochester billboards are owned by Lamar Advertising Company, which is one of the largest advertising companies in the U.S. “As of December 31, 2007,” they “owned and operated approximately 151,000 billboard advertising displays in 44 states, Canada, and Puerto Rico.”²² There is no question that the managers and CEO’s of this major corporation will not allow any advertisement portraying left-wing radicals as heroes because they represent a threat to the status-quo from which corporations like Lamar make a big profit.

Piqueteros

A third image completes the *We Support Our Troops* series and can be seen on Figure 15. Considering the color temperature of the two previous images (one cold and the other warm), I decided to create a neutral landscape to maintain the temperature



Fig. 15. *We Support Our Troops (Piqueteros)*, (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

²¹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: the political economy of the mass media*. Pantheon Books, New York. 1988, page 14.

²² Google Finance. Company summary. <http://www.google.com/finance?q=lamar>

balance of the body of work as a whole. To achieve this, I worked the color balance carefully with complementary colors like Hopper did on his famous *Nighthawks* (1492, Figure 4). On *We Support Our Troops (Piqueteros)*, the warm orange of the buildings is balanced by the cool blue of the street and sky. There are also cool elements on the buildings like the windows and warm elements on the street like the lady with the red coat at the far left, which I digitally inserted. This lady also helps the composition as a reference spot, creating a mark that attracts the eye of the spectator so it can rest and appreciate this part of the landscape.

The appropriated billboards have a different format on this image when compared with the previous two. Figure 15 is a detail that shows them, one is a corner billboard with two sides and can be seen on the left, and the other is the bus billboard on the right.



Fig. 15. *We Support Our Troops (Piqueteros)*, [detail], (2007)
Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type, 2 x 9'

The *Piqueteros* is a movement mainly from Argentina. This is the brief explanation from the glossary:

Piqueteros: The current *piquetero* organizations came from the protest of Cutral-Có, Argentina in 1996. They are mostly unemployed workers that were fired as a result of the privatization politics of the neo-liberal government. Their main way of action is the *piquete*, which consists of blocking a road and demanding aid plans for the unemployed and sometimes better conditions for hospitals and schools.

The political and economic situation in Argentina during the last decades was very complex. From 1955 to 1983, military dictatorships and elected civil governments switched into power causing a political instability that had a direct effect on the economy. During the 1980's the collapse was inevitable and the international debt duplicated. As a result, the government drastically enforced the neo-liberal practice of privatizing State companies during the 1990's. The most notorious case was the privatization of the oil company, YPF, on the northern part of the country. Cutral Có and Plaza Huincul are two big cities that depended economically on YPF, and witnessed gigantic protests and fierce full battles between workers and policemen. Just like in Oaxaca, protestors started building barricades to protect the picket lines and block important roads with burning tires to call the media and government's attention. The barricaders were known as *piqueteros*. In fact, most of Argentina was turned into a battlefield with strikes, barricades and rallies that ended in violent confrontations²³.

The most important event of this period was the *cacerolazo*²⁴ of December 2001 to January 2002 in which the People of Argentina (unemployed, working class, small business owners, middle class and even high middle class) took the streets and revolted against the current government. The sparkle that caused the big explosion was the *corralito*²⁵, a government drastic method to hold the economy by freezing the bank accounts. The uprising ended with two presidents being removed and three provisional ones that took the seat for less than a year each, for a total of five presidential changes from December 2001 to May 2003. Néstor Kirchner, the president of the *Peronista* party, succeeded on keeping most of the people calm and was able to complete his presidential term. His wife currently holds the seat.

During the time surrounding the main *cacerolazo*, public meetings were being held in order to organize all the protests. These meetings took the form of popular assemblies, just like in Oaxaca. Among the society members that were part of the assemblies were unemployed workers organized as *piqueteros*, who started organizing

²³ Chris Harman. *A Revolt in Argentina*. ISO Press, San Juan, 2003, pages 13-27

²⁴ The word *cacerolazo* comes from *cacerola*, which means 'stew pot' in Spanish. The *cacerolazo* is a form of protest that consists of making noise with pots and other kitchen utensils, either from the street or from your balcony, showing inconformity with the current government.

²⁵ The word *corralito* comes from *corral*, which means 'fence' in Spanish. During the *corralito*, nobody was allowed to retire more than a thousand dollars per month.

themselves during the YPF privatization protests. Figure 15 shows a billboard with two *piquetero* images. The first one consists of a barricader with a slingshot and the other one shows a *piquetero* holding a pole. Both of them have their faces covered. Fire appears on the backgrounds because of the burning tires of the *piquete*. Also, the bus billboard displays a high contrast image of two *piqueteros* with t-shirts covering their faces and a text that reads, *Piqueteros Carajo*²⁶ which means, ‘piqueteros hell yeah!’

The *piqueteros* represented the radical wing of the Argentinean movement during the crisis. With urban guerilla tactics, these warriors demonstrated their willingness to give it all for what they believed is right; but the most important fact is that they’re not alone. Besides the majority of the people’s support, by 2001 they were able to join forces and have two national conferences of *piquetero* organizations. On the same year, the *piqueteros* blocked the 300 mayor roads with around 50,000 barricaders²⁷. Although some people can see the barricades as something violent, for others they represent a self-defense tactic. The *piqueteros* are defending themselves against the violent act of being fired from a corporation because the International Monetary Fund (IMF) told the government to privatize it. The *piquete*, therefore, is used as a tactic to obtain temporary jobs and other aid-plans for the unemployed. They also show their solidarity with other struggles by building barricades to protect the picket lines of striking workers and to ask for better conditions for schools, hospitals and poor communities.

But barricades with burning tires and violent confrontations against anti-riot police squads are not everything for these contemporary heroes. The *piqueteros* also cover their basic needs, while helping others and rejecting the system, by organizing self-sustained communities. The work never ends in these *barrios*²⁸ because they’re in charge of bringing food to the most needed, building and coordinating health clinics, organizing alphabetization programs, and promoting and preserving the culture by coordinating art workshops and music presentations. These communities are managed economically by co-op systems, and the decisions are taken democratically in open meetings. After all

²⁶ *Piqueteros Carajo* is a documentary film’s title from Argentina and the billboard image was taken from film poster design.

²⁷ Harman, Chris. *Argentina in Revolt*. ISO Press, San Juan, 2003, page 40

²⁸ The word *barrio* means neighborhood in Spanish.

that, is almost incredible that they still have the time to decide where the next *piquete* is going to be.

Conclusion

For the series *We Support Our Troops* I decided to test myself with a number of challenges in order to create a strong body of work for my MFA thesis. Conceptually, I wanted to fuse my political beliefs with my art work in a way that the message would be understood, but still keeping an intellectual level of poetry. Technically, I chose to work with large format images while keeping each of the panoramas on a single sheet of paper in order to challenge my printmaking skills. This last challenge was successfully surpassed, as I was able to develop my own printing techniques on the recent Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type media. These techniques will help not only the printmaker willing to make mural sized Intaglio-Type prints, but anyone using the Akua Color® inks eager to experiment with the wetness of the paper to control the final quality of the print.

The conceptual challenge is not as objective as the technical one and requires further analysis. I expected the *We Support Our Troops* series to be individually interpreted through singular historical and political ideological filter. At the same time, I wanted to deliver a clearly understandable message: my opposition to the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and my alignment with Latin American grassroots resistance movements. Yet, elements of composition, color and format were successfully worked for anyone to enjoy, regarding their personal opinions about these political subjects. The most difficult part came to be the viewers' historical backgrounds and their lack of knowledge about the Latin American revolutionary movements which images covered the billboards of my landscapes. To overcome that, I followed my Thesis Committee's recommendation and created a glossary that briefly explained each of the movements. The glossary was printed on a letter-sized paper and pasted at the right end of the work installation in the show at the Bevier Gallery (see Figure 7 on page 7). Still, I feel that its display was not good enough to incite the viewers to stop and read the brief words that would put my images into context. I cannot expect that my prints would shed light on the economic and political disparity between the United States and Latin American countries if the viewers are not getting the whole panorama.

Despite my inability to deliver a clearly understandable message, the Bevier Gallery installation has been the best out of four different places in which the *We Support Our Troops* series has been shown. The space between the prints, the clean walls, and most important, the space the viewers had to walk back and enjoy the work have been unmatched. Still, in the second installation of the series at the Store Front Anti-War Crisis Center on Monroe Avenue, Rochester, I decided to include the brief explanation of the corresponding Latin American movement on the label of each of the prints. For example, the *Piqueteros*' short paragraph was included as part of the label of the *We Support Our Troops (Piqueteros)* print, and so on. I'm very positive that this way of integrating the text made it much more readable than the first time.

The *We Support Our Troops* series has opened many possibilities for my career as an artist. I learned the basics about capturing a digital image with a camera and experimented with professional equipment. Also, my image processing skills clearly evolved during this process. Right now I can see myself as a Photographer, just as I consider myself a Printmaker and a Painter. The creation of this series has unlocked a new path for my work through the use of photographic imagery. In addition, the Four Color Inversion Intaglio-Type technique needs further investigation in order to discover its wide variation of possibilities. Through my work I will continue the exploration of these techniques and contribute to the ongoing development of the media. Furthermore, *We Support Our Troops* gave me a point of departure for a fusion process of my political beliefs with my artwork. I am clear that the poetry level needs to be increased, so too the volume and clarity of my message. Cuban poet and musician Silvio Rodríguez, once said, "*La era está pariendo un corazón*" (the era is giving birth to a heart)²⁹, making reference to the struggles and social movements of the 1960's. Right now, new movements are arising as global capitalism keeps highlighting its own contradictions. Some of them were referenced in the *We Support Our Troops* series. With my future artwork I intend to keep showing my alignment with these new social struggles and movements, expanding the limits to a global scale, with strong verses, and a loud and clear broadcast that will always have room for further development.

²⁹ Silvio Rodríguez. *La era está pariendo un corazón* (1968). From the album *al final de este viaje...*, Ojalá Records, La Habana, 1978.

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