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El Taller de Gráfica Popular & the Meaning of Labor in Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana

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The Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphics Workshop) or TGP, is a graphic art collective founded in Mexico City in 1937. A recurring theme in the work of the TGP is manual labor, as a result of members’ concerns for the living conditions of the Mexican worker. The workshop artists not only participated in various labor movements, they were patronized by key figures and groups associated with labor reform. Representations of labor in the work of the TGP appear, at times, to be a trope for a universal figure that signifies a particular social class or specific political issues. The focus of this essay is the conception and application of the image of labor within the TGP’s 1947 portfolio, Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana.

The TGP’s intentions were explicitly outlined in their 1937 Declaration of Principles.1 In this document, the members of the collective articulated several things: one, they pledge to preserve and contribute to Mexican national culture; two, they express their willingness to collaborate with various cultural and political groups, regardless of geographic location; and three, they vow to, ‘defend freedom of expression and artists’ professional interests.’ For the TGP, image production was directed by the ideological values informing these guiding principles. Although the development of a personal style was encouraged, common meaning and intent was required. Their mode of evaluating workshop art production was based on a democratic group process termed críticas colectivas, or collective critiques. This process of decision-making occurred at weekly meetings and assured broad unity of purpose among members, but not necessarily mechanical conformity. However, the collective work produced by the TGP is also profoundly inflected by the individual interests and ideologies of each of the artists. Members negotiated their own distinct beliefs and opinions with the ideological parameters of the workshop and those of their patrons, even when contradictions arose.

The TGP produced graphic imagery intended to engage, inform and/or educate the people of Mexico, as well as audiences abroad. Political and social issues, both domestic and international, therefore, were the focus of TGP productions. Topics addressed by the group include: Mexico’s divided heritage and fragmented history, the poverty and oppression of the Indian population, human rights for the popular classes, defending nationalization of natural resources and the civil liberties for the workers movements.2 The legacy of the TGP is of far-reaching cultural significance because its work, which also promoted political and social change on a global level, circulated
worldwide and involved, as well as impacted, international artists. As such, important to the TGP was the legibility of an image, the relevance of an image to the global predicaments of marginalized citizens and the role of the work in fostering action. Distribution of TGP graphic work was accomplished through a variety of venues, which included the plastering of information on walls throughout the city, publication in news journals, the circulation of public posters and illustrated leaflets and the production of cinematic illustrations, calendars, books and portfolios.

The Mexican Revolution, which took place between 1910 and 1920, is one of the definitive historical events in the Americas, if not of the twentieth century. The popular uprising involved various political and social factions, concerned with issues ranging from instituting a democratic political system to supporting agrarian reform. Beyond the armed conflict, revolutionary demands yielded ongoing national programs that promised to address and fulfill the demands of the Revolution’s ideologues. In the 1920s and 1930s alliances between distinct political groups that had at one point been at odds during the Mexican Revolution and the blending of rival traditions began to produce overarching narratives of the Mexican Revolution. As a result, an institutionalized national narrative of the Mexican Revolution emerged, but it was altered by the individual interests and ideologies of each succeeding post-revolutionary presidential administration.

Many of these perspectives both informed and were incorporated into the pictorial production of the TGP, such as in the series of prints dedicated to the Revolution known as Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana. This portfolio consists of eighty-five prints, accompanied by explanatory text, that illustrate Mexican history from the late nineteenth century up to the 1940s. The images depict figures and events associated with various political periods, including the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911, known as the Porfiriato), the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and projects of national reconstruction promoted by post-revolutionary governments. As such, the TGP portfolio memorializes many of the heroes and villains of Mexican history.

A salient narrative in the print series is the institutionalized idea of La familia revolucionaria, or revolutionary family, allegedly comprised of such political figures as Francisco Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, and Emiliano Zapata; all of whom can be seen portrayed together in print number 82. La familia revolucionaria was a non-existent alliance whose construction was initiated by the post-revolutionary governments including Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco Elias Calles (1924-1928). In reality, each of these figures represents different groups, which
were in opposition during the Mexican Revolution and whose objectives often remained in conflict after the Revolution, just as they had during the decade long insurrection.\textsuperscript{4} The revisionist unification between members of disparate parties demonstrates the development of a singular, overarching national narrative of the Revolution that developed over time.\textsuperscript{5} The problem of a single narrative of Mexican history, however, is that it implies that Mexico was a unified nation–particularly after the Revolution–which indeed was not the case.\textsuperscript{6}

The portfolio is often interpreted or understood as a simple narrative of Mexican history, due to its loosely structured, chronological and linear format. A cinematic-like approach illustrates a sequence of historical events and figures that actually convey the history and legacy of the Mexican Revolution. Concerned with accuracy, the group conducted research and consulted archives before creating the images for the portfolio. For example, the illustrations in this collection directly refer to photographs from the Casasola Photographic Archive and to film stills from movies by Salvador Toscano, all of which were familiar to many Mexicans, as to people elsewhere. The incorporation of recognizable events and figures, in particular as captured by photography, validated the mediated images in the portfolio by enhancing their truth value and thus the perception of historical accuracy.

The version of history, which \textit{Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana} portfolio presents is directed by the prevailing ideologies of the collective, commemorating as it does the tenth anniversary of the founding of the workshop. Therefore, the album can be read as exemplifying the group’s principles and efforts, as well as its contradictions and conflicts. The portfolio illustrates what and who the TGP artists felt were the most significant in Mexican history at the time, thus they present a selective, edited content.\textsuperscript{7} Through the images in the portfolio, the TGP developed a nationally and culturally specific visual language that illustrates reconstructed versions of Mexican history. The revisioning of the national past and present by post-revolutionary leaders and the TGP is made obvious in the sequential relationships of individual prints and the interventionary presentation of the portfolio, which brings to light the juxtaposition of its conflicting themes. Therefore, rather than solely depicting a one-dimensional, linear narrative of the Mexican Revolution, as is typically assumed, the portfolio actually highlights multiple, competing narratives.

The adept marketing and circulation of the portfolio greatly expanded its popularity and widely promoted this distinct narrative of the Mexican Revolution. The TGP made a conscious effort to circulate the portfolio and its images nationally, as well as internationally, which expanded its audience.
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However, the price of the portfolio, at fifty Mexican pesos, equivalent to $15.00 U.S., would have been prohibitive for the working and rural classes of the time. The price of the portfolio, therefore, effectively limited it to groups with expendable cash, namely the middle and upper classes. Additionally, half of the portfolios were produced with texts in English. The price, combined with the language, implies that the intended market for at least half of the total production was an international one. To reach the masses in Mexico, who otherwise could not afford the portfolio, the TGP, during the early months of 1949, published individual prints from the collection in El Nacional, a widely distributed newspaper. The combination of historical narrative and easy reproducibility made these prints ideal for a wide range of educational and historical publications, ensuring the wide dissemination of its ideological content. The importance, as well as the familiarity, of these images to the larger population was due to their inclusion in many publications that addressed the Mexican Revolution, including texts on Mexican history and art.

Historical events, political figures and social issues make up the content of the portfolio. The theme of manual labor is represented by references to the oppression and injustices faced by Mexico’s rural populations during the Porfiriato, various figures involved in and activities that were part of the Mexican Revolution, as well as post-revolutionary programs of reconstruction. Thus, representations of labor in the portfolio appear, at times, to be a trope for a universal figure that signifies a particular social class or specific political issues. Images I examine in this essay address a variety of categories of labor, which reveal the multi-layered meanings attached or ascribed to the image of labor, both traditionally and by the TGP. Central to these representations of labor are portraiture, landscape and narrative scenes.

In Mexico, specifically from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, portraiture had been reserved for the representation of religious figures and the institutional elite, such as ecclesiastic officials and nobility. Eventually, the wider affluent classes turned to portraiture as a way of representing, elevating and/or reifying their social status. With the development of photography, portraiture became more common and accessible to the popular classes. The visual vocabulary employed to signify power, leadership and status in photographs, consequently, can be seen as based on the compositional precedents found in painting. Historically, portraiture played an important role in substantiating a subject’s social position. The sitter was normally idealized in order to enhance his/her own attributes and/or to construct and represent an identity. Linking the subject to idealized qualities resulted in the pictorial suggestion of nobility. Over time, particular formal elements became standardized, constituting a codified visual vocabulary tied to character and status. The meanings ascribed to certain visual elements, such as physical
characteristics, gestures, facial expressions, posture, attire, space and other signifiers, therefore, transmitted and constructed a particular impression of the subject. Different messages about a given subject are thus dependant on the formal configuration and genre, and are transformed by the site of display, as well.

Traditional portraiture was staged according to a formula that depicted a subject in a formal and inactive pose. Life-size, full-length representations were the standard format for the elite male portrait. The sitter would be centrally located in the picture space, highlighting his importance as subject and individual, and presented in three-quarter turn. Usually, the subject stands with his legs apart, suggesting an active stance. Faces are economically rendered, resulting in stylized generalizations. The hands are positioned in a variety of ways: placed on hips, resting on a table or chair, holding a staff or other object signifying power, or gripping a sword-hilt, as a gendered, often martial, reference. In most portraits, irrespective of gender, the sitter gazes straight ahead and exhibits a rigid posture, communicating a formal, authoritative attitude. High social status was depicted through such expression of indifference. Contributing to this reading, the perspective of the viewer is low, resulting in the monumentalization of the figure and highlighting his/her importance in relation to the viewer.

The subject of a traditional portrait is often framed within a fairly closed composition. Backgrounds include both indoor and outdoor settings, which also refer to and construct desired notions regarding the sitter’s status, activities and abilities. The occasional use of chiaroscuro creates dark and ambiguous interior settings that provide minimal visual information, thus highlighting the subject. When furniture is present, it consists of tables, armchairs and curtains. Additional visual elements might include windows and columns. Landscapes, when visible, could also refer to wealth, status, ownership and travel. Animals are sometimes included, such as dogs, which possess hunting or military associations–canines were identified with hunting and preparation for military activities. Horses in equestrian portraits, following an ancient imperial tradition, can be read as symbolizing gendered power, strength and military ability. In colonial portraiture, text cartouches and heraldic emblems contributed to the recognition of a sitter’s noble status by providing personal and familial information. In line with such traditional idioms, similarities can be seen between portraiture and TGP images of labor, revealing that workshop artists drew from earlier languages.

The TGP normally depicted the working class as actively engaged in a variety of tasks. A distance between the subject and the viewer provides relative information about the tools and materials specific to particular types of labor,
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geographic location/quotidian environment of the laborer and social and political issues related to labor. TGP images rarely seem staged, appearing spontaneous and/or realistic in their portrayal of the manual laborer. By reconfiguring these pictorial elements of traditional portraiture TGP artists transform the visual and ideological representation of power, the Mexican Revolution and Mexican laborers.

The first section of the portfolio, which consists of fourteen prints, presents the period of the dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz—these images are consistently associated with oppression. An example of labor as a form of Díaz’ domination is Trabajos Forzados en el Valle Nacional, 1890-1900 (Forced labor in the National Valley, 1890-1900), print number seven in the portfolio, by TGP artist Alfredo Zalce (Figure 1). The scene and the text refer to actual hard labor camps that existed during the Porfiriato, where those who opposed the President were incarcerated. In the foreground, a heavy set, uniformed male figure is seated on a boulder with his rifle across his lap. This soldier, representing the Díaz regime, menacingly stares at a laborer, whom he appears to be vigilantly guarding. The peasant wears ragged

Figure 1. Alfredo Zalce, Trabajo Forzados en el Valle Nacional, 1890-1900, Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana, No. 7 (1947), Linocut (Used by permission of University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque)
clothing, is barefoot and is seated on the ground with his hands tied behind his back. The prisoner, with his back to the viewer, draws the viewer into the scene, as if s/he were also facing the guard and experiencing a similar fate. In the middle ground, three prisoners struggle as they attempt to move an enormous boulder using wood slabs. The figures are illustrated by outlines, and thus simplified and without detail. Eight other prisoners, located in the background, wield picks and are each at a different stage of a swing cycle as they break the ground. This series of figures, as a representation of the larger population of Mexico, alludes to the hopelessness of their plight and of the nation’s dire situation. All of the figures, with the exception of the soldier, are faceless and generalized, possibly a reference to their perception and treatment as worthless and disposable. The disparity of clothing between the soldier and the prisoners communicates, not only the living conditions of the camps, but the disparity between their stations, not only socially but politically.

Zalce embraced the material characteristics of linoleum. Line in his work is minimal and limited to the outlines of figures and objects. The continuous line is very likely due to the soft, pliable quality of the synthetic matrix. Linoleum has no grain and offers a smooth surface, which is highlighted by the artist’s choice not to model any of the figural elements, resulting in a very simple and direct image. In turn, the flatness of the composition is emphasized and serves to communicate notions regarding the conditions found at the labor camps, where space was closed, limited and cramped. The composition is framed on either side by boulders, the soldier and by the prisoners in the background, whose bodies imply a horizontal line. Thus, all of the framing devices function as barriers that encircle the prisoners in the camp.

The soldier and boulder are equal in size and mass, and thus mirror each other and balance the composition. The soldier represents the obstinate, menacing, and armed presence that persecuted and victimized Mexico’s poor during the Porfiriato. The boulder through its scale and placement seems to embody a looming and inflexible presence. The futile act of trying to move the boulder without the proper equipment and little more than sheer physical strength echoes the plight, frustration and grimness that many confronted during Díaz’ dictatorship. Similarly, the figures in the background can be read either as representative of the multitudes who suffered in the labor camps or as a single figure forever locked in the cyclical act of fruitless labor. The decreasing size of forms within each plane, largest in the foreground and smallest in the background, creates a shallow space and thus a sense of limited depth within the composition. However, the height of the horizon line enhances the
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sense that nothing exists beyond the camp. The visual construction of space evokes the dismal reality that the prisoners faced at these camps. Trying to escape oppressive circumstances, they now find themselves in an even more hopeless situation.

In *La Juventud de Emiliano Zapata: Lección Objectiva* (The Youth of Emiliano Zapata: An Important Lesson) Mariana Yampolsky, a female TGP member, confronts the tyranny of Díaz’ regime by scrutinizing the hacienda’s role in this system (Figure 2). In the eighth print of the portfolio we see the revolutionary leader, Emiliano Zapata, as a youth wearing calzones, the uniform of the campesino or agrarian laborer. Zapata stands in the foreground, on the right side of the picture space, and observes the harsh working conditions and mistreatment of the peones on a large agricultural estate. He takes an active stance: his face is taut as he faces the scene before him, his arms are bent at the elbow, his left hand appears to be in a fist, his torso leans in toward the scene, his knees are bent and his feet are spread wide apart. Zapata is anchored in the picture space by what appears to be a stone wall and shrubbery behind him. Both landscape elements are rendered in dark tones and frame Zapata’s figure through the contrast of the figure/ground relationship.

Figure 2. Mariana Yampolsky, *La Juventud de Emiliano Zapata: Lección Objectiva, Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana*, No. 8 (1947), Linocut (Used by permission of University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque)
A number of activities capture Zapata’s interest, beginning with a man and a woman who walk past him. The couple is stooped over due to the heavy weight of their loads. The hunched posture of these two figures leads the viewer into the image. The central plane consists primarily of thickly incised, parallel lines suggesting rows prepared for seeding; they also direct the viewer further into the picture space. Three sets of figures, in profile and silhouetted, are situated in the central plane. The hierarchical scale contributes to a reading of spatial perspective and emphasizes their location in the scene and the order in which the viewer encounters them. The first group is centrally located and is the closest and largest of the three. This group consists of a cacique or hacienda boss on horseback, and two laborers, who appear to be tilling the fields. The cacique appears about to strike the laborers with a whip. The second group, which is set further back to the right and reduced in scale, is made up of four men. Three of the men slowly walk towards the left while carrying heavy loads, as a figure on horseback follows them.

The viewer, following the directional movement of the second group in the middle ground, encounters the final group of figures, who are seated on a carriage. The carriage is either pulling up to or leaving the palatial home of the hacendados, the owners of this large agricultural estate. The high social status of these figures is indicated by their method of transportation and their hats, which identify them as the agrarian elite. The location of the home allows its owners to overlook the estate, embodying the magisterial gaze, which implies not only their endorsement of the abuse that is taking place, but their disregard for the laborers. To the right of the casa grande or great house, one finds a number of single room structures or hovels, which most likely function as housing for the campesinos in the scene.

This is the first of eight times that Zapata appears in the portfolio. Many images of Zapata are creative depictions and not modeled from photographs. Notably, photographs of the early years of Zapata’s life are rare. Poetic license allows Yampolsky to visually produce a very common myth about Zapata as a youth. This biographical anecdote, narrated in the text that accompanies the image, describes Zapata as a child who promised his father that he would take back the lands that had been stolen from his people by the hacendados. Depicting Zapata in the traditional clothing of the campesinos indicates his intimate association with the agrarian community and their way of life. Zapata, of indigenous heritage, grew up in the village of Anenecuilco in the state of Morelos. Most members of the community were members of the agrarian labor class. The male campesino generally wore loose white cotton shirts and pants, which were particularly suited for the physical demands of their activities and environment. As Samuel Brunk has noted, Zapata’s parents
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were *campesinos* and the family worked a plot of village land; therefore, we can assume that Zapata may have donned the typical attire while performing this type of labor. However, the Zapata family was part of a small rural middle class of Anenecuilco; as such, and unlike many of his neighbors, Zapata never had to work as an agrarian laborer on haciendas. There are numerous photographs dating from 1910 to 1919 that depict Zapata wearing calzones, which is quite suggestive of the identity politics at work.

In the image, the hacienda is placed at a diagonal to Zapata. This juxtaposition harkens back to Zapata’s personal experience with the hacienda system and foreshadows Zapata’s role in the rebellion against local hacendados and the Porfirian regime. As one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, Zapata promoted agrarian reform and regional autonomy in the form of grassroots self-government. Zapata’s involvement in the Mexican Revolution began as a fight for the reclamation of land and resources on behalf of the disenfranchised villagers of his hometown, Anenecuilco. Hacendados had been methodically expropriating *campesino* lands as they expanded their agribusiness enterprises. As a result, villagers were displaced and forced to work as sharecroppers or as field hands on the haciendas, often suffering from personal abuses at the hands of the caciques. The wealthy hacendados, in contrast, lived opulent lives, while most villagers, subjected to abject poverty and living under horrid conditions, barely survived.

This image incorporates elements of traditional portraiture, but also represents a non-traditional subject in the portrayal of Zapata. Although a non-elite, Zapata is placed in the foreground in an active stance. His clothing, associated with the peasantry, indicates low social status and the whole scene is located in a specific outdoor setting. Zapata’s off center position within the composition, his profile view and his low social status as a member of the agrarian community contradict the norms of traditional portraiture produced between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, which focused solely on the socio-political elite. Zapata is represented in a shallow space and is the largest figure in the image, thus emphasizing his importance. His scale, in hieratic fashion, foreshadows his destiny and his eventual fight against the deplorable conditions he is witnessing. Zapata’s reactive posture and the linear pattern in his face arms, and clothing create tension, reflecting an emotional response of distress and anger, unlike the aloof remoteness of earlier elite portraiture. The silhouetted figures are not meant to suggest a social distance between them and the main figure, rather, they signify Zapata’s identification with the *campesino*. 
Generally, in elite portraiture, the status of the subject is echoed through surrounding property and objects of wealth or education; in this case, the depiction of land and labor reflect the oppressive hacienda system and its abuse of power. Additionally, rather than situating Zapata in a closed space, Yampolsky renders an expansive distance that stretches across the middle ground and reveals the type of labor being performed and the working or living conditions of the laborers. The difference in the activities performed by the figures within the scene, their distinct clothing and the opulence of the haciendados’ home compared to the poor housing conditions of the campesino, clearly communicates the class-based inequality. The horses in the image, too, signify the social stratification on the hacienda and the harsh distinctions between overseer and campesinos. Silhouettes in portraiture are typically linked to attributes of individual character. The use of the silhouette as a pictorial frame for the laborers reduces them to beasts of burden alluding to their status in Mexican society during the Porfirian regime as comparable to that of animals.

The abuse of the campesino is ubiquitous throughout the first section of the portfolio; in this print, for instance, the campesinos are whipped. Similarly, in the second print of the portfolio, an Indian is beaten by a soldier, wielding a saber. The act of violence in this image refers to the forced removal of Yaqui from their land, which was then turned over to a U.S. corporation, also referenced in the image. The visual phrases of figures carrying heavy matter on their backs and the tilling and harvesting of the land, as seen in print eight, are reiterated in print three. This repetition of visual references to labor on haciendas emphasizes the magnitude of abuse during the Porfiriato, as well as establishes a symbolic language evoking the plight and conditions suffered by Mexican campesinos on haciendas.

Also documented and illustrated in the portfolio are issues related to the mining industry in Mexico. In 1906 a strike by Mexican miners, who were working for the Green Consolidated Copper Company of America in Cananea, Sonora, protested the unequal treatment of Mexican citizens and United States citizens working at the Cananea mine. Mexicans were paid far less than their U.S. counterparts, as well as being routinely assigned to more undesirable and dangerous posts. The exchanges between workers, employers and U.S. forces were intense and escalated into open violence. Print eleven of the portfolio, La huelga de Cananea: Los obreros Mexicanos reclaman igualdad de derechos frente a los obreros yanquis (The Cananea strike: The Mexican workers demand rights equal to those of the American workers), by TGP artist Pablo O’Higgins, refers to the initial collision between striking Mexican miners and the men defending the Green Consolidated Mining Company (Figure 3). The image text describes the event and states that
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Manuel M. Diéguez and Esteban Baca Calderón, among others, organized the strike. The text explains that the uprising was violently met by forces, which included American military troops. Afterwards, the leaders of the movement were imprisoned.

In the upper left corner of the composition, five vertical geometric forms can be seen. These forms can be read as smoke stacks that allude to buildings that were part of the industrial mining complex. The left side of the image contains a group of miners who are marching towards a mining company building, led by the only two legible figures in the image, who may represent Diéguez and Calderón. The other miners, located directly behind the kneeling figure, are depicted by silhouettes and linear patters that suggest an anthropomorphic mass; their intensity and motion are conveyed through the gestural lines that illustrate them. The two legible figures’ attire is distinct—they wear small brimmed hats, button down shirts, and closed leather shoes. The figure on the left is crouched and holds a sign in his left hand that reads, ‘UNIDAD OBRERA IGUALIDAD,’ (LABOR, UNITY, and EQUALITY). The figure at the center of the image is at the head of the miners group. He appears to have stopped directly before the entrance to a mining company building.

Figure 3. Pablo O’Higgins, La huelga de Cananea: Los obreros Mexicanos reclaman igualdad de derechos frente a los obreros yanquis, Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana, No. 11 (1947), Linocut (Used by permission of University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque)
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marked by a wide rectangular doorway with a sign that states, ‘GREEN CONSOLIDATED MINING COMPANY.’ The miner holds a pick in his right hand and waves what appears to be a flag in his left hand. Finally, numerous bayonettes project through the entrance and are aimed, defensively, at the miners.

Following traditional pictorial idioms, the lead miner, in a rigid full-length pose, is centrally placed in the foreground with feet separated. The axe not only functions to signify the laborious tasks that mining requires; it is also a weapon. The miner is in the act of swinging the axe and striking the door. Although the face is framed by a thick outline, it is not idealized. Instead, it is shaded via the application of multiple lines that suggest the soot covered faces of miners. Dissimilar to most traditional portraiture, the lead miner is depicted in profile view. The architectural and industrial elements in the background, instead of highlighting the company’s or the miners’ accomplishments, are an oppressive presence. In this instance, the subject of labor is raised through protest, as a proactive demonstration of workers’ rights. The image directs attention to the de-nationalizing policies of Díaz’s regime and its practice of serving and protecting foreign interests over those of Mexico’s working population. This event, along with a series of others, identifies one dimension of the social unrest in Mexico which motivated the revolution.

Following the armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution, labor remained an important issue and thus continued to be an important theme within the portfolio’s narration of Mexican history. Rebuilding the nation involved a variety of activities, including the (re)construction of architectural structures and the development of educational programs for the rural populace, both of which are enacted in print sixty of the portfolio, entitled Escuelas, caminos, presas: Progama y realización de los gobiernos de Álvaro Obregón (1920-1923) y Plutarco Elias Calles (1923-1928) (or Schools, roads, dams: Programs and realizations of the governments of Álvaro Obregón (1920-1923) and Plutarco Elias Calles (1923-1928)), by Alfredo Zalce (Figure 4). The title and image directly reference contributions made by Obregón and Calles during their distinctive presidencies in the areas of building and education. During Obregón’s presidency, federal spending on education and the construction of rural schools and public libraries increased.22 During Calles’ administration 1,000 new schools were added to the federal government’s rural education system.23 In addition to listing accomplishments of both men’s administrations, the text labels their governments as revolutionary, which raises the issue of post-revolutionary governments and their relationships to the Mexican Revolution.
In the image, women and men are represented as equally involved in the betterment of society. The style of each figural group within the image is distinct. The two women in the foreground are illustrated in great detail and are well modeled. They evoke costumbrista paintings and prints in terms of the different social types they represent. Each is a member of the working class: the student is a rural laborer and a mother, and the instructor is an educator; yet, both are engaged in the labor of the mind.

The student is seated and concentrating on the material before her as the teacher stands behind her and guides her reading. The seated woman, with child on lap, is draped in what can be assumed to be a traditional indigenous shawl, yet there is no indication of regional specificity; as such, she may be an exemplar that stands in for all indigenous female workers. The student’s hair is pulled back and most likely in braids. With her right arm, she embraces her child and with her left, she mimics the gestures of the instructor. This depiction of the female student multi-tasking perhaps suggests the improbability, or at least the challenges facing many women pursuing their education, due to familial and other domestic responsibilities.

The instructor, through her stance and pose, creates a hierarchy between herself and her students in terms of social position. Her blouse is urban in design with its collar and buttons down the front. She wears her hair in a bun, which is a modern hairstyle typical of professional women. The attire
and hairstyle of the instructor not only distinguishes her from her students, but it also evokes the secularization of education and the engagement of urban activist teachers in rural schools, as part of the education programs of the reconstruction phase of the 1920s. The instructor’s facial expressions and hand gesture present her as invested in her efforts to teach.

Neither figure in the foreground is depicted in full-length. Although the student is centrally positioned, what is also centrally framed and pushed to the forefront is the educational material on the table. This compositional emphasis focuses our attention on the central theme of the image: the education of the indigenous. The women in the middle ground echo the actions, as well as the style of dress and hair of the student in the foreground, but they are illustrated with less detail. Although there are men in the background, they are depicted as laborers, underlining the absence of men from the group of students, suggesting gender-specific activities, as well as the reality of the demands of other responsibilities that interfered with participation in the educational programs.

The scene in the background suggests the concept of action pedagogy, learning through doing, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education (SEP) during the Calles administration. For instance, construction trade was taught to campesinos through the construction of their own school buildings, according to plans supplied to them by the SEP. Thus, the men who appear involved in various tasks of construction can be interpreted as engaged in a process of educational self-empowerment, as they erect a school building. The fact that there are no regional or geographically specific references may very likely speak to the widespread nature of Obregon’s and Calles’s educational programs. Additionally, the active task of construction alludes to the theme of nation building.

All of the figures in the image are consumed by the activities set before them, so that none are looking at or engaging the viewer. Instead, the viewer is positioned as observer or witness to what is taking place, namely the fulfillment of revolutionary ideals and the achievements of government. On the surface, the image reads as a celebratory presentation of reconstruction projects in general, and education programs in particular, which were enacted by Obregón and Calles. Another interpretation, however, is that this is an illustration of governmental idealism, rather than everyday reality, since the campesinos’ experience and everyday demands to survive often prevented them from taking advantage of all that the governmental post-revolutionary projects offered. One has to consider the impact and price of educating and modernizing the rural, indigenous population of Mexico: were the needs and concerns of the people were taken into consideration and being attended
to through these projects? Rural, federal schools were administered by government officials with the intent of promoting citizenship and social efficiency, and ultimately, as an avenue for the integration of rural communities into Mexican mainstream society. The successful implementation of such a program would also create a power base in the countryside. In his discussion of the Callista education project, Andrae Michael Marak asserts that, ‘campesinos who spent the vast majority of their time merely trying to earn or produce enough to eke out a living,’ were also expected to attend night classes, as well as perform civic duties. Marak observes that in the end the inability of campesinos to accomplish all that was set before them resulted in the failure to drastically alter the campesino lifestyle, thus contributing to the perceived shortcomings of Calles’ program.

By mid-century, Miguel Alemán, Mexico’s president between 1947 and 1952, directed an administration that was focused on the industrialization of the country. In relation to Alemán’s interests to industrialize Mexico, the TGP emphasize, in the text for print eighty-four, that in order for Mexico to build financial independence, it must independently industrialize, process, and manage its own natural resources. La industrialización del país (or The industrialization of the country) by TGP artist Arturo García is a statement aimed at Alemán’s program of industrialization (Figure 5).

In this print, a dark and shadowy factory looms in the background. The negative impact of industrialization, such as pollution, is signified through the stylized treatment of the sky. The middle ground contains a crowd of figures wearing

Figure 5. Arturo García, La industrialización del país Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana, No. 84 (1947), Linocut (Used by permission of the University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque)
urban attire and the obreros’ (urban laborer) uniform. The group resembles an angry mob as they march towards the factory—the intensity of their emotions is emphasized through exaggerated gestures and expressive lines. The frustration of the group culminates with the figure in the foreground clutching a machete as he points and marches towards the factory. What are the people of Mexico—or more correctly put—what are the TGP members angry about in terms of Alemán’s administration and his industrialization project for Mexico? Alemán’s push for capitalist industrialism in Mexico was intertwined with and dependent on strengthening relations with the United States. This undermined much of what had been gained as part of the socialist reforms that were fought for during the Mexican Revolution and pursued by post-revolutionary administrations.

Visual elements in this image seem to quote earlier prints in the portfolio. In print eleven, La huelga de Cananea... a similar tenebrist treatment of the factory was applied to the mining industry building in the upper left corner. Another similarity between the two prints is the illustration of a focal figure tightly gripping a tool as a weapon. In print thirteen, La huelga de Río Blanco: Los Obreros Textiles Se Lanzan a la Lucha, 7 de Enero de 1907 (The Rio Blanco Strike: The Textile Workers Jump into the Struggle, January 7, 1907), by Fernando Castro Pacheco, the body language of the striking textile workers is similar to that of the crowd in print eighty-four and print eleven; in each image the crowd is angry and has been provoked by injustice to rebel. Both the position of print eleven in the portfolio sequence and the location of the viewer in the print, at the head of the striking miners, allude to the beginnings of revolution. In print eighty-four, however, the artist presents the figures in backside profiles that draw the audience into the crowd. Significantly, this particular image at the end of the portfolio sequence is a statement about the unending cycles of government corruption in Mexico and the cyclical nature of revolution.

Post-revolutionary leaders of Mexico maintained their allegiance to the Mexican Revolution in order to assert legitimacy, yet each did so in distinctive ways. Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), for instance, enacted progressive socialist programs that were based on the demands of the Revolution, including land reform and the nationalization of resources, while Miguel Alemán insincerely evoked the Revolution, as a political device, even as he opposed many revolutionary programs. The TGP artists, when creating the Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana portfolio, were aware of counter-revolutionary changes made to the Mexican Constitution of 1917 by Alemán. In December 1946, Alemán’s administration passed 39 new laws that reversed land reform, privatized education, limited free expression and undermined existing labor organizations. Article 27, which originally called for land reform and
nationalized Mexican soil, was changed to protect private landholders from further land reform, thus allowing them to increase holdings and to revoke uncultivated lands from *ejidatarios*’ (collective farm owners/workers).28

*Las Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana* portfolio references the national narratives of the Mexican Revolution constructed by post-revolutionary governments, but it also represents the manner in which government participated in the Revolution. In so doing, the print collection inevitably incorporates the TGP’s critique of past and present government administrations. The portfolio can be understood as a direct response to Aleman’s actions, in particular his revision of the Mexican Constitution and his interests in aligning himself with the United States. The juxtaposition of Cárdenas’s program of land reform (print sixty-seven) and the nationalization of resources (print seventy-four) form an implicit critique of Alemán’s new project for Western style modernization. Additionally, the incongruous facets of Calles’ administration are noted in the juxtaposition between the promotion of education (print sixty) and the Cristero Rebellion (prints sixty-one through sixty-four). Calles entered into a power struggle with the Catholic Church regarding constitutional provisions for secular education, prohibition of monastic orders and the disentitlement of the Church’s properties, which resulted in the Cristero Rebellion.29 The groupings of prints that refer to Calles make evident the complicated nature of political history and its players, defying a simplified account of the post-revolutionary period.

Any single image from this important portfolio, as well as the portfolio as a whole, can be read as an icon of remembrance.30 Images commemorate events and figures of Mexican history; however, what is consistently highlighted are the social injustices and atrocities committed against and suffered by indigenous groups and the working class, both in the past and present, from the political perspective of the downtrodden and their supporters. The recurring portrayal of labor generates an iconography of Mexican labor that addresses issues ranging from oppression and revolution, reconstruction and industrialization, to cultural production and national or regional identity. Thus, as illustrated in the TGP portfolio, the image of the agrarian and urban laborer became a symbol embodying national narratives revolving around history, culture, development and social justice.

¡QUE VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN!
HEMISPHERE

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NOTES:
2. For a discussion of the various subjects addressed by the TGP see Hannes Meyer, Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce Años de Obra Artística Colectiva (Estampa de México, 1949) 2-36.
3. Thomas Benjamin, La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History (University of Texas Press at Austin, 2001). Benjamin asserts (69) that it was Obregón that coined the term, ‘Revolutionary Family.’ However, he also states (74) that Callistas, ‘pressed for the unification of all revolutionaries.’ Additionally, he communicates that the Mexican Congress made November 20, 1920 an official, ‘day of national celebration.’ Benjamin also writes (70) that that it was in the 1920s that Zapatismo was, ‘accorded revolutionary status in official memory.’ We are also informed (73) that during the Calles administration the national government assumed greater responsibility for commemorating la Revolución.
4. For instance, each had a distinct position on the agrarian issue, which related to their social class: Madero and Carranza were from elite families and themselves hacendados, Obregón was from the middle class and an urban laborer, and Zapata was a rural campesino.
5. Benjamin (59) in his book implies that a type of Master Narrative of the Mexican Revolution developed and that a unified Revolutionary Family emerged, and that both were accepted by those included. However, Art Historian David Craven asserts that although various groups after the Revolution did form alliances, based upon similar political and/or economic interests, their overall distinct ideological positions prevented any true unification between groups like the Maderistas, Villistas, Carranzistas, Obregónistas, Zapatistas, Callistas and members of the Communist Party. David Craven, Personal Communication, February 2008.
6. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (Verso, 1991) 6-7. Anderson defines nation as, ‘an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.’ He goes on to write, ‘It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. . . . Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.’
7. In relation to the issue of the changing narrative of Mexican history see the 1960 TGP portfolio 450 Años de Lucha: Homenaje al Pueblo Mexicano, which consists of 146 prints that incorporates many images from the Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana portfolio. This later series of prints takes a different approach to Mexican history and the Mexican Revolution, resulting in the modification and sometimes the elimination of figures and episodes represented in the earlier portfolio. These alterations in the TGP’s version of Mexican history reflect the group’s new membership and the change in the Mexican government’s administration, which results in the rewriting of history.
8. Hannes Meyer recorded, ‘Of the total edition of 550 portfolios and 46,750 prints, 2/3 were sold within a year. 10% were presented to progressive cultural organizations all over the world.’ Meyers, Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce Años de Obra Artística Colectiva, XV. Helga Prignitz asserts the price made the portfolio accessible. However, she also informs that in the first year only 200 of the portfolios were sold.
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and in the second year only 30 sold. Helga Prignitz, El Taller de Gráfica Popular en México 1937-1977 (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1992) 113 and 116. Meyer appears to be exaggerating if Prignitz is accurate. Twenty percent commission was given to each person that personally sold a portfolio. Additionally, it appears as if the portfolios were sold in non-sequential order and that individual prints from the portfolio were sold. For sales records, see Taller de Gráfica Popular Records, Reel 6, Box 1, Folder 51.

9. Specifically, portraits of the Hapsburg kings produced between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will serve as the basis for any discussion of a traditional and symbolic visual language of portraiture. Political portraiture of Spanish monarchs, produced between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was based on the models implemented by Titian. Titian is important in the production of portraits because he established a composition, which became the model not only in Spain, but throughout Europe. The impact and spread of Titian's model is addressed by Patrick Lenaghan, Images for the Spanish Monarchy, Art and the State, 1516-1700 (The Hispanic Society of America, 1998) 11.


12. A window behind a model relates him to affairs and activities of the outside world. It could also refer to the public persona of the subject. Columns erected in a portrait were usually monumental in size and only partially visible. The presence of a column evoked classical rulers and heroes in an attempt to assign their attributes to the monarch.

13. When mounted by the king the horse is transformed into a traveling throne, decorative dressing further advances this idea. The illustration of the monarch's equestrian skill and control over a horse metaphorically represents his ability to govern his subjects and control his realm. Jesús María González de Zárate, “El retrato en el barroco y la Emblemática: Velásquez y La lección de equitación del príncipe Baltasar Carlos,” Boletín del Museo Camón Aznar XXVII (1987) 29. Lenaghan (21) explains that riding a horse, hunting, and military activities are linked by their demands of similar faculties. Gállego (1984, 228-229) notes the significance of the horse in representations of kings.

14. In regards to which hacienda may be referred to within the image, Sotelo Inclán informs that Zapata lived and grew up near the Cuahuixtla Hacienda. Jesús Sotelo Inclán, Raíz y razón de Zapata 1943-1944 (1970) 425. However, the people of Anenecuilco had trouble with the owner of the Hacienda Hospital and Chinameca Hacienda who was aggressively taking land, animals and water. Enrique Krauze, El amor a la tierra, Emiliano Zapata (2000) 34-35.

15. Sotelo Inclán writes (425-426) that at the age of nine Zapata witnessed the destruction of a neighboring village, Olaque, as part of an expansion project by hacienda owner Manuel Mendoza Cortina of the Cuahuixtla Hacienda. He also informs that a myth arose in relation to this event in which Zapata sees his father in tears, in response to the annihilation of the town of Olaque. Zapata asks his father, “why do they take our land?” and “why do we not fight against them?” Zapata swears to his father that when he grows up he will make these men return the land taken.

16. Calzoneras during the Spanish colonial period were “a species of wide pants opened on the outer sides, with a double set of silver buttons running down its length from the waist to the foot, the opening through which may be seen the wide pants worn underneath.” Alvarez del Villar, Men and Horses of Mexico: History and Practice of Charreada (1979) 35. A relationship between the calzoneras of Spanish colonial hacienda owners and Morelos’ campesino white cotton calzone is reasonable to assume. However, resources dealing with campesino attire are scarce and I have been unable to explore the topic in depth.

17. Samuel Brunk, ¡Emiliano Zapata! Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico (University of New Mexico Press, 2001) 6. It is commonly believed that Zapata did not wear the white cotton calzones or manta of the agricultural laborers of the south of Mexico. It has generally been accepted that the image of
Zapata wearing calzones is part of a myth visually constructed by Diego Rivera. Rivera illustrated approximately 40 images of Zapata, those of him wearing the calzone include: a 1927 illustration in Fermin Lee’s publication, which depicts Zapata on horseback holding a banner that reads, “Tierra y Libertad;” and two images painted between 1929 and 1930 at Cortez’ Palace in Cuernavaca, one at the end of the cycle infamously depicting Zapata and a white horse and the other painted overhead on an arch shows Zapata laying on his side.

19. For an indepth history of land issues and oppression in Morelos see Sotelo Inclan, 97-439. Or for a brief summary of late nineteenth-century agrarian-based industries, the hacienda system, and the impact on and oppression suffered by the local people as a result of both, refer to Womack, 43-52 or Brunk, 9-13.
20. As integral component to the hacienda system, the horse also alludes to the hierarchical social structure of Mexico. The depiction of a monarch mounted expressed dexterity, military skill and control suggesting the ability to govern. Jesús María González de Zárate, “El retrato en el barroco y la Emblemática: Velázquez y La lección de equitación del príncipe Baltasar Carlos,” Boletín del Museo Camón Aznar XXVII (1987) 29. See also Lenaghan, 21. In the Americas the horse signifies the conquest and hierarchical social structure established in New Spain by the conquistadors and early Spanish settlers. As the rural areas were inhabited by the mestizos, the horse became a primary tool for these charros to perform their chores associated with livestock and agriculture. Between the sixteenth and mid eighteenth centuries, the indigenous of the Americas were not allowed to own, ride or use a horse. For the history of horses in the Americas see Jose Alvarez del Villar, 11-27.
24. Marak, 310.
25. See Marak, 117 and 146.
26. This figure can be read as a Mexican version of French Liberté, and a direct reference to Delacroix’s 1830 painting, “Liberty Leading the People.”
29. Hernández Chávez, 245. Chávez further explains, ‘The government responded by ordering the immediate and universal application of the constitution. State governors ordered the expulsion of foreign priests, and local authorities closed Catholic schools, convents, and orphanages. A Catholic resistance took hold and formed the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty. . . . Calles implemented a constitutional provision that gave the federal government authority to regulate religious practices.’
30. Luis Camnitzer gave a talk entitled “Art and Dishonor” given at Site Santa Fe on November 13, 2007 as part of a lecture series in conjunction with the exhibition Los Desaparecidos. Camnitzer discussed his work “Uruguayan Torture Series,” thirty-five etchings that provide potent visual testimony to the horrors of war. Within this context Camnitzer spoke of art as icons of remembrance that inform about and/or keep alive the reality of suffering that accompanies dictatorial governments and war, which history so often omits or denies.