

Latinx Paper Cultures: Puerto Rican Solidarity, 1960s-1980s

My original project for CLAS was going to consider how Puerto Rican national identity, or *alma puertorriqueña*, was constructed. The “Puerto Rican soul” was premised on the “harmonious” union of the three races: the Spaniards, the Taínos (the island’s indigenous group), and Africans. In visual culture, this harmonious union manifested in the idealized figure of the *jibaro*, a working-class, mixed-race character that was broadly used as a way to establish a differentiation between the Island and Spain, the United States, Latin America, and even other Caribbean nations. These images were created and disseminated under the purview of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, which had two primary printmaking workshops: the Taller de Artes Gráficas of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña and the División de Educación a la Comunidad (DiVEDCO). While the printmaking workshops are no longer active, their collections are housed at the ICP in San Juan, which are only available in person.

Unfortunately, I could not access the ICP online collections as I had hoped, but upon reading primary documents that I was able to access using the Museum of Fine Arts Houston’s online archive, it became clear from artist interviews and articles that it was the ICP that adopted and promoted ideological *anexionismo* (the movement that favors Puerto Rican statehood). In other words, the ICP produced and disseminated visual culture material that favored the unification of Puerto Rico and its commonwealth status. It was at this point that my research shifted to artists based both in and outside Puerto Rico who protested the ICP’s political administration, *anexionismo*, and communicated solidarity with Puerto Rican independence.

One of the artistic initiatives that I focused on was The Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), a non-governmental organization

headquartered in Havana, Cuba and founded in 1966. From its founding in 1966 until 1990, OSPAAAL circulated *Tricontinental* magazine, which reached eighty-seven countries at its peak, and included political posters printed in color. These posters often expressed support for international protest movements, with a particular focus on resistance to U.S. and European imperialism. For example, OSPAAAL produced *Day of Solidarity with the People of Puerto Rico* (1969), in which an image of a pre-contact Taíno three-cornered zemi, also known as a *triangolito*, appears prominently in the center of the poster, while U.S. corporation logos are engulfed in flames in the poster's upper register. This poster speaks to the hegemony of U.S. corporations within Puerto Rico, while also insisting on a radical return to indigenous heritage.

In fact, this collapse of multiple temporalities within a singular matrix is a technique that various artists deploy. In Linda Zamora Lucero's 1975 *Lolita Lebron* poster, the artist pairs a portrait of Lolita Lebron with one of her quotes in the upper half of the poster, while the phrase "Viva Puerto Rico Libre" is superimposed onto an image of the Puerto Rican flag in the lower half of the composition. Lebron was a seminal figure in the fight for Puerto Rican independence who in 1954 led an attack on the the U.S. House of Representatives to protest Puerto Rico's designation as a U.S. commonwealth two years before. Similar to OSPAAAL's poster, there is a harkening back to the past—pre-contact cultures and historical political figures—to mobilize support for an imagined future, which in both cases would be Puerto Rican independence.

While I had some success with finding posters that communicated a global solidarity, as can be seen in OSPAAAL's productions as well as the Lucero's work which was produced at the La Raza Silkscreen Center in the Bay Area, I struggled to find works that were produced within Puerto Rico that were explicitly addressing independence from the United States. Moving forward, I hope to visit collections and archives of Puerto Rican artists such as Rafael Tufiño,

Myrna Báez, and Antonio Martorell who formed the Puerto Rican Brotherhood of Graphic Artists in 1981 and put on their own exhibition to protest the ICP and 5th San Juan Biennial of Latin American Graphic Art. I also wonder to what extent artists began deploying more oblique visual strategies such as abstraction or even conceptualism to comment on Puerto Rico's annexation- in an effort to avoid surveillance and retaliation.



Fig. 1. OSPAAAL, *Day of Solidarity with the People of Puerto Rico*, 1969, offset, 21 in x 13 1/2 in.



Fig. 2. Linda Zamora Lucero, Lolita Lebrón ¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!, 1975, screenprint on paper, 26 1/2 x 18 7/8 in.