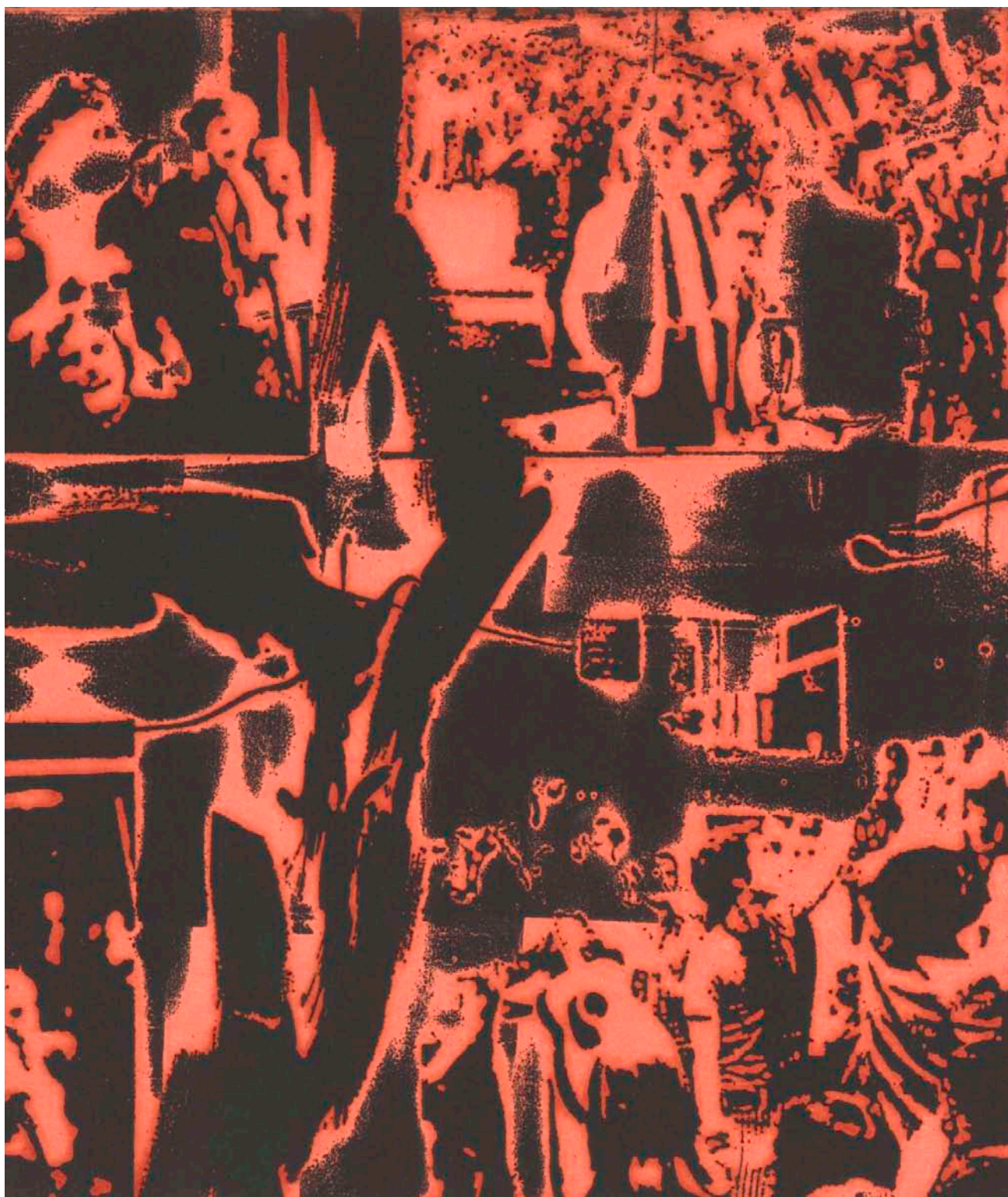


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# Art **in** Print

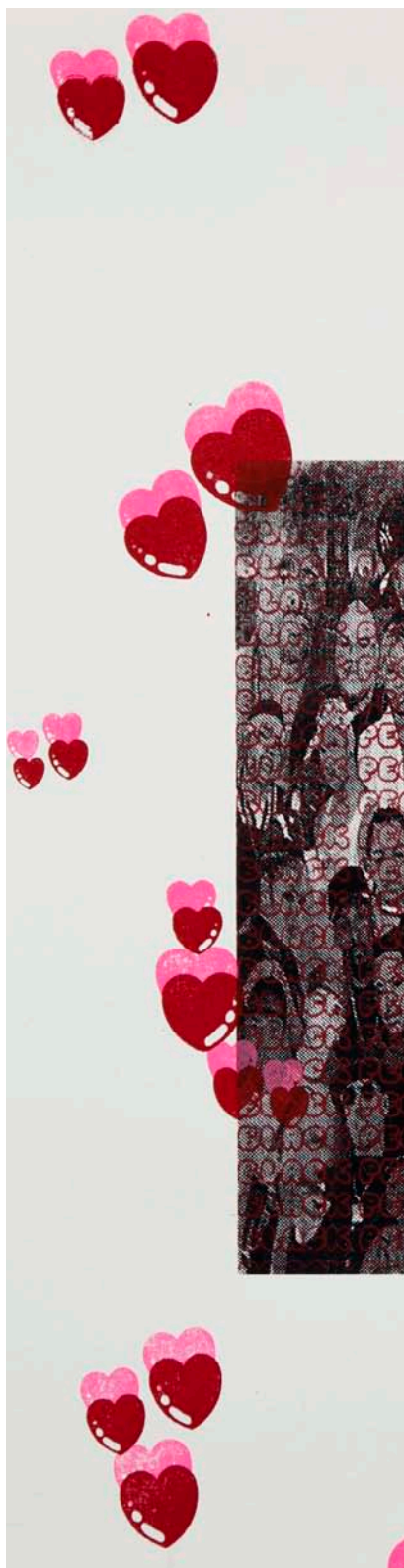
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September – October 2017  
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ON RESISTANCE • SANDOW BIRK • TOM LEWIS AND THE CATONSVILLE NINE • NELL PAINTER • DÜRER'S ETCHINGS  
PRINTS AND POLITICAL MADNESS • HANS HAACKE • REVOLUTIONARY PRINTS • REMBRANDT AT NOTRE DAME • PRIX DE PRINT • NEWS

# Art in Print



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*This Page:* Kelly Taylor Mitchell, detail of *Black People Don't Owe You Shit* (2017), screenprint, 22 x 15 inches. From the RISD *Prints for Protest* portfolio.

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# Prints in a Time of Political Madness

By Alison W. Chang

Donald Trump's unexpected Electoral College victory in the presidential election last November and the solidification of Republican control of the House of Representatives, the Senate and a majority of statehouses has triggered a wave of political activism across the country, not least in the art world. Trump's campaign rhetoric, which dealt in xenophobia, nationalism and thinly veiled racism, sparked concerns about civil liberties before he even took office, and while as of this writing courts have blocked the most egregious of his executive orders, administration policies present imminent threats of deportation to many. On almost every front—from health care to the environment to education—his administration has pursued goals that move away from the desires of a majority of Americans and seem to refute core values of equality, fairness and tolerance.

Resistance to this agenda has taken many forms: the Women's March on Washington, held the day after the Inauguration, drew 450,000 to 500,000 to the capital, while an estimated 5 million participated in related marches around the world. Subsequent marches have been organized in defense of everything from civil rights to science. Printmakers, whose politics typically skew to the left, have organized to provide resources and galvanize creativity as an outlet for frustration, fear and anger. Organizations and presses have held public printmaking events that serve as an entry point into grassroots organizing. The nationwide network Print Organize Protest and the Rhode Island School of Design portfolio *Prints for Protest* came into being as direct responses to the election; and extant organizations such as the international artists' collective Justseeds, the not-for-profit Amplifier, the Interference Archive in Brooklyn, and Shoestring Press (also in Brooklyn) have seen increased participation, donations and media coverage.

Printmaking and social protest have gone hand-in-hand since the introduction of print into Europe. Modest costs, ease of replication and collective methods of production make print a practical method of communicating ideas on



Protester at the Women's March in New York on 21 January 2017 holding an Amplifier poster: Shepard Fairey, *We the People—Greater than Fear* (2017) (downloadable for free on the Amplifier website). Photo: Jessica He. Image courtesy of Amplifier.

a grassroots level. We don't know when the first "protest print" was created, but many historians point to anti-papal imagery of the 16th century as among the earliest examples of politically motivated printmaking.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary political prints are produced using a wide variety of techniques and are published at widely ranging price points. Amplifier has used prints as rewards in their Kickstarter campaign, the most expensive being a Shepard Fairey screenprint at \$700.<sup>2</sup> The RISD *Prints for Protest* portfolio consists of lithographs, screenprints, woodcuts and letterpress prints priced at just \$25 each (\$248 for the 11-print portfolio). The Justseeds website offers etchings, screenprints, relief prints, offset prints, risographs, digital prints and books that range from \$750 to free downloadable graphics.

## JUSTSEEDS

Josh MacPhee began Justseeds in 1998 as a Massachusetts-based mail-order graphic distribution network, selling screenprinted T-shirts and posters he had designed for a variety of political groups. Soon artists working in a similar vein began asking whether he would also

sell their materials. In 2007 the organization was restructured as an artist-owned cooperative and launched a new website to handle their commerce. They relocated their distribution center to Pittsburgh, where it is now run by Bec Young and Shaun Slifer, two of the organization's 30 artist members. (Justseeds artists come from the United States, Canada and Mexico.) The website now features more than 1,000 works for sale and more than 250 free downloads to be printed out on signs, T-shirts, bags, or fliers.<sup>3</sup> There are postcards, individual prints, and thematic portfolios by multiple artists, such as *War is Trauma*, produced in partnership with Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). These portfolios are often produced in collaboration with relevant outside organizations that receive half the edition (usually 100 to 150) to use for exhibitions, education, or fundraising; proceeds from the remaining half are used to remunerate artists for the cost of materials.

Works on the website can be sorted by subject matter, from "Anarchism" to "Social Movements," and offerings tied to "Migration" are representative of the broad stylistic range among artist members. Nicolas Lampert's screenprint *Imagine No Borders* (2011) pairs the



Meredith Stern, *Peace Poster* (2011), offset print, 42 x 54 cm. ©Meredith Stern, Justseeds.org

title text with a simplified ideogram of a uniformed officer looking at a passport, while Jesus Barraza's *Resist* (2017) is purely typographic: a rainbow-roll screenprint of old-fashioned circus type in various sizes packing the page with slogans: "Decolonize Black Lives Matter No Ban No Wall Smash Patriarchy Nir+ Stand Up Fight Back Not One More Deportation Resist Solidarity Mni Wiconi."<sup>4</sup> In Chris Stain's hand-colored screenprint *Threat of Chance* (2009), we see the lower half of a figure attempting to scale a fence; his right hand grasps the barbed wire, pulling it taut, prior to leaping over the barrier into the unknown.

Many Justseeds prints promote relatively uncontroversial goals, like Meredith Stern's 2011 offset *Peace Poster*, in which abstracted leaves and feathers fall diagonally across the page, above a quote from the social justice activist Ursula Franklin: "Peace means not only absence of war, but also the presence of justice and the absence of fear." Others, such as Melanie Cervantes' 2014 screenprint of a shouting woman in a keffiyeh, *End the Occupation of Palestine*, court controversy even within the reflexively left-leaning art world, something MacPhee believes is healthy.

#### INTERFERENCE ARCHIVE

In 2011, MacPhee joined with artists Kevin Caplicki, Molly Fair, and Dara Greenwald to found the Interference Archive in Brooklyn, whose mission is preserving the graphic material of politi-

cal movements that might otherwise be lost, including the products of now-defunct small activist presses, such as Riot Grrrl Press, groups affiliated with colleges or universities, and anarchist organizations. Initially the archive consisted of Greenwald's and MacPhee's personal collections of political ephemera—prints, books, posters, T-shirts, buttons, stickers, music, films, postcards, zines and pamphlets, mostly from the 20th century—but it has continued to acquire new material. Jen Hoyer, a long-time volunteer, notes that the archive takes "materials that voice any opinion (sometimes one item will include several contradictory opinions within itself), as long as they fit our collection policy of material produced in multiples for widespread distribution."<sup>5</sup> She mentions, for example, "a folder of anti-abortion protest posters, not just from one rally, but from rallies all over the world over the last many decades . . . [which] creates a completely new narrative that any of those objects on their own cannot create."<sup>6</sup>

Such artifacts offer material lessons in the relationship between design, graph-

ics and political agency. "The archive, as a whole, is a manual of how to organize," says Kevin Caplicki. "The tactics and strategies are so similar all around the world, it's a testament to human struggle and an example of how to create a grassroots social movement."<sup>7</sup> In addition to maintaining a publicly accessible open-stacks collection of material on worldwide social activism, the Archive hosts exhibitions, workshops, talks, film screenings and school visits.

For the past year it has also been holding periodic events called "propaganda parties" that bring together activists, designers and artists. (The embrace of the word "propaganda" is a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of the overt political program of these images, rather than of an aim to purposefully mislead.) Often co-sponsored with other organizations, the propaganda parties provide opportunities to collect art, learn more about specific organizations, and create protest-related prints, buttons and banners. The first two parties, held in July and October of 2016, drew about 100 attendees each, but the third, the two-day "Inaugurating



A "propaganda party" hosted by Interference Archive in March 2017. Images courtesy Interference Archive.



Resistance” event on 14 and 15 January 2017, distributed some 3,000 posters and 5,000 stickers to people attending the Women’s March on Washington and affiliated marches and rallies elsewhere. Participants screenprinted more than 600 shirts and patches and made more than 500 buttons. The event was covered by the *New Yorker* and CNN.

The archive has also seen a significant increase in the number of visits from high schools and colleges, both private and public, since the election (the first four months of the year brought in as many as all of 2016). But Caplicki points out that “this didn’t just start with Trump . . . The beauty of Interference Archive is that we can pull out posters or show them books on the shelves, we can show them all this material from people who have struggled over the last hundred years . . . You can come into this space and be surrounded by that history and it provides you a sense of hope.”<sup>8</sup>

#### AMPLIFIER

The Propaganda Parties were launched in collaboration with Amplifier, an not-for-profit founded in 2015 by the photographer Aaron Huey to connect artists with nonprofit organizations and produce visual materials that support social justice. The Foundation’s most visible success has been its “We the People”



Janina Larenas, *Don’t Mourn, Organize* (2016), digital file available for download and printing (vector image taken from a relief print digitally altered for multiple uses and distribution).

Kickstarter campaign, which sought donations to fund six ads to run in the *Washington Post* on Inauguration Day—an end run around the restrictions placed on signs and banners in the capital that day. The foundation also planned to distribute posters at Metro stations around the city. Commissioned works from three artists—Shepard Fairey, Jessica Sabo-

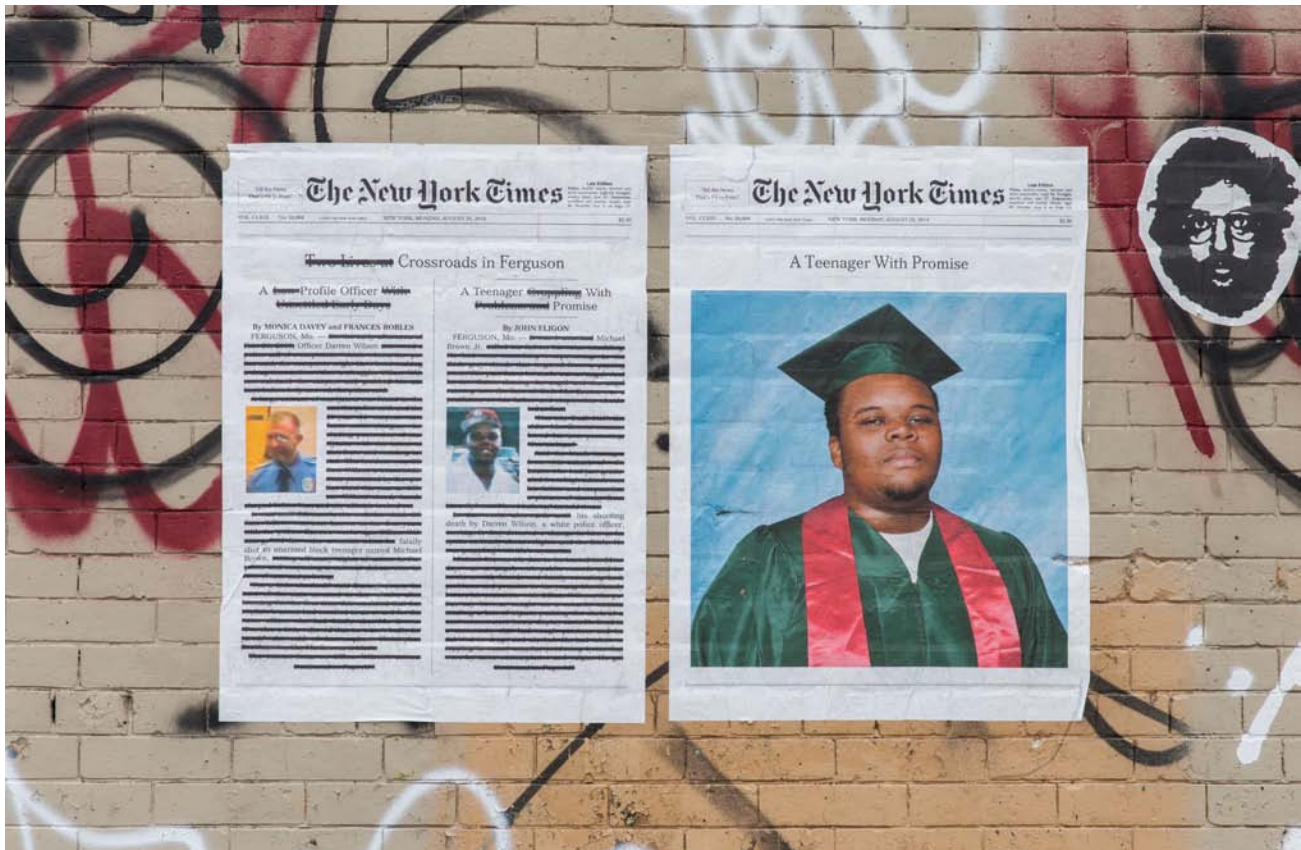
gal and Ernesto Yerena—were produced as stickers, postcards, screenprints and lithographs as rewards for donors. The initial goal was \$60,000, but within in eight days the campaign had raised \$1,365,105—enough to fund full-page ads in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, and to distribute over 30,000 placards in Washington and Los Angeles.<sup>9</sup> The day before the inauguration, the foundation made the commissioned images available online for free: Sabogal’s depicted two women about to share a kiss, Yerena’s featured an older Native American woman, her fist raised, while Fairey, working with photographers Ridwan Adhami, Arlene Mejorado and Delphine Diallo, created a trio of images: a young woman wearing an American flag as a hijab, a Hispanic woman with a flower in her hair, and an African-American child. They were downloaded more than 500,000 times over three days.

#### PRINT ORGANIZE PROTEST

On 9 November 2016, the day after the election, printmaker Janina Larenas created a relief print featuring a raised fist beneath the injunction, “Don’t Mourn Organize.” She began posting that design, along with a list of activist organizations, around her neighborhood in Santa Cruz, California. She then reached out to artists and designers around the country,



An Amplifier poster at the Women’s March in Los Angeles on 21 January 2017: Ernesto Yerena, *We the Resilient* (2017) (downloadable for free on the Amplifier website). Photo: Patricia Guerra. Image courtesy of Amplifier.



Alexandra Bell, *A Teenager With Promise* (2017), inkjet print, each sheet 32 x 24 inches, 32 x 48 inches combined. Photo: Darryl Richardson.

forming a network dedicated to print as a vehicle for social change. Print Organize Protest (POP) now has members in Columbus, Ohio; Chicago; Brooklyn; Santa Cruz; Austin, Texas; Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

“The really powerful part of this project,” Larenas says, “is that through physically engaging with art, people are also learning to physically engage with politics.”<sup>10</sup> Thus POP has facilitated workshops across the country for screenprinting signs, T-shirts and bags to be deployed in strikes, protests, marches and rallies. POP events have also drawn many parents seeking positive ways to engage their children in their local communities. POP continues to expand through word of mouth, and Larenas believed the group is a resource that will be needed in the coming years.

#### SHOESTRING PRESS

One organization participating in POP is the Brooklyn printshop Shoestring Press, run by master printer Lane Sell, which has been engaged in political printmaking for years. For the past

year the press has been printing and wheatpasting a screenprint by the Sudanese artist Khalid Albaih on the streets of Brooklyn. Based in Doha, Qatar, Albaih is an online political cartoonist whose work addresses global politics, with a specific focus on the Arab world.<sup>11</sup>

Sell met Albaih at the 2016 Creative Time Summit, where he spoke on the positive and negative aspects of circulating his work on the Internet. Sell suggested a collaboration, and Albaih created a screenprint, *America*. Stylistically distinct from his silhouetted cartoons, it shows the figure of the Statue of Liberty, with her head replaced by that of a Native American chief, and her raised arm and torch replaced by Tommie Smith’s Black Power salute from the medal podium at the 1968 Olympics. Albaih’s print pulls the Black Lives Matter movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests together in an icon of American liberty, signaling the interconnectedness of multiple causes.

Sell also believes that continued activism and art making have helped combat the helplessness many people felt after the election. On Inauguration Day, Shoe-

string helped organize a POP-affiliated workshop, “Sign of the Times: Sign Making in Solidarity” at the Queens Museum, which was otherwise closed in solidarity with the J20 General Strike. This was another public printing event where people could make banners, posters and other materials for the upcoming marches. Shoestring supplied a modular design with twelve English words, nine Spanish words, and four Chinese characters, from which one could choose two to pair together. Many participants went beyond sign-making, screenprinting words onto tote bags and items of clothing, including a homemade poncho whose owner covered it with multiple repetitions of the word “power.” Using the screens and supplies provided, visitors created more than 300 prints in two and a half hours.

#### COUNTERNARRATIVES

Social media played an important role in an ongoing collaboration between Shoestring Press and Alexandra Bell, who has been pasting her work on walls and in subway stations in Brooklyn. Sell had seen the work in his neighborhood and on



Instagram, and when one of his friends posted an image asking if anyone knew the identity of the artist, Sell chimed in, offering Shoestring Press's services if the artist came forward.

Bell, who has a background in the visual arts and in journalism, focuses on the news media's portrayal of race and was struck by the *New York Times*' use of the phrase "no angel" to describe Michael Brown in their coverage, on 25 August 2014, of Brown's death at the hands of a Ferguson, Missouri, policeman.<sup>12</sup> Working digitally, Bell annotated and edited the spread in red, but felt the images lacked visual impact. She then redacted the article and changed the photograph. The final diptych pairs one sheet showing the redacted columns of text, paired with a full-page photograph of Brown in cap and gown at his high school graduation, with the headline "A Teenager with Promise" printed above; both bear the *Times* masthead.

Bell initially posted this work on her Instagram feed but ultimately decided to take the work into the physical realm. Since wheatpasted posters are usually quickly removed, Bell also uses Instagram as a means to track the work and viewers' responses to it. Shoestring's offer came at a critical juncture, when Bell was running out of resources to continue posting her work around the city. She prints the posters digitally, on either adhesive plastic film or on paper, and posts them at night. She rarely stays to observe responses, although she once saw a man stop to look at *A Teenager with Promise*, kiss his hand and place it on the slain teen's image; then bow his head and slightly pump his fist.

In May, Bell installed an eight-foot-high, digitally printed version of *A Teenager with Promise* on the side of a building in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which led to a discussion of media bias with graphic design students from the Academy of Innovative Technology in Brooklyn. A second eight-foot version was installed in the backyard of We Buy Gold, a new gallery in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

#### PRINTS FOR PROTEST

Anna Benjamin, a recent graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design's MFA program in printmaking, was also inspired to take action in the wake of the election, and found that many of her classmates shared her sense of urgency.

Within a week they had created proofs for a portfolio of eleven works—*Prints for Protest*.<sup>13</sup> The printmaking department donated paper and the RISD Museum acquired the portfolio. Benjamin draws a distinction between protest posters, meant for activist display, and protest prints, artworks that harbor a political message. She and her colleagues chose to make limited edition screenprints, woodcuts and letterpress prints, hoping to appeal to people who wish to collect art at a reasonable price. The group launched the portfolio on the crowdfunding site Indiegogo, where prints could be purchased individually or as a set; the profits went to a group of non-profit organizations chosen by the artists: the ACLU, Black Lives Matter, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Make the Road New York, Planned Parenthood Action and Sane Energy Project each received a donation of a little over \$1,000 from the project. Benjamin is currently planning a second iteration, to be launched in 2018. With a longer lead time she hopes that more artists—including RISD undergraduates and faculty

members—will be able to participate.

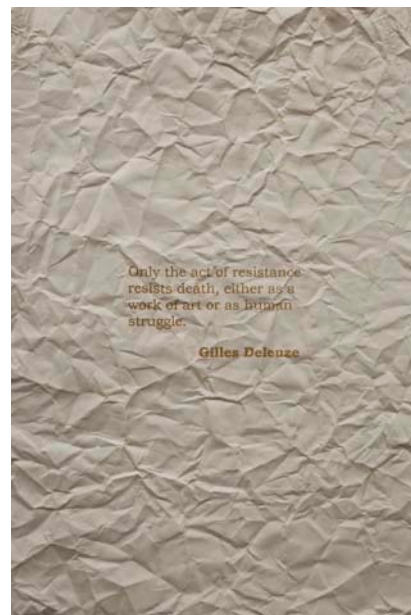
America's current political paroxysms have made prints and printmaking freshly relevant in a digital age, not only as a means of production and object of distribution, but as a participatory social event and an ongoing lesson in civic engagement. As shown by the initiatives described here, many printmaking organizations have chosen to engage in grassroots activism, political awareness and protest culture. By harnessing the "old" medium of print to the Internet, social media and crowdfunding sites, they have built a bridge between the efficient but disembodied information distribution of the digital age and the power of physical bodies in physical spaces working together. We can expect to see many more political printmaking efforts through the remainder of this administration and beyond. ■

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*Alison W. Chang is an independent curator and scholar based in New York City and the Vice President of the Association of Print Scholars.*



Khalid Albaih, *America* (2017), screenprint, 25 x 19 inches. Printed by Lane Sell, Shoestring Press, Brooklyn. Photo: Lane Sell.



Prints from the **Prints for Protest** portfolio. **From left to right:** Anna Hendrick Karpatkin Benjamin, **Print for Protest** (2017), screenprint, 22 x 15 inches. Kelly Taylor Mitchell, **Black People Don't Owe You Shit** (2017), screenprint, 22 x 15 inches. Vanessa Nieto Romero, **Untitled** (2017), letterpress print, 22 x 15 inches.

#### Notes:

1. I would like to thank everyone—Alexandra Bell, Anna Benjamin, Kevin Caplicki, Jen Hoyer, Janina Larenas, Josh MacPhee, and Lane Sell—who took the time to speak to me for this article. Julie Nelson Davis and Jeannie Kenmotsu were kind enough to steer me toward the best resources on politically motivated prints in East Asia, and I am so grateful that they shared their expertise.

The organizations and projects featured in this article have an active presence on the Internet. See Justseeds at <http://www.justseeds.org>; the Interference Archive at <http://www.interferencearchive.org>; Amplifier at <https://amplifier.org/>; Print Organize Protest at <https://www.printorganizeprotest.org/>; and Shoestring Press at <http://www.shoestringpressny.com/>.

In the 2006–2007 exhibition at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Dissent!, curator Susan Dackerman included a woodcut from ca. 1520 by an anonymous German artist that shows the Pope in the guise of a wolf, enticing a flock of sheep. Lucas Cranach's negative depictions of the pope in the 1540s can also be considered politically motivated. Although printmaking began in China as early as 700 AD, the Chinese did not begin using printmaking for social and political change until after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. See Clarissa von Spee, ed., *The Printed Image in China from the 8th to the 21st Centuries* (London: British Museum Press, 2010). Xiaobing Tang examines more closely the rise of the Chinese avant-garde in the 1930s and 1940s in *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

2. Amplifier also offered rewards at higher levels: \$5,000 contributors received an executive producer credit for a short film to be released in late 2017 about art and activism in America; for a \$10,000 donation, the foundation would work with

and artist to build a visual campaign for a nonprofit of the contributor's choice.

3. Current Justseeds artists are: Aaron Hughes, Alec I. Dunn, Bec Young, Chip Thomas, Chris Stain, Colin Matthes, Dylan A.T. Miner, Erik Ruin, Favianna Rodriguez, Fernando Martí, Jess X Chen, Jesse Purcell, Jesús Barraza, Josh MacPhee, Kevin Caplicki, Kristine Virsis, Lesly Geovanni Mendoza, Mary Tremonte, Mazatl, Melanie Cervantes, Meredith Stern, Molly Fair, Nicolas Lampert, Paul Kjelland, Pete Railand, Roger Peet, Sanya Hyland, Shaun Slifer, and Thea Gahr. New artists must be sponsored by a current member and approved by the group at the co-op's annual meeting.

4. "Mni wiconi" became a rallying cry for the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests. The phrase means "water is life" or "water is alive" in Lakota. "Ni1+" is shorthand for "ni una más" (or "not one more" deportation).

5. Email exchange with Jen Hoyer, 21 July 2017.

6. Author interview with Jen Hoyer and Kevin Caplicki, 3 May 2017.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/amplifier-foundation/we-the-people-public-art-for-the-inauguration-and>.

10. Author interview with Janina Larenas, 12 April 2017.

11. Albaih is perhaps best known for his cartoon "Choices for Syrian Children," utilizing the iconic news photographs of Omran Daqneesh, the five-year-old boy photographed in the back of an ambulance after an airstrike in Aleppo, covered in blood and dust, and Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old who drowned in the Mediterranean as his family tried to reach Europe in a small inflatable boat. In Albaih's cartoon, "If you stay" was printed below the image of Daqneesh and "if you leave" below Kurdi. More of Albaih's work can be seen online

on Twitter and Instagram by searching for his username, @khalidalbaih.

12. New York Times public editor Margaret Sullivan described the "no angel" phrase as a "regrettable mistake" the following day: "An Ill-Chosen Phrase, 'No Angel,' Brings a Storm of Protest," 25 Aug 2014. The article's original author, John Eligon, was quoted as saying, "I wish I would have changed that."

13. *Prints for Protest* includes the prints by the following artists: Anna Hendrick Karpatkin Benjamin, Lukas Birk, Audrey Danze Blood, Megan Foster, Valeria Rachel Herrera, Leekyung Kang, Anna McNeary, Kelly Taylor Mitchell, Vanessa Nieto Romero, Kate Sarrantonio and Stacy Lynn Smith. All prints are 22 x 15 inches and dated 2017.