

Chicano Graphics Teaching Posters

Beginning in the 1960s, activist Chicano artists in the United States forged a remarkable tradition in printmaking that remains vital today. These teaching posters highlight five screenprints from the major collection of Latinx art at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The primary poster images, together with supporting text and exercises—information about the artwork and the artist, supplemental images, close-looking questions, interdisciplinary connections, and suggested student extension activities—offer students insights into the vibrant graphic arts tradition among these artists and their collaborators, and how their works were attuned to social justice causes, both nationally and globally.



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IMAGE CREDITS

Jesus Barraza, *Steve Biko*, 2001/2013, screenprint on paper, image: 21 1/2 x 16 in.; sheet: 26 x 20 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Samuel and Blanche Koffler Acquisition Fund, 2020.39.3. © 2019, Jesus Barraza; photo by Mildred Baldwin.

Ester Hernandez, *Sun Mad*, 1982, screenprint on paper, image: 20 x 15 in.; sheet: 22 x 17 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, 1995.50.32. © 1982, Ester Hernandez; photo by Mildred Baldwin.

Carlos Francisco Jackson, *Breaking the Fast*, 1968, 2012, screenprint on paper, image: 25 3/4 x 40 in.; sheet: 29 7/8 x 44 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Drs. Harriett and Ricardo Romo, 2019.50.2. © 2012, Carlos Francisco Jackson; photo by Mildred Baldwin.

Rupert García, *Frida Kahlo (September)*, from *Galería de la Raza's 1975 Calendario*, 1975, screenprint on paper, image: 22 x 16 1/2 in.; sheet: 23 x 17 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Margaret Terrazas Santos Collection, 2019.52.19. © 1975, Rupert García; photo by Mildred Baldwin.

Ernesto Yerena Montejano and Shepard Fairey, *Not One More Deportation*, 2015, screenprint on paper, sheet and image: 24 x 18 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Patricia Tobacco Forrester Endowment, 2020.50.2. © 2015, Ernesto Yerena and Shepard Fairey; photo by Mindy Barrett.

This project was produced by the Education department of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in conjunction with the exhibition ¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now. Support was provided by the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

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Chicano Graphics



**The most potent weapon in the
hands of the oppressor is the minds
of the oppressed.**

-Steve Biko

About the Artist

“I want to make that thing that helped
me see the world differently.”

JESUS BARRAZA

Interdisciplinary artist Jesus Barraza lives, works, and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area. Born in 1976 in El Paso, Texas, Barraza embraces his role as an “activist artist,” and his political prints and multimedia projects advocate for immigration rights, equity in housing and education, and international solidarity.

In 2001, Barraza began working as a graphic designer at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts (MCCLA) in San Francisco. There he was struck by the expansive archive of MCCLA’s printmaking studio, Mission Gráfica, which consists of both fine art prints and posters—“work that was meant to exist on the streets at protests as well as in galleries,” Barraza notes. Today, his work can be found in both settings. Barraza has also reproduced earlier works by Malaquias Montoya and Rupert García, and collaborated with Juan Fuentes, all major figures in the Chicano art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrating the intergenerational influence and sustained impact of the rich Chicano graphic arts tradition in the United States.

With his partner and fellow activist-artist Melanie Cervantes, Barraza cofounded Dignidad Rebelde (Rebel Dignity) in 2007, an Oakland-based graphic arts collaboration that seeks to “create work that amplifies people’s stories and to create art that can be put back into the hands of the communities who inspire it.” For Barraza, art, political activism, and community engagement are inseparable from and essential components of one another.

Barraza holds a bachelor of arts in Raza studies from San Francisco State University and two master’s degrees from California College of the Arts: an MFA in social practice and an MA in visual critical studies. He is currently a lecturer in the ethnic studies department at the University of California, Berkeley.

About the Artwork

Bantu Stephen “Steve” Biko was born in 1946, two years before the beginning of apartheid, a system of legalized racial segregation that codified long-standing white supremacy in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s.

Expelled from high school for speaking out against the white-run South African government, in his early twenties Biko emerged as a leading national voice, focusing on the self-empowerment and psychological liberation of Black people. By 1973, Biko’s voice had grown so influential that the government banned him from public speaking and restricted his physical movements. Biko was murdered in 1977 at age thirty while in police custody. In Nelson Mandela’s words, “They had to kill him to prolong the life of apartheid.”

Barraza based this print on a well-known photograph. Here, he renders Biko in vivid colors, surrounding him with red, green, and black, the colors of the Pan-African flag, a symbol of Black liberation. The quotation comes from “White Racism and Black Consciousness,” a speech Biko gave in 1971 at a student conference. In this powerful statement, Biko is both unmasking the psychological strategies that underpin apartheid, or any other form of racism, and urging those who have been subjugated by racism to consider their own internal messaging about their value in society.

In memorializing a South African figure, Barraza participates in a long tradition of Chicano artists viewing themselves and their activism as part of global movements that challenge injustice. Barraza views portrait making as an opportunity to rectify the ways in which “history had been taken from us” by “paying honor and respect” to groundbreaking individuals whose history is not often taught in school, despite their critical role in shaping our world.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

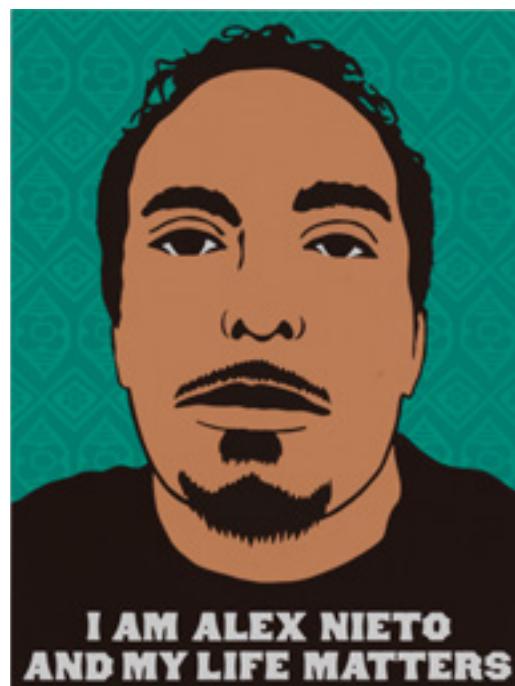
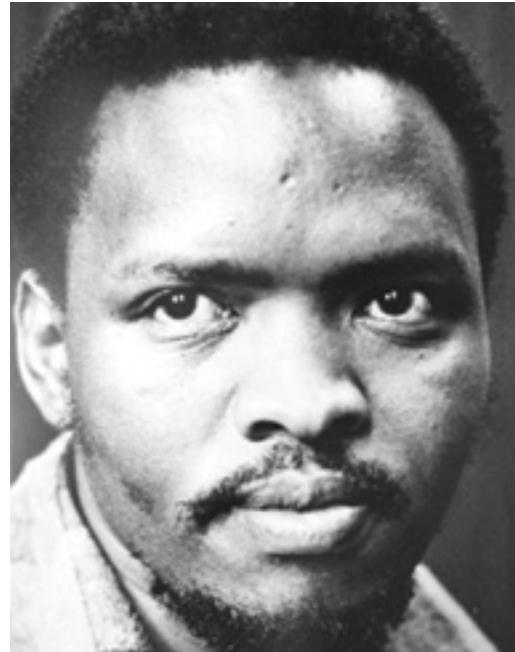
- What adjectives would you use to describe Biko, based on his facial expression and the direction of his gaze?
- How might your interpretation be different if Biko were smiling or if his eyes were facing downward?
- In what ways do the quotation and the image work together to send a message?

Connections

- Compare Barraza's print with the photograph on which it was based. What changes has Barraza made? Which image do you find more compelling, and why?
- Read more from and about Biko's speech "White Racism and Black Consciousness" at Facing History and Ourselves: www.facinghistory.org/confronting-apartheid/chapter-3/steve-biko-calls-black-consciousness.
- Jesus Barraza has produced many portraits of individuals who, like Steve Biko, were killed by the police. One example is *I Am Alex Nieto and My Life Matters*. In 2014, 28-year-old Alejandro "Alex" Nieto was killed by San Francisco police. Four officers fired dozens of shots at Nieto, who was struck by at least ten bullets. No criminal charges were brought against the officers. How does Barraza depict Nieto in such a way that reaffirms his humanity?

Unknown photographer, *Steve Biko*, n.d. South African History Online (uploaded to Wikimedia Commons Oct. 3, 2017; Creative Commons license).

Jesus Barraza, *I Am Alex Nieto and My Life Matters*, 2014, screenprint on paper, image: 21 1/2 x 16 in.; sheet: 26 x 20 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Samuel and Blanche Koffler Acquisition Fund, 2020.39.4. © 2019, Jesus Barraza; photo by Mildred Baldwin.



Chicano Graphics



About the Artist

“I need to do whatever I can to try
and make things a little better in
this world.”

ESTER HERNANDEZ

For more than four decades, Ester Hernandez has been creating powerful works that advocate for labor, feminist, environmental, and Chicano rights. She is recognized for her iconic representations of Chicanas that defy simplification and stereotypes.

Born in 1944 in Dinuba, California, Hernandez is of Mexican and Indigenous (Yaqui) heritage. Like so many migrant farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley at that time, her family endured horrendous working circumstances. “We all grew up in the fields,” Hernandez remembers, where “you absolutely have no control of your living conditions.”

In the 1960s, the San Joaquin Valley was the epicenter of the activism organized by the United Farm Workers (UFW), the groundbreaking labor union led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. During the UFW’s historic 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966, the activists stopped in Dinuba. For Hernandez, the event was a turning point for the young artist. She witnessed a performance by El Teatro Campesino (The Farmworker’s Theater), which marched with the UFW during the pilgrimage. “It was the first time that I’d ever seen art being used for social justice,” Hernandez recounts.

Soon after, Hernandez moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and became involved in the Chicano art movement. “We were like the visual language of our community” and the larger Chicano civil rights movement, she recalls. Hernandez explains that her gravitation toward murals and screenprinting meant that her art and its political messages could be widely distributed and visible in public spaces.

Hernandez’s work is held in over a dozen museum collections and has been featured in more than sixty exhibitions. She holds a bachelor of arts in the practice of art from the University of California, Berkeley, and for more than thirty years taught at Creativity Explored, a San Francisco-based studio and gallery for artists with developmental disabilities.

About the Artwork

Hernandez's best-known work, *Sun Mad*, grew out of a visit to her hometown in 1979. She learned that the town's water supply had been contaminated and that the community was under a boil-water order. Hernandez quickly realized that everyone, especially the field-workers, was at risk of dying of cancer. "Sun Mad evolved out of my anger and my fear of what would happen to my family, my community, and to myself," she reveals. "It came to me, 'I am going to unmask [Sun-Maid's] innocent young woman and let people really know what is going on there.'"

In *Sun Mad*, Hernandez transforms the image on the Sun-Maid raisin box to call into question the wholesomeness at the heart of the popular brand. The smiling young woman who has been the face of Sun-Maid since the 1910s is such an iconic figure in American advertising history that the original Sun-Maid bonnet is in the collection of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

In depicting the Sun Maid as a skeleton, Hernandez not only underscores the deadly conditions that farmworkers face but also draws on the legacy of José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913), a founding figure in the history of Mexican printmaking best known for depicting *calaveras* (skulls) in his works of satirical social commentary.

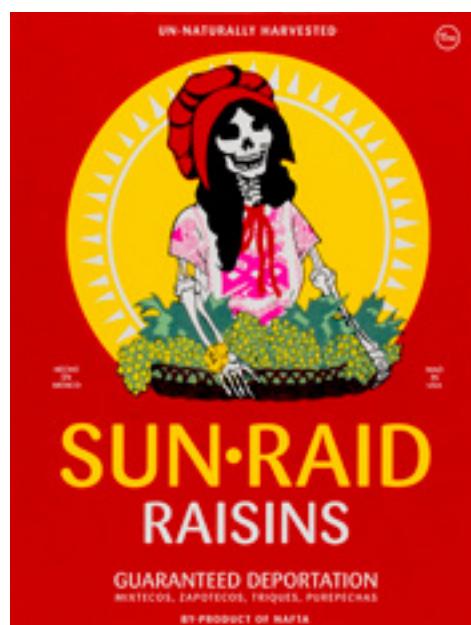
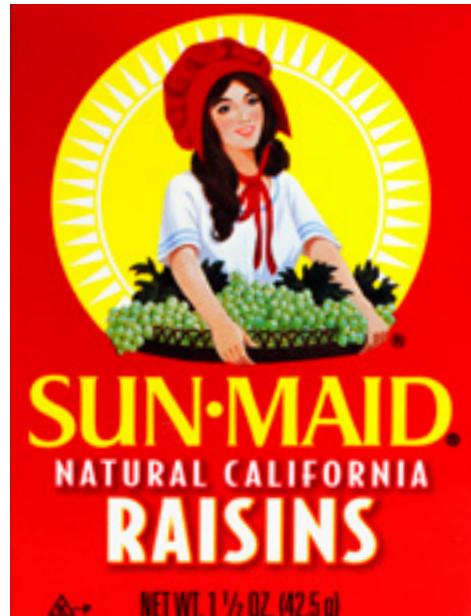
While *Sun Mad* was made in 1982, the economic and social realities that led to its creation persist. As Hernandez laments, "Unfortunately, [*Sun Mad*] is still relevant today," as pesticides continue to endanger the health and safety of farmworkers, despite increased regulations.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

- In what ways does *Sun Mad* turn on its head the notion of the "natural process of raisins being 'made' in the California sun," to use the language of the Sun-Maid raisin company?
- How would you describe the tone of this artwork? What decisions by the artist contribute to this tone?
- How do the carefully chosen words and the detailed image work together to send a message?

Connections

- Compare *Sun Mad* with the standard Sun-Maid raisin box. How are the two images similar? What changes has Hernandez made? Why might it be important to change only some elements while keeping others the same?
- Research the UFW's historic march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 and its influence on Chicano civil rights. Hernandez describes her personal reaction to the marchers coming through her hometown: "There was César Chávez, Dolores Huerta and a small group of farmworkers—very vulnerable, standing proud, and knowing their rights. The only thing I had seen that resembled it was the Civil Rights Movement in the South. Yet it wasn't African Americans, it was us. That was a turning point in my life." What do Hernandez's words reveal about the importance of seeing oneself reflected and represented?
- Hernandez reimagined *Sun Mad* as *Sun Raid* (2008), a condemnation of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). What modifications to her original work does she make in this latest image? Hernandez added an ICE wrist monitor and adapted the figure's attire; she now wears a huipil, a traditional garment which is a reference to the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, and other Indigenous people who comprise a visible segment of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Hernandez issued *Sun Raid* at a time when the George W. Bush administration was being widely criticized for its high level of workplace raids. ICE raids continue today, and it has become increasingly common for them to take place in the homes of undocumented immigrant parents and their children, as this article from *The Atlantic* explains: www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/07/when-ice-raids-homes-immigration/594112/.



Sun-Maid raisin box: iStock.com/JulNichols.

Ester Hernandez, *Sun Raid*, 2008, screenprint on paper, image: 19 3/4 x 15 in.; sheet: 29 x 22 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 2020.12.2. © 2008, Ester Hernandez; photo by Mindy Barrett.

Chicano Graphics



About the Artist

“It’s about. . . making the *invisible* visible.”

CARLOS JACKSON

Carlos Francisco Jackson’s work as an educator is central to his artistic practice. Born in 1978 in Los Angeles, Jackson credits taking a Chicano studies course as a college student as a pivotal moment in his life and career. Today, Jackson is a professor of Chicanx studies at the University of California-Davis, the same institution he attended as an undergraduate.

What interests Jackson about Chicano studies and Chicano art is that “it’s about . . . making the *invisible* visible.” His realization that many twenty-first-century young people know little about key events in U.S. civil rights history inspired him to create a series of prints based on documentary photographs of historic events, such as student Elizabeth Eckford attempting to enter Little Rock Central High School, which had been segregated, in 1957. In commemorating these moments in vivid colors, Jackson brings them to the fore and underscores their continued relevance for contemporary viewers.

Further demonstrating the inextricable link between his roles as artist and educator, Jackson, alongside his mentor, artist Malaquias Montoya, cofounded Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn Art Workshop), a community-based art center in Woodland, California. There he nurtures young artists who are employing their visual skills to further social justice, equality, anti-racism, and community self-determination—themes that are present in his own work as well.

Jackson holds a bachelor of science in community and regional development and an MFA in painting from the University of California-Davis.

About the Artwork

Breaking the Fast, 1968 is based on a photograph taken on March 10, 1968, the day that labor union organizer and civil rights activist César Chávez broke his twenty-five-day hunger strike.

Chávez, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., implemented peaceful protest strategies—including marches, strikes, and fasts—in the effort to expand civil and labor rights for Latinos. During his fast in 1968, Chávez refused solid food and drank only water, losing thirty-five pounds in just under a month. He ended the fast at a Catholic Mass attended by four thousand supporters, including U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, who is seated on Chávez's right in Jackson's print. Kennedy had long supported the UFW and was admired by many Chicanos.

While Chávez and Kennedy are the most famous faces in this image, the other individuals include Chávez's wife, Helen Chávez, and his mother, Juana Chávez. Although the men standing behind them are often cropped out of the widely reproduced photograph on which his artwork is based, Jackson made sure to include the four organizers from the Filipino community who often partnered with Mexican field-workers in the struggle for justice: Irwin DeShetler, Andy Imutan, Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz. Two of the men are carrying the flag of the UFW, further underscoring the unity between marginalized communities.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

- What elements or details of the artwork stand out to you? How does Jackson render them in such a way that catches your eye?
- What words would you use to describe César Chávez, based on his body language and facial expression?
- How would this artwork be different if it depicted only Chávez rather than a group of people?

Connections

- Explore another work in SAAM's collection with deep ties to this historic event, Emanuel Martinez's *Farm Workers' Altar* (1967): <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/farm-workers-altar-33081>. Which symbols do you see that invoke unity between social and religious causes? Which symbols celebrate the diversity and character of humanity?
- Compare Jackson's screenprint with its source photograph. How does Jackson's use of color alter the mood or tone of the image?
- Although Chávez was too physically weak to speak at the Mass, one of his aides read the following statement on his behalf: "*Our struggle is not easy. Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful, and they have many allies in high places. We are poor. Our allies are few. But we have something the rich do not own. We have our own bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons.*" Research the role of nonviolent protest in social justice movements in the United States and around the world.



Photo by John Kounz/Courtesy of the Tom & Ethel Bradley Center at California State University, Northridge.

Emanuel Martinez, *Farm Workers' Altar*, 1967, acrylic on mahogany and plywood, $38\frac{1}{8} \times 54\frac{1}{2} \times 36$ in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the International Bank of Commerce in honor of Antonio R. Sanchez Sr., 1992.95. Photo by Gene Young.



Chicano Graphics



About the Artist

“Well, it’s *always* important to know your roots, always important to know your history, at all times. Because it’s not as if one is *born* with an identity. One gains an identity through time and space.”

RUPERT GARCÍA

Since the late 1960s, Rupert García has been creating art that makes bold political statements. Born in 1941 in French Camp, California, García grew up in nearby Stockton. After serving in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War, he enrolled at San Francisco State shortly before the groundbreaking student strike that called out racism in institutions of higher education and led to the creation of the nation’s first ethnic studies departments.

Initially trained as a painter, García turned to printmaking in 1968. With graphic arts as his primary medium, García produced work in support of the political activism and cultural pride at the heart of the Chicano civil rights movement.

In his work today, García continues to address the most pressing social issues. His legacy as a foundational figure in the graphic arts tradition is twofold: his body of work, and his contributions as a scholar, mentor, and teacher. After completing his MA in printing and silkscreen at San Francisco State, García earned a second master’s degree in the history of art from the University of California, Berkeley. For more than twenty years, he taught art at San José State University, where he holds the distinction of professor emeritus.

About the Artwork

Frida Kahlo is one of the most famous Latin American artists in the world. Yet her global popularity is a relatively recent development. Kahlo was not a major icon in U.S. visual culture until Chicano and Chicana artists began incorporating her likeness.

Rupert García was one of the first Chicano artists to portray Kahlo, in a print that is part of a 1975 calendar portfolio. Many Chicano artists grew up surrounded by illustrated calendars hanging in their homes. Given as gifts by local stores, these signs commonly portrayed scenes of Mexican Indigenous myths. Artists adopted the calendar format as an art form through which they could explore Chicano daily life and history. García's decision to present Kahlo's now iconic visage in this context reflects how Chicano and Chicana artists viewed Kahlo, who was deeply committed to social justice during her lifetime, as a role model and wanted more people to recognize her importance.

Kahlo was born in Mexico City in 1907. Kahlo's father was German Mexican and her mother was of Spanish and Indigenous Mexican heritage. Her clothing blended Mexican and European fashions, as did her distinctive artistic style, which reflected the Indigenous traditions of rural Mexico as well as European influences including surrealism and symbolism.

Kahlo suffered from polio as a child and survived a bus accident as a teenager that resulted in lifelong disabilities. Her physical and emotional pain factors prominently in her work, which is known for its frankly personal subject matter. Following her death in 1954, Kahlo's stature grew in the 1980s and 1990s, with the artist achieving cult-like status as a feminist and queer icon by the turn of the twenty-first century.

LOOKING QUESTIONS

- Describe this artwork to someone who hasn't seen it. Include details such as the colors, shapes, and lines that García uses.
- Based on Kahlo's facial expression and the direction of her gaze, what might she be thinking or feeling?

Connections

- García based his print on a photograph taken by portrait photographer Nickolas Muray. How does García change the original image and create a different aesthetic? He renders Kahlo's skin in a way that is darker. Why might he have chosen to do so?
- Frida Kahlo painted more than fifty self-portraits. Research her self-portraits and select one to compare with García's print. Consider how the ways we choose to represent ourselves may differ from the ways others represent us. Discuss how even our self-representations may change over time, using Kahlo's double self-portrait, *The Two Fridas* (1939), as a jumping-off point.
- Imagine you are creating a calendar to highlight twelve influential women of color who have changed history through their accomplishments in the arts, humanities, social activism, sports, sciences, or business arena. Who would you feature and why?



Photo by Nickolas Muray; © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives.

Chicano Graphics



About the Artists

“This is the time to create art in solidarity and resistance.”

ERNESTO YERENA MONTEJANO

“Art is not always meant to be decorative or soothing, in fact, it can create uncomfortable conversations and stimulate uncomfortable emotions.”

SHEPARD FAIREY



ERNESTO YERENA MONTEJANO identifies as an artist, an activist, and a storyteller. Montejano was born in 1987 in El Centro, California, located less than twenty miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. Growing up, Montejano crossed the border often to visit family who lived in Mexico. The experience of traveling freely to see family members who were unable to cross the border into the U.S. awakened his social and political consciousness at a young age. “You still see in my work—that same spirit is present from growing up on the border and understanding what the border does to the communities,” Montejano explains.

There is a rich history of Chicano graphic artists working in solidarity with cross-cultural collaborators. Early in his career, Montejano worked alongside graphic artist Shepard Fairey, co-creator of *Not One More Deportation*, first as Fairey’s intern and later as his studio assistant. Now based in Los Angeles, Montejano creates prints and murals that draw on his Chicano and Native/Indigenous heritage while addressing some of today’s most pressing issues. He holds a bachelor of arts in graphic design from the Art Institute of California—Los Angeles.

Born in South Carolina in 1970, **SHEPARD FAIREY** has been a prominent figure in the Street Art movement since the 1990s, when his “Obey” posters, stickers, and murals became highly visible in the public sphere. But it was his now iconic red, white, and blue “Hope” poster, created in 2008 to support presidential candidate Barack Obama, that launched Fairey to international recognition. He has a bachelor of fine arts from the Rhode Island School of Design.



About the Artwork

The text in this artwork uses simple words to convey a profound truth—WE ARE HUMAN—alongside an urgent call for policy change. *Not One More Deportation* is also ripe with symbolism. The butterfly, with its well-documented migratory patterns that often stretch across nations, is a common symbol of migration in protest imagery. The broken shackles evoke newfound freedom as well as the decriminalization of unsanctioned border crossings, which have historically resulted in individuals being reduced to the dehumanizing term “illegal alien.” The girl’s teeth are articulated through her smile in such a way that suggests she is still on her primary set, signaling the impact of immigration policy on innumerable children. This print was made in 2015 in partnership with the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and is part of the #Not1More movement calling for immigrant rights and a stop to all deportations, which had reached record highs during the Obama administration.

Montejano has stated that the work “pays homage to migrants whose courage, sacrifice, and activism is helping to write the next chapter of civil rights history.”



LOOKING QUESTIONS

- How would you describe the child’s facial expression? What about her pose? What might they suggest she is thinking or feeling?
- What colors have the artists used? What might they symbolize? How might they be related to the work’s message?
- How would the artwork be different if the person were an adult?
- How might the two phrases in the artwork relate to one another?



Connections

- In a statement about the political and social realities that led to the creation of *Not One More Deportation*, Ernesto Yerena Montejano said, “*Migrants’ labor is accepted, but their humanity is denied.*” How does the artwork attempt to correct this demeaning juxtaposition? Research the ways in which migrant laborers in the United States, many of whom continued to perform essential work during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been disproportionately affected by the crisis: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/us/california-coronavirus-food-insecurity.html?searchResultPosition=1>.
- Compare *Not One More Deportation* with Rupert García’s *¡Cesen Deportación!*, originally made in 1973. The artist reprinted the work in 2011 in collaboration with Dignidad Rebelde, a graphic arts project cofounded by Jesus Barraza and Melanie Cervantes. The title’s English translation is “Stop Deportation!” How do these two works communicate a similar message in different ways? Which one do you find most effective? Why?



- *Not One More Deportation* was created by Ernesto Yerena Montejano, a Chicano and Native (Yaqui) artist, and Shepard Fairey, a white artist. Research other multi-cultural partnerships in the struggle for social justice, such as the Rainbow Coalition, founded in Chicago in 1969, which brought together African American, Latino, and working-class white youth. What might be the benefits, challenges, and limitations of cross-cultural collaboration? What opportunities for transformation might these partnerships present?



Rupert García, *¡Cesen Deportación!*, 1973, reprinted in collaboration with Dignidad Rebelde in 2011, screenprint on paper, image: 20 1/2 x 28 in.; sheet: 25 x 32 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Samuel and Blanche Koffler Acquisition Fund, 2020.39.9. © 1973, Rupert García; photo by Mildred Baldwin.

