



RESIGNATION

Marcelo Román Kopp

It's impossible to think separately about printmaking and politics in Argentina.

Rosario, the Argentinian city I live in, has an important printmaking history. In 1942, the first Argentinian Salon of National Printmaking opened in the Municipal Museum of Rosario. Until then art salons were exclusively dedicated to drawing and painting. Although engraving existed in Argentina, it was thought outside the realm of legitimate art. At the beginning of the 20th century, political pamphlets and book illustrations were the common product of printmaking. A group of left wing artists, The Artists of the People, made up of Adolfo Bellocq, Guillermo Hebequer and Jose Arato, among others, used printmaking to awaken consciousness in the working class and spread their message to the masses. In the 1930s, Antonio Berni, a teacher at the Municipal Museum of Rosario, founded a group of visual artists with a realistic aesthetic, influenced by the Mexican muralist Siqueiros. This group laid the ideological and aesthetic foundations of local art for future generations. It is no coincidence that Berni, a Rosario resident, was the first Argentine artist to be awarded a prize for his engravings at the 1962 Venice Biennale.

All printmakers of Rosario inherit a history of political art and social commitment. Their choice of discipline is not a whim. The selection of materials implies a political position. Wood is, and has been, the most accessible of materials throughout history. Examples include the T'ang dynasty of

the 8th century, Dürer in the 16th century, Hokusai in the 19th century and Kirchner in the 20th century.

In Argentina the tradition of printmaking included left wing pamphleteering and the denunciation of corruption and class inequality. In Rosario, from the 1940s, a recurring theme appears in the work of Minturn Zerva, Ricardo Warecki, Leonidas Gambartes and Juan Grela. These artists focus on the margins of the city, where urban neighborhoods grow into surrounding countryside and are affected by environmental degradation. I explore that in my own work, adding some critical symptoms of our time.

Although my technique is similar to wood engraving, I call it *xilografía a contraveta*. I prepare end grain cuts, sand them to a mirror finish, then begin cutting with a burin. I don't use maple, cherry or boxwood. I use Palo Blanco, whose Latin name is *calycophyllum multiflorum*. It is a wood found in the South American countries of Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. It is usually used for broomsticks and is quite hard. Traditionally Palo Blanco was used in Argentine woodcut before the appearance of MDF or PVC.

My country has adopted the agro-export model. Pampa plain, smooth and fertile, is ideal for agricultural production. In Argentina, "the granary of the world," great riches produced by exports are concentrated in very few hands. Rosario is one of its most important urban centers, whose wealth derives from the port on the great Paraná River. It is surrounded by endless kilometers of farmland.

In my series, *Resignation*, there are references to Durer, Dore and Brueghel among others. There are many



recurring symbols including the skull with the soy plant used by environmentalists to denounce the damage of glyphosate, the silo as an index of accumulation and private property and the character of the fumigator. There are also representations of city structures and sites (the bridge, soccer stadium and river of Rosario) that have been degraded. For me, it is an exercise in appropriation, a series of historic stylistic wood engravings in the form of denunciation and proof of environmental damage generated by indiscriminate agricultural activity and the exploitation of natural resources.

Artist Information

Marcelo Kopp was born in Rosario, Argentina on February 19, 1986. He is a professor and technician in visual arts. He has received prizes in paintings and made illustration and graphic design works, however he dedicates most of his time to wood engraving.

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Image Documentation

Salome Eating From the Poisoned Earth, multiple block wood engraving, 4" x 4", 2018

Fishing From the Poisoned River, multiple blockwood engraving, 4" x 4", 2018

The Extermination, multiple block wood engraving, 8" x 8", 2018

The Fumigator, multiple block wood engraving, 4.72" x 2", 2017

The Drought, multiple block, 8" x 8", 2018

