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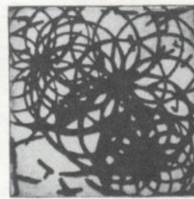
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Front cover: René Arceo, *Mestizo*, 2009. Linocut and watercolor, 6 x 8".

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Back cover: *Primordial Soup Print Portfolio*, 2012, prints by Daniela Deeg & Cynthia Lollis, David Chioffi & Cynthia Thompson, Matthew Sugarman and Marie Weaver.

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Contents: Terri Dilling, *Sequential Bloom*, 2011. Set of 4 intaglio prints, 4 x 4" each.

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Art & Theme in the Prints of René Arceo

By Julio Rangel

René Arceo was born in Cojumatlan, Michoacán, Mexico, attended high school in the U.S., and graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with his BFA in printmaking and a K-12 teaching certificate. He has worked for the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago and is now the Visual Arts Coordinator for the Office of Language and Cultural Education at the Chicago Public Schools. Co-founder of Chicago's Galeria Ink Works in 1984 and the Taller Mexicano de Grabado (Mexican Printmaking Workshop) in 1990, René has curated dozens of exhibitions for galleries, universities and museums. He has received numerous awards including two Governor's International Exchange Program grants from the Illinois Arts Council to travel, lecture and exhibit in Lublin and Paris. In 2005 he founded Arceo Press to promote international printmaking exchanges. In addition to this career as a teacher and advocate for printmaking, he continues to exhibit throughout Mexico and the U.S. as well as in Poland, Spain, Canada and France.

René Arceo, in the tradition of many artists, seeks himself in the nearly alchemical process of his work. In him, with palpable force, we meet an artist who channels the rivers of the unconscious. One can trace these rivers to their various sources: the pugnacious Mexican printmakers, including the Posada and Leopoldo Méndez; the post-revolutionary discourse of the Mexican muralists; the avant-garde movements of Europe, particularly Cubism; as well as the artist's internal combustion, his ghosts, personal history and context. These sources could be pursued to exhaustion and yet the list would still be incomplete. The agility of his line, the air that sinuously expands and then contracts the line to unify each work: this is what ultimately feeds the conflicting forces of the instinctive and the rational, pushing the game into new territory.



Arceo says that he usually begins his work without knowing ahead of time what he will create. In effect, he is like an explorer who sets out without a predetermined idea of his route or destination. This confident reliance on intuition is too rash for many artists because of the risk of going adrift. But this particular artist-artisan knows how to anchor himself in the final equilibrium of the form, in its structural tension: he knows how to return from his journey. The "theme" is always present — the gravitational force of culture, to which his figurative explorations must return: the politicized art that marked his formative years, noteworthy aspects of everyday life, his strong ties to a community that is rich in narrative tradition and in its history of fine arts (from the pre-Hispanic codices to the diversity of contemporary approaches; the popular iconography of the *retablos* and the lottery, neighborhood murals, etc.).

*A poet and essayist, Julio Rangel's articles and interviews have appeared in *El ciudadano potosino* and *Contratiempo*, among other publications. Born in Mexico, he has lived in Chicago since 2000.*

*Adapted with permission from "Certainty and Intuition in the Work of René Arceo" by Julio Rangel (translated by Mary Hawley), from **René Arceo: Between the Instinctive and the Rational / Entre lo Instintivo y lo Racional**. Edited by Francisco Piña, texts in English and Spanish by Víctor M. Espinosa, Julio Rangel and Gary Francisco Keller, with a prologue by Gilberto Cárdenas. Chicago: Casa Michoacán en el Medio Oeste, 2010. Paper, 12 x 9.5", 152 pp., 160 illus. ISBN 9781450710701. \$20 + shipping, contact the publisher at 312-491-9317 or renearceo@comcast.net.*

*René Arceo, **Untitled**, 2011. Linocut, 15.5 x 24".*

*Front cover: René Arceo, **Mestizo**, 2009. Linocut and watercolor, 6 x 8".*

Seen in perspective, the continuum of Mexican fine arts reveals an enduring relationship between so-called "high" culture (classicism, the European canon) and "popular" culture, incorporating and coexisting with the geometric patterns and figures of pre-Hispanic pyramids, stelae and sculptures. From the blending of both traditions a unique pictorial tradition emerged.

René Arceo, **Bolivian Woman**, 1986. Linocut, 12 x 11.75".

René Arceo, **Guatemalan Women**, 1991. Linocut, 12 x 12".

René Arceo, **Homage to Carlos A Cortez**, 1999. Linocut 10.5 x 18".

René Arceo, **Harvesting**, 2002. Linocut, white ink on red paper, 6 x 10".

Opposite:

René Arceo, **Lacandon Boy**, 2008. Linocut on cream paper, 17 x 14".

René Arceo, **Meditacion II**, 2008. Linocut, 12 x 13.5".



The work of René Arceo is all movement, a journey governed by rhythm, where a dancing, drifting line engenders images of people, fish, corn and serpents. This stroll through a picture's visual field at times suggests an airy sobriety, a generously curving path that seems to embody the artist's enjoyment of open space. At other times, in contrast, the picture is crowded with barely perceptible or abstract forms. Motives and figures proliferate in elusive metamorphosis; bodies mutate and come together, generating intricate constructions; backgrounds rich in detail produce new figures. The musicality and playfulness of these lines, the sense of an almost instinctive agility in *Spiritual Dance* and *Central American*, are in contrast with the gravity of *Guatemalan Woman* and the indignant rage of *Madre con rebozo*. As a collection, his work spans a range of emotional temperatures, some pieces resulting from reflection or an urgent need to communicate, and others conveying the artist's sense of contagious spontaneity.

On occasion, a narrative image transmits a specific message. In others, by contrast, the image offers a laconic but expressive synthesis, as in *Monarca*, where we see a butterfly against the Chicago skyline. Each year the monarch butterfly migrates from Canada to Mexico, reaching its sanctuary in the state of Michoacán, birthplace of René Arceo. The monarch has thus become a symbol of Michoacán, and in this picture it is simultaneously an image of emigration, of free movement without political borders, of the presence of Michoacán in Chicago, and of nostalgia for an almost mythical native land, a yearning shared with the hundreds of thousands of others who have been transplanted to this city.



It is not by chance that Arceo's art is imbued with social themes: the history of Latin American immigrants in the United States is a continual struggle for justice and respect. Nevertheless, it is not mere didacticism that inspires his prints, since their iconic force demands a long look in order to perceive their lyric currents, their profound layerings. Yes, René Arceo's work stems from his immersion in the cultural universe of the U.S. Latino community and from the combative principles of printmaking as a tool for enlisting conscience. But he has too much respect for the viewer's intelligence to lapse into political sermons or to see his mission as the simple transmittal of a message. His work transcends journalistic immediacy, mere testimony, in order to establish a lasting nexus of art that raises questions outside of any particular discourse or historical period. His prints, acrylics, collages and watercolors capture one's gaze and do not easily release it; they breathe with the breath of the old troubadours of *corridos* and narrators of popular stories and legends. But there is also the enigma of discovery, the result of an encounter in which viscosity and craft reach equilibrium in the synthesis of the image.

The *Muchacha con rebozo*, who stares intently at us; the woman in *Meditación*, who in repose has withdrawn to an inner world; the indigenous man in *Tarahumara*, whose gnarled hand is revealed in the nervously fluid lines of his clothing: these are figures of a concentrated expressiveness, shown against a flat background that is bare of other elements. In his portraits, René Arceo strives for an undercurrent of expression, a history revealed in the gaze of his subjects, rather than an ethnographic reverence or romantic mythologizing. The abyss from which the Lacandon boy regards us highlights his figure and echoes the precarious existence of the rural indigenous peoples of Mexico and South America.

Arceo's work is often identified within the context of Chicano art. While this does not bother him, his work is not limited by such specific boundaries. Yet it was in Chicago that Arceo came in contact with the flourishing movement of Latino muralists and printmakers, joining them in their different spaces: Casa Aztlán, Instituto del Progreso Latino and the Taller Mexicano de Grabado (which he co-founded). His generation of artists and social activists has looked for ways to pass on the legacy of these spaces, which rose up from the community itself, by means of classes and workshops that introduce young people to the rich artistic tradition that precedes them. Along with his educational work, Arceo continues to participate in current political and community activities.

It is the permanent coexistence of the visceral and the intellectual, honed by years of practice, that gives Arceo's images the power to arrest the eye and to live on in the memory of the viewer. ✱



Human, social, and sometimes political commentaries are the common themes addressed in my prints. My feeling is that artists must reflect, in lesser or larger commitments, their own time and place.



Prints have a special beauty and magic for me. On one hand, the beauty and the enjoyment of the process while carving each individual line and texture, and on the other hand, the magic and often surprising results after pulling the first impression. I enjoy working with and printing on paper. An additional and final element of great interest to me is the fact that multiplicity can contribute to reaching larger audiences while subsequently making the artwork affordable or more accessible.

By 2012, Arceo Press has already produced seven limited edition print portfolios. Each includes the participation of 20 to 35 artists from various countries including Spain, France, Mexico, Canada and the U.S. Find a link with full image sets at www.arceoart.us.

- ♦ *Mnemonic: To Aid the Memory*, 2005
- ♦ *Bestiario & Nahuals One*, 2007
- ♦ *Bestiario & Nahuals Two*, 2007
- ♦ *Día de los Muertos: Common Ground*, 2008
- ♦ *Centennial of the Mexican Revolution*, 2010
- ♦ *Santitos*, 2011
- ♦ *Rostros de la Migración [Faces of Migration]*, 2012

Caroline Bouyer, *Reine en Peril*, from the portfolio *Bestiario & Nihuals One*, 2007. Color linocut, 22 x 15".

Juan Pablo Luna, *Animal Interno*, from the portfolio *Bestiario & Nihuals Two*, 2007. Color woodcut, 22 x 15".

Opposite:

Ricardo X. Serment, *St. Gabriel*, from the portfolio *Santitos*, 2011. Color screenprint, 22 x 15".

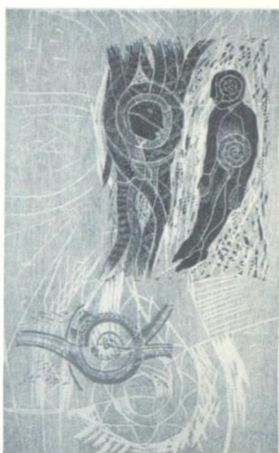
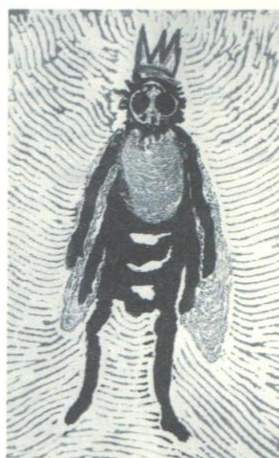
Héctor Duarte, *Nomas iva pasando por aquí [I Was Just Passing By]*, from the portfolio *Rostros de la Migración [Faces of Migration]*, 2012. Relief, 17 x 15".

A Press for International Print Portfolios

By René Arceo

In 1990 Tomas Bringas, an artist from Durango, Mexico, suggested to a group of printmakers in Chicago that we compile a print portfolio. *El Canto del Papel [The Song of Paper]* was the labor of seven artists including myself. Within the year, our group decided to create the Taller Mexicano de Grabado (now Casa de Cultura Carlos Cortez). This was my first experience participating in a print portfolio.

In 2003, under the auspices of the Federación de Clubes Michoacanos en Illinois, I began coordinating a new bi-national print portfolio, *Bajo un mismo cielo [Under the Same Sky]*. This portfolio included twelve artists, six living in Michoacán and six now living in the United States. I coordinated the travel and logistics for those from the U.S. while Juan Guerrero coordinated the rest, so that everyone could travel to produce their images in Patzcuaro, where the editions were pulled and the portfolio covers fabricated. This project was the catalyst for me to found Arceo Press.



Creating this type of international project serves multiple interests for me. First is seeking an opportunity for artists from different cities and countries to collaborate on a common theme. In my travels and experiences with many artists, most often printmakers, I found myself wanting to bring them together in some form. I wondered how artists from different cultures, experiences and backgrounds would respond to and enrich a specific theme. What diversity of media and styles come about with this type of collaboration? I purposely select mature and knowledgeable printmakers with expertise alongside young promising artists so that all can benefit from these projects. Each and every collaboration has been enormously gratifying and, in some instances, illuminating.

Because this type of collaboration links artists in the international arena, additional projects often come about as a direct consequence of the connections artists realize they have. This translates into group or even solo exhibitions as well as art exchanges. For example, when I had the opportunity to present a solo exhibition in Paris, I met printmakers from a collective whom I have since invited to participate in several portfolios. In other instances, artists from Montréal have been invited to exhibit individually and collectively in the Chicago area.

I also use these print portfolios as a vehicle to gain exhibition opportunities in other countries. It is very expensive to send an exhibition of one's own artwork for exhibition to another country. An artist who does not have professional

gallery representation or a museum promoting his/her work has limited exposure. By creating works on paper, specifically prints, artists have the possibility of more easily mailing prints to potential exhibiting venues abroad. One great benefits of these print collaborations is for each participating artist to promote an exhibition of the portfolio they are in, in their own country and city.



Finally, the themes of the previous and current portfolios have come out of the meetings and discussions with Chicago-based artists. I am particularly interested in nurturing themes that could involve many possible artists' interpretations and visualizations while being humanistic and/or culturally meaningful. These themes search and explore some new level of meaning for all artists and audiences. *

Arceo Press is part of the Consejo Gráfico, an independent network of print workshops that has formed to advance the legacy and viability of Latino printmaking in the United States. The Consejo Gráfico promotes the communication and collaboration that enable the preservation and continuity of the critical activist orientation that spearheaded Latino printmaking. Similarly, it works to foster opportunities for Latino youth to engage in printmaking, and for a larger community to appreciate the importance and value of the Latino printmaking tradition.

Exhibitions, Books & Events

Robert Motherwell and Jasper Johns: Poetic Works as Metaphor at the Wichita Art Museum through November 25, 2012 is an exhibition of 46 lithographs and etchings, each produced with a relationship to poetry by artists who have been a dominant force in the development and maturation of 20th-century modern art. The exhibition focuses on two separate and isolated projects. The prints by Robert Motherwell, a pioneer and principal exponent of abstract expressionism, are all lithographs directly related to a single poem, *El Negro Motherwell*, written by the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti. Johns, one of the most innovative printmakers of our time, is paired with the Irish-born, Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright Samuel Beckett, who played with and reinvented language in much the same way that Johns approached imagery. *

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Through the support of the sponsors, individuals and businesses, I am able to take care of all logistics including purchasing and shipping paper, contracting the design and production of the portfolio covers, sorting and shipping the portfolios to each artist. The artists only have to worry about creating their image of a specified size, in the media of their choice, and pulling the edition of their single print.

*For portfolios from the Coronado Press in Austin, Texas, also part of the Consejo Gráfico, see "The Serie Print Project," by Dana McBride in **Contemporary Impressions**, Spring 2002, vol. 10 #1, pp. 25-27.*

The Tamarind Institute Gallery in Albuquerque hosts **Notes on the Tower** by Nicola López, until December 21. López's site-specific installation of prints, text, collage, animation and sculptural elements visualizes the Tower of Babel. Also shown is a print collaboration by artists López and Gandalf Gaván and Los Alamos scientist Bryce Tappan that transferred drawings to copper plates using explosives. *