

IN THE WAKE OF JUÁREZ: TEACHING POLITICS THROUGH ART



Altar Parsioneros, 2010 | Sgraffito on wood panels with acrylic and acrylic ink
Alice Leora Briggs | Courtesy of Evoke Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico

UNM Art Museum | UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute
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INTRODUCTION

These materials were developed in conjunction with “In the Wake of Juárez: Teaching Politics through Art,” a professional development workshop for K-12 educators that was co-sponsored by the UNM Art Museum and the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute. The workshop was held on Tuesday, March 26, 2013, at the UNM Art Museum at the University of New Mexico.

For more information on the sponsoring organizations, please visit:

- ❖ UNM Art Museum: <http://unmartmuseum.org>
- ❖ UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute: <http://lail.unm.edu>

The workshop was organized to explore teaching about the exhibition, “In the Wake of Juárez: The Drawings of Alice Leora Briggs,” on view at the UNM Art Museum from February x 2013 to May x, 2013.

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CURATOR STATEMENT

IN THE WAKE OF JUÁREZ THE DRAWINGS OF ALICE LEORA BRIGGS

“ *My artwork has not stopped the rapes, kidnappings, and murders, or brought reason to this border city. Cutting, scratching, and gouging out my disquieting similes has not even fed people. But I am without other tools. Drawing is the calculus I possess.* ”

~ Alice Leora Briggs

Alice Leora Briggs’ precisely descriptive sgraffito drawings provide the grim specifics of homicides, tortures, and autopsies that have recently branded Juárez and the rest of Mexico. To bring some perspective to the horror, she appends these graphic accounts with figures and compositions borrowed from late 15th through 17th century prints and paintings of the Last Judgment, Crucifixion, and other sanctified martyrdoms as ample evidence of man’s persistent inhumanity to man. The Juárez drawings, beginning in 2007, are the fulfillment of the artist’s long-range reflections on our darker natures. For more than a decade, she has been consistently involved “in some attempt to gain an understanding of what many consider less than civilized conditions. I persist in trying to resolve why these less civilized dimensions of human life are such a critical part of ‘civilized’ life.”

Alice Leora Briggs was born in Texas and grew up in Idaho’s Snake River Valley. She now lives in Lubbock, Texas. Her drawings and installations have been featured in dozens of exhibitions, including *Industry of Memory*, Tucson Museum of Art, 2001; *NeviemViem Neviem*, Galeria Mesta Bratislavy, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 2002; *Purgatorio*, Joseph Gross Gallery, University of Arizona, Tucson, 2004, and *Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art*, Utah State University, Logan, 2006; *Dreamland: The Way Out of Juárez*, El Paso Museum of Art, 2010; and *Near Impunity*, Eide/Dalrymple Gallery, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 2012. In addition, the artist’s work resides in many private and public collections, including the Tucson Museum of Art; Phoenix Art Museum; deYoung Museum of The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; El Paso Museum of Art; and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.

Robert Ware Ph.D., Curator
UNM Art Museum

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

ART AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

Anyone who spends much time with Briggs' images from "In the Wake of Juárez" may find it hard to imagine using these in a high school classroom setting. Yet, projects like this exhibition must be included in our curriculum. As educators we toss around terminology like cultural competency, culturally relevant teaching, multiculturalism and social justice education, but too often we don't really think about what these things mean or how they should impact our classrooms and our teaching. We ask our students to take risks, to trust us, to make themselves vulnerable in sharing their own personal histories through their writing or art, but how often do we do these things ourselves? Briggs' exhibit gives this opportunity. Through incorporating "In the Wake of Juárez" in the classroom we're showing students the multiple facets of art: art as an expression of the personal, as creativity, as storytelling, as activism, and as social justice.

Briggs' artwork comes from a deeply personal place; her own willingness to discuss this can be an excellent model for students. In explaining the violent nature of many of her images, she writes, "I've always made images about this kind of material. When I was seven I had an experience close up and personal with a violent death. My brother was fifteen and climbing at the Tetons when he fell. Subsequently, I spent about eight years trying to pretend that it couldn't possibly have happened. In a lot of ways it was perfect preparation for a place like Juárez where every day there are rapes, disappearances, murders. Every day people try to pretend that rapes, disappearances and murders aren't really happening. I think it's getting harder to pretend" (Stunda, Interview with artist Alice Leora Briggs, AdobeAirstream).

Her artwork is not only a means for sharing her own personal story. It's also an example of how art functions as a means for fighting for social justice, as the practice of activism, as documentation of stories that too many times are ignored. In serving these purposes, art becomes a voice for those who have been rendered voiceless.

“ *The world cannot afford to ignore these crimes against humanity that continue to destroy so many lives. The rights to life, physical integrity, liberty and personal safety must be protected and ensured whenever and wherever they are threatened.* ”

It is a means of participating in civil society—both as resistance and as empowerment. It’s powerful, and should be presented to our students as such. I’ll leave you with a quote from Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman’s introduction to Marjorie Agosín’s book *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Juárez* (p. 21). I think Cooperman sums up quite well why lessons like the ones we can learn from Briggs’ exhibit are so important: “The world cannot afford to ignore these crimes against humanity that continue to destroy so many lives. The rights to life, physical integrity, liberty and personal safety must be protected and ensured whenever and wherever they are threatened.

Katrina Dillon
Latin American and Iberian Institute

CURRICULUM MATERIALS: I

ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGE “EL CHOLITO”



El Cholito, 2008 | Sgraffito on wood panel | Alice Leora Briggs
Courtesy of Evoke Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Overview:

In Alice Leora Briggs' own words:

El Cholito memorializes a young member of the Wonderlook Gang who was gunned down in Colonia Anapra, Juárez. I read documentation about this young man's death and traveled to the site of his execution. According to the report, he apparently died at an intersection that does not exist.

From the perspective of an educator, *El Cholito* is an image that I believe could speak to many of our students, as it shows the death of a young man, that could easily be the same age as many of our students. The image of the young man is foreshortened, recalling the style of many Renaissance paintings. Like *Altar Parsioneros*, Briggs makes allusions to the crucifixion. The young man is arranged in a position like that of Christ—arms out, legs extended and crossed at the ankles. While the background is done in dark shades, the areas around the young man are lighter—as if light is shining down on him, or radiating from him. The allusions to Christ suggest that Briggs may believe the young man innocent even though he was condemned to death. Yet, unlike Christ, his body has been left in what appears to

be a rubbish heap in an abandoned building. In the documentation of the young man's death, it states the intersection where he was killed. Yet, this intersection does not exist. As in *Altar Parsioneros*, Briggs is again making allusions to our own complacency or complicitousness as witnesses to the state of violence in Juárez.

The situation for many young men in Juárez is bleak. Often times, there aren't many options outside of gangs and drug cartels. Some fear, that many young teenagers watch the glamorized life of gangs and drugs (as portrayed in the increasingly popular narcocorridos) and are drawn into a life of death and violence. This may be an area to explore in greater depth with students as you analyze *El Cholito*. Corridos have long been an important part of Mexican music, but the narcocorrido is something different. A quick Google search will bring up a number of examples. NPR did a special report on narcocorridos posted at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zjyDGnDUXs>. *Al Otro Lado: To the Other Side* is another film that speaks to similar issues of drugs, music, and the opportunities available to young men in Mexico. The film's synopsis writes, "*Al Otro Lado: To the Other Side* 'follows Magdiel, an aspiring corrido composer from the drug capital of Mexico, as he faces two difficult choices to better his life: to traffic drugs or to cross the border illegally into the United States.'" The following is a link to the trailer and the lesson plan:

http://www.pbs.org/pov/alotrolado/lesson_plan.php#.UVHkNmfO-So

It's important to note that while the majority of deaths of young men, like the one in *El Cholito*, are assumed to be in connection to gangs and drug cartels, this is not the case for all of the murdered young men. Some are unjustly connected to illegal activities as a way to explain their murders.

Discussion Questions:

The following questions can be used to help guide a discussion or analysis of the image. However, it would be best to start this activity by allowing students to spend some time looking at the image, talking about what they see and what they think it may mean. Then, also share some of the information above as it relates to your purposes in studying the image.

1. Describe what you see in the painting.
2. What do you think is the main focus of the image?
3. Why do you think Briggs would choose this young man as her subject?

4. Note the position of the body of the young man. How is he laid out? What do you think this represents? Why is this important?

5. Describe the surroundings in the image. Where has the body been left? What does this communicate to the viewer? What does it say about the value of this young man's life?

CURRICULUM MATERIALS: II

ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGE “ALTAR PARSIONEROS”



Altar Parsioneros, 2010 | Sgraffito on wood panels with acrylic and acrylic ink
Alice Leora Briggs | Courtesy of Evoke Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Overview:

In Alice Leora Briggs' own words:

*In this five-panel tableau, I make use of Jacques Louis David's celebrated painting *The Death of Socrates* to evoke institutional politics of the United States and Mexico. An unshaven Felipe Calderón masquerades as Socrates lying on his bed, waiting for the inevitable cup of poison. Barack Obama plays the part of the wealthy friend, Crito. He beseeches Calderón/Socrates not to kill himself since the world will surely blame Obama/Crito for failing to prevent his suicide.*

Altar Parsioneros pays homage to twelve men who were tortured and murdered, then buried in the back yard of a condo in a middle class neighborhood along Acequia Parsioneros in Juárez. Between August 2003 and January 2004, this residence served as a cartel "death house," featuring a graveyard beneath the patio.

As mentioned in the description above, *Altar Parsioneros* incorporates images from other paintings. The center panel references *The Death of Socrates*, 1787, by Jacques-Louis David. The wings reference two paintings by van der Weyden: *The Magdalen Reading*, before 1438; and *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435. These are significant in analyzing and understanding the painting. Below we've included images of the referenced paintings and brief descriptions to help in analyzing and understanding Briggs' images. Following these images and descriptions are the lesson activities.

Analysis of Death of Socrates:



The Death of Socrates, 1787 | Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748-1825) | Oil on canvas

The Death of Socrates was painted in 1787 by Jacques-Louis David, a French neoclassicist painter who “championed a style of rigorous contours, sculpted forms, and polished surfaces [and whose] history paintings were intended as moral exemplars.”

This approach is nowhere better evident than in *The Death of Socrates*, where we see that “Accused by the Athenian government of denying the gods and corrupting the young through his teachings, Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) was offered the choice of renouncing his beliefs or dying by drinking a cup of hemlock. David shows him prepared to die and discoursing on the immortality of the soul with his grief-stricken disciples. Painted in 1787, the picture, with its stoic theme, is perhaps David's most perfect Neoclassical statement. The printmaker and publisher John

Boydell wrote to Sir Joshua Reynolds that it was "the greatest effort of art since the Sistine Chapel and the stanze of Raphael."¹



The Magdalen Reading, before 1438 | Rogier van der Weyden

The Magdalen Reading is a “fragment cut from a larger painting, evidently an altarpiece of the Virgin and Child with Saints. It shows Mary Magdalene, with Saint Joseph behind, and the bare feet and red robe of Saint John the Evangelist on the left. The jar in the foreground contains the ointment which Mary Magdalene used to anoint Jesus' feet as she wept over them, repenting of her sins. She subsequently devoted her life to holy works, and is represented reading a holy book. Her clothes are sumptuous: her fur-lined dress is turned back to reveal a bejewelled underdress. The wooden cupboard suggests that the scene was set in a rich domestic interior. The background includes a detailed landscape view.”²



The Descent from the Cross (or, Deposition of Christ) c. 1478 | Rogier van der Weyden

¹ Quoted from Kathryn Calley Galitz, Department of European Paintings, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in “The Legacy of Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825)” and the gallery label of “The Death of Socrates” (www.metmuseum.org).

² Quoted from the National Gallery of London’s image description of *The Magdalen Reading* (www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/rogier-van-der-veyden-the-magdalen-reading).

Rogier van der Weyden, “...centers his composition on the COMPASSIO MARIAE, the passion felt by the Virgin at the suffering and death of her Son. In order to depict this, the painter chose the moment when Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and a helper hold Jesus’ body in the air and Mary falls to the ground in a faint, where she is held by Saint John and the holy women....Weyden masterfully handles the figures depicted in a limited background space and at the edges, where the opposing and complementary movements of Saint John and Mary Magdalene close the composition. Within this space, an outstanding play of parallel diagonals—in the form of Christ and Mary’s bodies— brings out their double passion. The expressions are striking, as is the contention with which feelings are expressed, and the play of curves and counter-curves that link the figures.”³

Analysis of Significance of Altar Parsioneros:

Like *The Death of Socrates*, Briggs’ painting is making a statement on contemporary politics, specifically the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. Calderón takes the place of Socrates, while Crito becomes Obama. Obama is imploring Calderón not to commit political suicide by pursuing the drug cartels, which of course could lead to Calderón’s literal death. Obama fears that the world will blame him, and he wants Calderón to just leave well enough alone. Using the format of an altar scene, Briggs connects the situation with Calderón to that of a crucifixion. Perhaps, Briggs is portraying Calderón as a Christ-like victim, stoically standing up for his beliefs.

The wings reference Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary, again alluding to an altar scene evoking both crucifixion and sacrifice. Typically, the two Marys are always present in traditional representations of the crucifixion, attending to Christ. While they are present in Briggs’ scene, they both communicate what could be interpreted as indifference. Mary Magdalen is reading, while the Virgin Mary dissects a Chihuahua. This could be interpreted as the indifference of the church or religion to the violence and killings in Juárez. It could also speak to our own indifference as witnesses to the inhumanity of the situation in Juárez—while we see it, we do little to change it.

It’s also important to note the two separate scenes within the one image. The foreground, done in light shades, is set in contrast to the darker background scene. Here, we see men being blindly led to the scenes of their own killing at a drug

³ Quoted from the Museo del Prado’s image description of *The Descent of the Cross* (<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/visit-the-museum/15-masterpieces/work-card/obra/descent-from-the-cross/>).

cartel's death houses. This specific death house was a condo in a middle class neighborhood. Again, Briggs alludes to our own complacency or complicitousness in the face of such tragedy.

Discussion Questions:

The following questions can be used to help guide a discussion or analysis of the image. However, it would be best to start this activity by allowing students to spend some time looking at the image, talking about what they see and what they think it may mean. Then, sharing some of the information above as it relates to your purposes in studying the image.

1. What differences do you notice between Briggs' image and *The Death of Socrates*? Crito is looking at Socrates in the original, but where is Obama looking? Do you think this difference is significant? What do you think it means? Socrates and Crito were very close friends; do you think Obama and Calderón have the same relationship?
2. Socrates was given two choices: he could commit suicide by drinking the hemlock or renounce his beliefs. He chose the hemlock. Why do you think Briggs chose this image in which to place Calderón? Was Calderón facing a similar choice? What choice did Calderón have to make? What did he choose? What would you have chosen, if you were in his position?
3. In Briggs' image, Obama is pleading with Calderón not to commit political suicide. Do you think this is because Obama really cares about Calderón? Or does the United States have ulterior motives in terms of the politics of Mexico?
4. Look at the four individuals included in the foreground. Trace their line of sight. Are any of them actually looking at another person, or even out at the viewer? Do you think this is important? What do you think it means?
5. Briggs includes both Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary in the wings of the picture. Why do you think she chose to include these religious icons? What does their body language communicate? Do they seem aware or invested in what is going on in the painting?
6. Look at the background images. What is happening in this part of the painting? Why do you think Briggs chose to do these in darker shades? Darker sometimes conveys a sense of shadow—what could that represent in this image?

7. Imagine you are in the scene as one of the blindfolded men. How would you feel? What would you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?
8. Why do you think Briggs chose to document this scene in particular? What purpose does the image serve?
9. Why do you think Briggs chose to put these two different stories from the foreground and background images together?

CURRICULUM MATERIALS: III

CURRENT EVENTS, HISTORICAL EVENTS, AND ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS

Introduction & Objective

The following lesson plan was adapted from the PBS [“Beeswax: Current Events Lesson Plan”](http://www.pbs.org/teachers/beeswax/lessonplans/currentevents/) found at <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/beeswax/lessonplans/currentevents/>. Briggs’ exhibit is an artistic rendering or documentation of some of the more violent events and/or parts of life in Juárez. In this activity, students will examine multiple newspaper articles or other texts about local, national or international current events or historical periods. This is where the activity can be adapted to various courses or age groups. If the class is studying a specific period of history, country, or topic the articles can be chosen with this in mind. If the class is studying history specifically, then the lesson material wouldn’t pertain to current events, but instead to the content of the particular history lesson or course. Students can read these in small groups or individually. Once students have read and analyzed the given text, they will present what they learned to the class. Then, based on what they learned and the things discussed through the activity, students will create an artistic representation of an issue or current event that they believe needs to be more widely known, talked about, or documented. If the class is studying Juárez, you may want to introduce images from Briggs’ exhibit as a pre-reading activity to activate prior knowledge and encourage student engagement. Otherwise, it may be best to show images from Briggs’ exhibit after the reading activity.

Materials

- ❖ Articles or texts on current events (if studying Juárez specifically, some potential articles or readings are listed in the resource section at the end of this guide)
- ❖ Paper
- ❖ Pencils, pens
- ❖ Art supplies for drawing, painting, or collage

Procedure

1. If the focus of the activity is current events, begin by asking students what they know about current events—depending upon prior knowledge or activities, you may need to define the term “current events” as a class.

2. If the focus is a historical period, then the initial discussion should be based on reviewing what students know about the events pertinent to that period.
3. Hand out the previously prepared texts or current event articles. Students can complete this part of the project in small groups or individually, depending upon the desire of the teacher. Students or small groups are given different articles or texts so that all students are not reading the same material. Rotate around the room, working with individuals or small groups, helping and providing guiding questions to assure that they understand the material. They should be able to answer basic questions like: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?
4. Once students have read and discussed the text, they are ready to create a presentation on their text for the class. Using available materials (posterboard, computer programs, etc.) students will create a visual aid to help explain the content of their text to the class. This can be as simple as providing a summary of the article and the answers to the who, what, when, where, why and how; or more elaborate depending upon the grade level of the class and background knowledge of the topic.
5. As groups present on their texts, encourage students to discuss whether or not they already knew about the event or content of the text. Was the content of the text widely known? Locally? Nationally? Internationally? Ask students to think about, if the content wasn't widely distributed, why would that be? Does someone or some group benefit from keeping that knowledge contained? Ask students if they think it is important to document stories and knowledge like the ones shared in the texts. Why or why isn't this important?
6. If students are not familiar with Briggs' exhibit, show them samples of her art work from "In the Wake of Juárez" available on line at <http://aliceleorabriggs.com>. Some of the images contain violent and/or explicit content, so spend time in advance selecting the images you plan to share. Using the images, discuss with students the ways in which Briggs' work documents important events or parts of life in Juárez. Ask them to share anything they know, have heard, or read about Juárez. Discuss the ways in which Briggs' art represents stories like those we might read about in newspaper articles, or why these stories might be omitted from news coverage.
7. Once students have spent time discussing Briggs' images, explain to them that they are going to create their own artistic rendering of an important current or historical event. As a class, ask students to brainstorm events that they think are important and should be documented. Perhaps they've experienced an

event that they believe should be documented, or they have family members who have. If the class has studied any social justice issues, this could provide topics for inspiration. If the class is studying a specific historical period, have important parts of that period or relevant events been omitted from textbook coverage? Those could provide the topic for the students' art project.

8. Using available art materials students create their own artistic representation of the event they chose. Various art mediums can be implemented: drawing, painting, sculpture, collage, etc.
9. When completed, allow students to share or present their art with the class.

CURRICULUM MATERIALS: IV

ODES TO JUÁREZ: PLACE-BASED POETRY WITH BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ AND ALICE LEORA BRIGGS

Introduction and Objective

The following lesson plan was adapted from “[Creating Place-based Poems](#)” by “POV: Documentaries with a point of view.” The original lesson plan is based upon the documentary “El Velador (The Night Watchman)” and poetry by Dolores Dorantes. The lesson can be found at http://www.pbs.org/pov/elvelador/lesson_plan.php. For a more complete description of the original lesson plan, go to the Supplementary Resources section at the end of this guide.

This adapted activity uses three different resources: Alice Leora Briggs’ artwork from “In the Wake of Juárez”; Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s poetry “Odes to Juárez”; and two of Marjorie Agosín’s poems from *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Ciudad Juárez*. Students will use the art and poetry as the basis for creating their own place-based poems. Both Briggs’ images and Sáenz’s poetry are available online. Sáenz’s “Odes to Juárez” are not published yet, but he read some of his poems for a PBS series on poets and poetry, which can be watched online for free. Agosín’s poems are included below.

Materials:

- ❖ Computer with speakers
- ❖ Internet connection
- ❖ Projection screen
- ❖ Images from “In the Wake of Juárez” (available online at <http://aliceleorabriggs.com>)
- ❖ Sáenz’s readings of “Odes to Juárez” (available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/poetry/2010/06/benjamin-alire-saenz.html>)
- ❖ Copies of Agosín’s “Only Death / Tan solo la muerte” and “I Have Wandered the Countryside / He ido con tu nombre” (see below)
- ❖ Paper
- ❖ Pen

Procedure:

1. If students are not yet familiar with the history and current state of Juárez, provide some background material, either through readings (some suggested references are included in the Supplementary Resources section at the end of

this guide) or a brief explanation of the background material included throughout this guide.

2. Display images from Briggs' exhibit "In the Wake of Juárez". Some of the images contain violent and/or explicit content, so spend time in advance selecting the images you plan to share. You may also provide copies of the two images included in this guide which can be reproduced for educational purposes. Allow students time to take in the images and process what they see. Then, guide students through a discussion that focuses on the sensory details suggested by the images. Ask students to imagine that they are part of the image. What do they see? What do they smell? What do they feel? How do they feel? What do they hear? What do they taste?
3. Next, play the recording of Sáenz reading "Ode to Juárez, No. 5" and "Juárez: The Last Ode". Briefly discuss with students what they thought. Then, play the recording a second time and ask students to take notes on the words or images which speak to them or which provide sensory descriptions.
4. Then, provide copies of Agosín's two poems. Read through the poems with students, asking them to note the same types of things they did with Sáenz's work.
5. Once students have discussed all three resources, ask them to look for images or themes that the three share. Are there common images? While all three resources are about Juárez, do they speak to different things? Do they focus on different subjects? Topics?
6. Explain to students that they are going to write a place-based poem using the information they've learned from Briggs, Sáenz, and Agosín (and any other resources relevant to Juárez). A place-based poem is essentially a five senses poem written about a particular place. In their poem students will describe what they see, smell, taste, hear, and feel in Juárez. They can choose to write about a specific place in Juárez or Juárez in general. They could imagine that they are in one of the images or poems they've analyzed. The poem can follow as simple a format as "I see. . . I feel. . . I smell. . . I taste. . . I hear". Or, the sensory descriptions can be included in more complex sentences like "It was as if I was inhaling smoke, the smell of death choking and burning my insides".
7. Provide time for students to brainstorm and write their rough drafts. Once their draft is finished, follow your classroom procedure for editing and revising.

Tan sólo la muerte
by Marjorie Agosín

Tan sólo la muerte
Como una caricia
Beinvenida entre la mudez
Y el letargo
Tan sólo la muerte
Guardiana,
Angel de reposo
Tan sólo la muerte:
Mensajera del alivio
Repositora de ese cuerpo que no calma
Que no gime
Que no es
Tan sólo la muerte
Reconoce el espanto
Se la envuleve toda
Apacigua su cuerpo desbandado
Se la lleva al jardín
Nocturno
Lejos del desierto

Only Death
by Marjorie Agosín

Only death
Like a caress
Welcome among muteness
And lethargy
Only death
Guardian
Angel of repose
Only death:
Messenger of relief
Repository of that body that
doesn't cry out
That doesn't moan
That no longer is
Only death
Recognizes terror
And surrounds everything
Soothing her scattered
remains,
It brings her to a
Nocturnal garden
Far from the desert.

He ido con tu nombre

by Marjorie Agosín

He ido con tu nombre
Por los campos
He entrado a ciudades deshabitadas
Donde los pájaros mueren en la noche
Te he buscado
Entre los mudos
Las mujeres que solo miran perdidas
Hacia el horizonte
He viajado contigo y tu nombre
En busca de tu luz
He repetido tu nombre hasta
Ser un sueño perdido en las planicies
Y nadie responde nadie reconoce
Nadie indaga
Tan sólo tu nombre
En mis labios secos
Tan sólo tu nombre que te recuerda
Palpear esencias, despertarse sola
Con tu nombre como una ceniza que
numbla la luz.

I have wandered the countryside

by Marjorie Agosín

I have wandered the countryside
With your name
I have entered uninhabited cities
Where birds die at night
I have looked for you
Among the silent ones
Women who gaze toward the horizon
At their losses.
I have wandered with you and your
name
In search of your light
And have repeated it until
It has become a dream on the
wasteland
And no one responds, no one
recognizes
No one inquires
Only your name
On my dry lips
Only your name that remembers you
To touch absences, to awaken alone
With your name like ashes that cloud
the night.

ABOUT JUÁREZ

VIOLENCE IN JUÁREZ⁴

Since 2008, Juárez has been the most violent city on Earth. There have been over 11,000 killings in the past six years, 95 percent of which—according to the government’s own estimation—have never been investigated. The city’s death toll in 2010 skyrocketed to nearly ten killings a day. To put this in perspective, the estimated murder rate was 80 times greater than that of New York City in 2010.

Year	City	Murder Rate
2010	New York City	3.8 per 100,000
2010	Juárez	300 per 100,000

Killings in Juárez have become spectacles—“decorations” or “performances” as Alice Leora Briggs puts it. One Juárez street gang has even taken on the ominous moniker: *Artistas Asesinos* (“The Murder Artists”). Thus the scene of each gruesome execution, each severed head, each corpse strapped with a pig’s mask is imbued with the message of the artist: “You are not safe.”

The people of Juárez have taken note. One quarter of the population has fled the city in a mass exodus, leaving behind thousands of abandoned homes and businesses which are subject to looting, arson, and vandalism. Property values have declined precipitously. “Juárez is exhausted by gore, poverty, terror and business flight,” says Charles Bowden, author of numerous books on the city. Neat little neighborhoods have transformed into empty streets and rows of housing have been stripped to the bones. This was not the expected outcome for Juárez, the poster-child for free trade in the 1990s, the so-called “Model of the Future.”

But Juárez is not dying. The local economy has gravitated to crime. Mexican cartels dominate the wholesale distribution of marijuana, methamphetamines, ecstasy pills, and cocaine. The smuggling relationship with the United States is

⁴ The statistics in this document are borrowed from Molly Molloy, Research Librarian, New Mexico State University. Molloy is nationally-recognized for her work in documenting and discussing the violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. To learn more about her work, including the figures cited here, visit her publication website: <http://fronteralist.org/>.

symbiotic: Drugs and people move north while guns and money move south. Walls have sprouted up along the border and billions of U.S. dollars have poured into Mexico's war on drugs with little effect.

Drugs are still cheap in El Paso, indicating that supply has not diminished.

Scholars like Bowden, Julian Cardona, and Molly Molloy have noted that there is more to the daily massacre than gang-on-gang violence. Death reaches all social classes. Soldiers, police, and paramilitaries have doubled as hitmen, implicated in numerous killings. Journalists have been targeted as they investigate corruption among the political elite. One police chief has even publicly announced that those who look too closely are "digging their own graves."

This is the situation that has inspired Briggs to spend the past five years "cutting, scratching, and gouging out" her disquieting similes in the sgraffito form.

ABOUT JUÁREZ

BEYOND THE VIOLENCE IN JUÁREZ⁵

There are numerous explanations for escalating violence in Juárez. The first explanation is poverty. In the 1980s, Mexico began implementing controversial policies that encouraged foreign trade. When NAFTA took effect, the availability of cheap labor just south of the U.S. border was irresistible to industry. Companies like General Motors, Phillips, RCA, and General Electric opened factories in the city. For these companies, NAFTA was a bonanza. Those seeking jobs flocked from surrounding communities, doubling the population of Ciudad Juárez by the year 2000. By 2007, social conditions had deteriorated. People were earning starvation wages; maquiladoras were hiring women and distorting family relations; infrastructure was lagging behind population levels and children were deserting school at an alarming rate. These conditions cultivated the birth of a network of neighborhood gangs that have been absorbed into the war between competing cartels.

The State's one-dimensional strategy for combatting the cartels may have also contributed to increased violence. Employing the "kingpin strategy," the State arrested the leader of the Mexican cartel causing the division of the Mexican narco-empire into numerous competing factions. As lines blur between the police and the criminals, these fragmented cartels "compete" by killing each other in battlegrounds like Juárez. Meanwhile, North Americans continue to demand illegal narcotics.

Gang membership has been glorified in Mexico. Drug ballads, or "narcocorridos," romanticizing the lives and deaths of drug traffickers have flooded YouTube. As Ricardo Ainslie points out, 13-16 year-old primary school dropouts have "form[ed] the bottom rung of Ciudad Juárez crime culture." At some point the prospect of driving an armored SUV and dying a hero in a blaze of gunfire became preferable to working for 70 pesos a day in the factories—particularly when Mexican law prohibits employment for children under the age of 15.

Some organizations have stepped up to combat the underlying causes of violence. "Boys and Girls First!" provides after school and weekend projects for elementary schoolchildren and young adolescents. Kids in the program are being trained in photo-journalism to document their worlds with disposable cameras. In theory, these opportunities represent an alternative to drug addiction and gang membership.

⁵ Much of the information in this document is based on Ricardo Ainslie's article: "Ciudad Juárez: Violence, and the Social Fabric" in *Portal*, Issue 7, 2011-2012, published by the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

In other efforts to reach the causes of violence, the federal government has launched “Todos Somos Juárez,” an ambitious \$245 million social intervention. TSJ seeks to address the social ills of the city by targeting six areas: economy, employment, health, education-culture-sports, and social development. Thus, life goes on in Ciudad Juárez, and efforts like “Boys and Girls First!” and “Todos Somos Juárez” are a fresh approach to a complex problem.

ABOUT PRESIDENT CALDERÓN

On December 1, 2006, as fistfights broke out among lawmakers in Mexico City, Felipe Calderón was inaugurated to the presidency in Mexico. Calderón was just the second democratically-elected opposition-party candidate since the PRI began its 70 year period of uninterrupted, single-party rule. While maintaining the same broad economic policy of his recent predecessors, Calderón sought to fight back against the cartels by militarizing Juárez and other Mexican cities.

During his six years in office, Calderón's security policies led to the capture of numerous drug dealers and the seizure of weapons, airplanes, transport ships, narcotics and money, and the destruction of clandestine runways, smuggling tunnels, marijuana and poppy farms. Sadly, these efforts did not lead to decreased violence. According to the Mexican government's own data, drug-related killings steadily increased during Calderón's term—the most violent period in recent memory.

Charles Bowden, Molly Molloy and others have estimated the bulk of the killings have taken place in the shadow of the Mexican army, indicating that the “war” itself is directly responsible for increased killing, or worse, that Mexican military and police forces are themselves doubling as hitmen, paid by the cartels. Intensifying drug enforcement operations remained paramount to Calderón, who once referred to the deaths of innocent victims as “collateral damage.”

It is partially the escalating violence that led Mexican voters to elect the PRI candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, in Mexico's 2012 presidential elections. Nieto has explicitly vowed to shift security policy away from the war against cartels and toward a general reduction of violence—though one of Nieto's first acts as President was the creation of a new paramilitary organization.

After leaving office, Calderón and his family fled Mexico to the U.S. where he accepted a professorship at Harvard.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

LAII BLOG: RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE BORDER

- ❖ <http://resourcesforteachingabouttheborder.wordpress.com/>

LESSON PLANS

- ❖ In this lesson students will analyze the role current events play in their lives. This lesson is designed to encourage students to broaden their awareness of current events and to increase their critical thinking skills as they analyze news events. Students will create a community culture collage using photographs, images and text from local newspapers. The lesson also contains an open-ended activity that may be used with any current event topic (Taken from lesson plan summary).

Lesson can be found at:

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/beeswax/lessonplans/currentevents/>

- ❖ In this lesson, students will walk step-by-step through the process of creating place-based poems. They will first practice identifying sights, sounds and other sensory details presented in a video clip about a unique cemetery in Mexico. Students will also investigate how this cemetery inspired the content of two poems by Mexican poet Dolores Dorantes. Students will then list key details about familiar locations in their own community and write place-based poems of their own (taken from lesson plan overview). Lesson can be found at:

http://www.pbs.org/pov/elvelador/lesson_plan.php#.UUtjdWfO-Sr

- ❖ In this lesson, students will research daily life, industries, and the political situation along the United States/Mexico border. They will conduct Internet research to learn more about what it might be like to live at the border and the controversies surrounding U.S. government politics along the border. Students will conclude by creating visual presentations showcasing the things they have learned about the border (taken from lesson plan overview). Lesson can be found at:

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/archive/xpeditions/lessons/13/g912/usmexico.html?ar_a=1

FICTION BOOKS RELATED TO THE BORDERLANDS

- ❖ *Into the Beautiful North* by Luis Alberto Urrea (also in Spanish as *Rumba Al Hermoso Norte*)
- ❖ *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (Art Público Press, 2005)

SUPPLEMENTARY REFERENCE MATERIALS

Online Articles and Interviews

- ❖ An interview with Alice Leora Briggs by Hilary Tunda from November 2010 (found at <http://adobeairstream.com/art/interview-with-artist-aliceleora-briggs/>)
- ❖ “Who Is Behind the 25,000 Deaths in Mexico?” An article by Charles Bowden and Molloy Molloy from *The Nation* (found at <http://www.thenation.com/article/37916/who-behind-25000-deaths-mexico>)
- ❖ “How Mexico Got Back in the Game” An article by Thomas Friedmann from the *NYTimes* (found at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/opinion/sunday/friedman-how-mexico-got-back-in-the-game.html?_r=1&context=us)

Books

- ❖ *Dreamland: The Way Out of Juárez* by Charles Bowden and Alice Leora Briggs (University of Texas Press, 2010)
- ❖ *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Juárez* by Marjorie Agosín (White Pine Press, 2006)
- ❖ *The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration* (Rethinking Schools, 2006)
- ❖ *Ringside Seat to Revolution* by David Romo (Cinco Puntos Press, 2005)
- ❖ *Troublesome Border* by Oscar J. Martínez (University of Arizona Press, 2006)
- ❖ *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the US-Mexico Border* by Alejandro Lugo (University of Texas Press, 2008)
- ❖ *Cities and Citizenship at the US-Mexico Border* by Kathleen Staudt, Julia Monárrez Fragoso, and César M. Fuentes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- ❖ *Breve historia de Ciudad Juárez y su region* by Martin Gonzalez de la Vara (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2002)
- ❖ *Ciudad Juárez la fea. Tradición de una ciudad estigmatizada* by Rutilo GarcíaPereyra (Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2010)



El Cholito, 2008 | Sgraffito on wood panel | Alice Leora Briggs
Courtesy of Evoke Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico



Altar Parsioneros, 2010 | Sgraffito on wood panels with acrylic and acrylic ink |
Alice Leora Briggs | Courtesy of Evoke Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico



The Death of Socrates, 1787 | Jacques-Louis David | Oil on canvas



The Descent from the Cross (or, Deposition of Christ) c. 1787 | Rogier van der Weyden



The Magdalen Reading, before 1438 | Rogier van der Weyden