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Hidden in Plain Sight:

The Story of the Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts

Sarah Laleman Ward, *City University of New York, Hunter College*

Abstract—The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts includes over 150 works produced between 1954 and 1985 and represents the work of forty-one artists. It is illustrative of the growth of the printmaking tradition in Puerto Rico during the twentieth century. Acquired through a misappropriation of funds by a student group in the mid-1980s and ultimately purchased by and displayed in the college, the story of this collection raises important questions regarding institutional responsibility for the purchase and stewardship of art objects. Should art be collected if no plans are made for its maintenance and care?

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PRINTMAKING IN PUERTO RICO—A BRIEF HISTORY

The mid-twentieth century marked a time of great artistic growth and expression by Puerto Rican artists. From the 1940s onward, printmaking workshops flourished on the island starting with one backed by United States government funding through an agency called the División de Educación de la Comunidad/Division of Community Education, or DIVEDCO. DIVEDCO was associated with the Information Division of the U.S. Farm Security Administration (FSA), which is best remembered for the striking photographic images of impoverished farmers and land taken during the Great Depression by photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, and Arthur Rothstein. The initial purpose of the DIVEDCO workshops, which included printmaking, film, and writers' workshops, was the wide dissemination of information across the island to educate and inform the largely rural population (Figure 1). The prints produced by the printmaking workshop allowed the silkscreen poster to become "the visual currency of

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Figure 1. Silkscreen poster from the DIVEDCO workshop advertising a film. José Meléndez Contreras, *El Secreto*. 1955. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission from Daniel Meléndez. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

a literacy campaign launched by the government.”¹ In the 1950s, the establishment of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture further engaged the work of printmakers to create posters for cultural and folk festivals and other events in Puerto Rico. As nationalist sentiments increased in Puerto Rico and on the US mainland throughout the 1960s and beyond, smaller and more politically motivated workshops cropped up, and “the print medium was reappropriated by pro-independence minded Puerto Rican visual artists to openly advocate for Puerto Rico’s independence from the United States.”² The artists, some under government employ, began “giving their graphic work a distinctly Puerto Rican graphic identity”³ (Figure 2). The evolution of Puerto Rican printmaking thus moved from a purely educational and artistic pursuit to one of political activism in addition to education and artistic expression (Figure 3).

THE HUNTER COLLEGE COLLECTION OF PUERTO RICAN GRAPHIC ARTS

The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts includes over 150 works produced between 1954 and 1985 and represents the work of forty-one artists. From the late 1980s through January 2014, the artworks resided in the main campus library of Hunter College at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. Hunter College is one of the senior colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system. In 2008, the author began researching this collection but was initially unable to discover any satisfactory information about the collection, its provenance and ownership, and who was responsible for its stewardship.

A spring 2012 conversation between the author and Dr. Louise Sherby in the Hunter College Archives identified the papers of Donna Shalala, president of Hunter College from 1980 to 1987, as a possible starting point for information about this collection. Shalala served under President Bill Clinton as the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, and she has been the president of the University of Miami since 2001.⁴ Shalala’s papers contained a folder revealing how the collection came to Hunter College. This documentation commenced what amounted to a treasure hunt through the Hunter College Archives and other locations for details related to the prints including their provenance, ownership, and stewardship. Here is the story.

“OVER \$70,000 ON ART EXHIBITS”

In March 1985, Hunter College President Donna E. Shalala informed the college community that the Evening Session Student Government (ESSG) had overspent two

1. Miguel Trelles and Hunter College Art Gallery, *Aesthetic Accomplishments, Political Commitments: The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Prints* (New York: The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, 2007).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. For a full history of graphic arts in Puerto Rico, see Maria Emilia Somoza, “Graphic Arts in Puerto Rico from 1949 to 1970: A Historical Perspective and Analysis of Selected Prints” (PhD diss., New York University, 1984).

4. “Former President Donna E. Shalala’s Biography,” University of Miami, http://www.miami.edu/index.php/about_us/leadership/office_of_the_president/president_donna_e_shalalas_biography/; Donna E. Shalala curriculum vitae, Miami University, <http://www6.miami.edu/communications/president/Shalala-Long-CV-Updated-05-15-2014.pdf>.

Figure 2. Luis Cajiga, *Tu Cultura, Defiéndela!* 1981. Silkscreen print. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by the artist. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

Figure 3. Silkscreen print appropriating the central figures from Edouard Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863). Myrna Baez, *En el patio de mi casa*. 1980. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by the artist. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

years' budgets by substantial amounts.⁵ No further details were given at that time about the source of the deficit, but President Shalala said that an audit was underway. The Hunter College student newspaper, *The Envoy*, quickly picked up the news that the ESSG was under investigation for overspending and reported on it before the college administration was able to address the situation publicly in more detail.⁶ Early *Envoy* reports expressed anger over the lack of transparency in the investigation, since documents detailing the overspending had yet to be released.⁷ A series of reports on the progress of the investigation continued throughout the following year.⁸ The first

5. Donna E. Shalala, *Public Statement*, March 14, 1985, President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 38, folder 6, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. The ESSG was a student governance organization of elected representatives representing students enrolled in evening classes. Daytime students had a separate governing body.

6. Ken Olsen, "No End to 'No Comment,'" *The Hunter Envoy* 40, no. 4 (February 3, 1985), Hunter College Student Clubs, Organizations, and Publications Collection, box 46, 1984–1985, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. According to *The Envoy*, the student body had a right to know what the ESSG was spending money on, since the funds in question came from student fees and were intended to finance student clubs, events, and activities.

7. Karen Rafinski, "It's Late in the Evening . . .," *The Hunter Envoy* 40, no. 12 (April 1, 1985), Hunter College Student Clubs, Organizations, and Publications Collection, box 46, 1984–1985, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

8. They contained information from public statements and meetings with President Shalala, including a detailed list of ESSG expenditures.

full status report (April 1985) to the Hunter College community on the ESSG investigation included a brief statement about the “liquidation of assets the purchase of which contributed to the deficit . . . for example, purchases for last year’s exhibition of Puerto Rican art.”⁹ This is the first mention of the art collection in the documentation.

While *The Envoy* advocated greater accountability in the expenditure of student fees by the student representatives, President Shalala reportedly told a public hearing that “ESSG was within its rights to spend whatever it wished on almost anything, so long as no checks were made out for services that were not performed.”¹⁰ *The Envoy* then juxtaposed Shalala’s quote with a list of seemingly frivolous expenditures by the ESSG such as artwork, framing supplies, an unauthorized trip to Puerto Rico, restaurant tabs, and rental car receipts. Continued reporting of the affair led ESSG to make claims of libel against the student newspaper and threaten a lawsuit.¹¹

Further investigation into the deficit revealed the ESSG budget shortfall to be over \$190,000, accrued over the years from 1982 to 1984.¹² Part of the deficit resulted from the purchase of art and framing supplies and “such services as ‘art consultation’ (the explanation being for ‘exhibits’ taking place on certain dates, no evidence attached that the event ever took place and no explanation of what necessitated the ‘consultation’).”¹³ ESSG officer Fernando Quiñones was identified as the party responsible for the art-related debt. According to *Envoy* reports, “Quiñones spent over \$70,000 on art exhibits.”¹⁴ The works of art in question included an unspecified number of prints by Puerto Rican artists, some of which may have been acquired when Quiñones took an unauthorized trip to Puerto Rico with an unnamed companion for thirteen days.¹⁵ While it is not explicitly stated that the works of art were purchased during this trip, at least two of the pieces in the collection—*Línea clásica* and *Bonito norte de la cáncora*, both by Lorenzo Homar—are signed by the artist, dedicated to Hunter College, and dated 1984, implying that a personal interaction took place between the artist and the purchaser (Figures 4 and 5). The fallout from the scandal was extensive, leading to personnel dismissals in the College’s Business Office and the freezing of ESSG’s assets during the course of the investigation.¹⁶ The

9. Donna E. Shalala, *Financial Problems of the Evening Session Student Government: A Status Report*, April 9, 1985, President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 38, folder 6, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

10. Adam Vinuesa, “Public Hearings Held on Eve. Govt. Debt,” *The Hunter Envoy* 40, no. 15 (April 29, 1985), Hunter College Student Clubs, Organizations, and Publications Collection, box 46, 1984–1985, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

11. Shalala, *Public Statement*, March 14, 1985.

12. Raoul Dennis and Adam Vinuesa, “Shalala Issues Report on Eve Gov’t Gov’t [sic] Money Crisis,” *The Hunter Envoy* 40, no. 14 (April 15, 1985), Hunter College Student Clubs, Organizations, and Publications Collection, box 46, 1984–1985, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

13. Adam Vinuesa, “Attn: Evening Students, All About the Deficit,” *The Hunter Envoy* 40, no issue number (May 13, 1985), Hunter College Student Clubs, Organizations, and Publications Collection, box 46, 1984–1985, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

14. Ibid.

15. Vinuesa, “Public Hearings Held,” April 29, 1985.

16. Donna E. Shalala, *Memorandum to the Hunter College Community RE: Financial Problems of the Evening Session Student Government: The Final Report*, October 11, 1985, 12. President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 42, folder 3, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. The Hunter College Business Office was responsible for budget and check requests made by student organizations. Following the investigation, several Business Office employees were reprimanded, reassigned, or let go because so many check requests from ESSG were apparently approved without proper oversight. Eventually elections were held and the budget was restored, but with much stricter

Figure 4. Lorenzo Homar, *Línea clásica*. 1963. Woodcut. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by Laura Homar Damm and Susan Homar Damm. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

College referred the ESSG investigation and audit to CUNY's General Counsel. The CUNY General Counsel in turn requested that the District Attorney of New York County look into the matter to determine whether or not criminal charges should be filed against ESSG officers. A letter to the Assistant DA from Michael D. Solomon, Deputy to the Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and Senior Associate Counsel, detailed some of the possibly illegal activities involving ESSG funds, including Fernando Quiñones's expenditure of nearly \$20,000 at Chelsea Frames By You (in

supervision and more accountability. Donna E. Shalala, "Financial Problems of the Evening Session Student Government," *Open Line*, no. 32 (May 5, 1985), President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 38, folder 6, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. Elections for new officers were suspended until the situation could be resolved, leaving Evening Session students with no governance and no way to fund student clubs and activities. Shalala, *Final Report*, October 11, 1985.

Figure 5. Detail of Lorenzo Homar, *Línea clásica*. 1963. Woodcut. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by Laura Homar Damm and Susan Homar Damm. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

exchange for “free” gallery space), and his purchase of an airline ticket to Puerto Rico.¹⁷ Further details emerged in a report issued to the Hunter College community from President Shalala.

In 1984–85 an official of the ESSG leased commercial art gallery space rent-free for personal use from a local company, and then purchased several thousand dollars in frames and framing services from the same company. The official admitted this possible conflict of interest only after the college initiated the investigation of ESSG finances. . . . In 1983–84, an ESSG official and another person travelled to Puerto Rico at ESSG expense. The official has said that the travel was for ESSG business, but has not yet identified the other person or the nature of that person’s business on the trip.¹⁸

CUNY’s letter to the DA also mentions that “Quiñones admitted that some of the art purchased with Hunter College student fees was given away to unidentified parties.”¹⁹ ESSG officers responsible for the deficit were notified that “stops” were placed

17. Michael D. Solomon, letter to Paul Giddins, Esq., July 30, 1985, Puerto Rican Art Inventory, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

18. Donna E. Shalala, *Report on the Financial Problems of the ESSG, Distributed for Review on September 27, 1985*, 17–18. President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 42, folder 3, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

19. Solomon, letter to Paul Giddins, Esq., July 30, 1985.

on their records and registration until they cooperated with the investigation and provided the requested documentation.²⁰ The letter to Fernando Quiñones includes an itemized bill with a list of ten missing artworks, asking him to “Additionally, please provide us with an accounting of the art that was stolen on June 27, 1984.”²¹ No response from Quiñones was located in the documentation.

It is remarkable to note that a student was able to amass such a significant collection of artwork over a relatively short time. At first it may appear to be a capricious act by a student who had access to funding with no oversight, but it bears consideration that this student knew precisely what he was doing when he set out to collect works of art by Puerto Rican artists. New York City was a hotbed of Puerto Rican student and youth activism during the 1960s and 1970s, when the students in the ESSG would have been children. Perhaps their parents or other relatives participated in the activist organizations such as the Young Lords or the Puerto Rican Student Union in the fight for inclusion in higher education and culturally diverse curriculum and programming. CUNY was a focal point for much of this activism, with black and Latino students banding together to push for open admissions in order to increase access by minority students to the city’s public colleges and community colleges.²² Several schools in the CUNY system were sites of student-led protests and occupations. Student activists demanded the establishment of black and Puerto Rican studies departments or programs within CUNY to adequately address a diverse array of cultural and historical issues germane to minority students. Fernando Quiñones may have been participating in a deliberately political act evocative of these earlier student activist efforts. Although this is speculation due to lack of evidence, Quiñones’s appropriation of ESSG funding to acquire a large and well-curated collection of art by Puerto Rican artists for the college seems to be a strong activist statement to increase the visibility of Puerto Rican culture and heritage at Hunter College. He certainly accomplished this goal, although the lack of a long-term plan for the artwork was an oversight for which the integrity of the collection would pay dearly.

“A LONG NEGLECTED AREA OF CONTEMPORARY ART”

By July 1985, the college expressed an interest in purchasing the art from ESSG in order to alleviate some of the deficit. The first mention came in a memorandum from Linda G. Howard, legal counsel to Hunter’s president, to Sylvia Fishman, vice president of student affairs, which contains a request for an expert opinion on whether the collection should be sold or kept together at the college. President Shalala suggested that Frank Bonilla, a professor of Puerto Rican studies and founding director of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños/Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro), be consulted.²³ Centro is a research institute located at Hunter College, “dedicated to the

20. Linda G. Howard, letter to Fernando Quiñones; letter to Betty Herard; letter to Thomas Acosta; letter to Eduardo Davila, July 25, 1985. President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 42, folder 3, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

21. Ibid.

22. Basilio Serrano, “‘¡Rifle, Cañon, y Escopeta!’ A Chronicle of the Puerto Rican Student Union,” in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 124–43.

23. Linda G. Howard, memorandum to Vice President Sylvia Fishman, July 9, 1985. President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 42, folder 2, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York.

interdisciplinary study and interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States. It also houses the oldest and largest Latino research and archival institution in the Northeast United States.”²⁴ Centro’s central mission to preserve and provide access to materials relating to Puerto Rican culture made it an obvious partner in this endeavor. Centro would later assume another major role in the story of the collection. An inventory of ESSG-acquired artworks, including a list of missing pieces, was completed in the fall of 1985.²⁵ Following the inventory, an appraisal was conducted, and Shalala reported that “in all, 364 pieces of art purchases were recovered. The recovered artworks, all from the Puerto Rican exhibition, has [sic] been appraised by an independent consultant from El Museo del Barrio ar [sic] a worth of \$70,225. Additional pieces, purchased for about \$12,132, are missing.”²⁶ In her official final report regarding ESSG finances, Shalala stated:

On the recommendation of our expert consultant, the Director of the Inter-American Affairs Program and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, I have elected to purchase for the college 191 of the most important pieces from the Puerto Rican Art exhibition for the college for \$52,000, their appraised value. The remaining pieces will be turned over to the ESSG for disposition.²⁷

Although President Shalala publicly stated her intent to purchase the art for the college, the funding source for the purchase remained a question for some time. Possible funding sources mentioned in the documentation included the college’s fine arts budget and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY), both of which required approval from various committees as well as the president. A precedent for large-scale art purchases through DASNY funding had been established in 1983 with the purchase of Tony Smith’s *Tau* sculpture, which is likely what led the president to pursue this line of funding.²⁸ For DASNY to approve the funding, proof of approval of and support from other Hunter College organizations was also required. Although vocal support for the art purchase came from the president, the college’s Fine Arts Committee, the students, Frank Bonilla, and State Assemblyman Jose E. Serrano, DASNY approval ultimately took two years.²⁹ Within all the docu-

New York City. The legal and ownership issues are unclear here since it would stand to reason that anything ESSG spent money on belonged to the college; however, that doesn’t seem to be the case. ESSG was funded with student fees; therefore it appears as though things ESSG purchased with those fees belonged to ESSG and the student body. Therefore, college administration stepping in to purchase the art would return that money to the students from whom it was taken initially and allow their governance organizations to once again have a budget.

24. María Josefa Canino, “Centro: Contributions & Challenges,” Centro, The Center for Puerto Rican Studies, April 24, 2009, <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/about/organizational-history/organizational-history>.

25. [Inventory of Puerto Rican Graphics], August 1985, Puerto Rican Art Inventory, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

26. Shalala, *Report on the Financial Problems of the ESSG*, September 27, 1985, 6.

27. Shalala, *Final Report*, October 11, 1985.

28. Laurie Johnston and Susan Heller Anderson, “Smith Sculpture to Grace Hunter Campus,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1983. For the opening of Hunter’s East and West Buildings, the Tony Smith sculpture, *Tau*, was acquired for the entrance area outside the West Building.

29. Anthony G. Picciano, letter to William R. Sunderland, January 3, 1986, President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 38, folder 7, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New

ments regarding the appraisal and purchase of the collection, there is no mention of plans for the long-term care of the prints. The focus instead is primarily financial.

“SUCH AN IMPORTANT ARRAY OF ART WORKS”

In the meantime, throughout 1985 and 1986, Rafael Colón Morales conducted an appraisal of the entire collection of 364 artworks. Morales was a curator at El Museo del Barrio, a museum in New York City dedicated to collecting and preserving Puerto Rican and Latino art and culture.³⁰ His work included an assessment of all of the artworks recovered from ESSG, but the appraisal statement focused on the 191 pieces the college selected for purchase. In the statement he recommends that “This collection of PUERTO RICAN GRAPHICS should be kept together. It constitutes an important collection which can be exhibited, and whose value will undoubtedly grow in the coming years.”³¹ He identifies specific works of art in the collection that are of particular beauty and value, many of which are “considered to be technically excellent and representative of the graphic arts of Puerto Rico as they developed in the 1960s and 1970s. In this area and time period the collection is well-defined and representative. Many of the graphics are major works by the artists, being excellent examples of their art.”³² Morales mentions three artists represented in the collection who are quite well-known and considered the “masters and teachers of this generation”: Rafael Tufiño, Lorenzo Homar, and Carlos Raquel Rivera.³³ The collection includes works by these master printmakers as well as some of their students, thereby documenting visually the growth and evolution of the printmaking tradition among Puerto Rican artists. According to Morales,

The collection can thus be defined as one of the major gatherings of Puerto Rican graphics in the United States. It should be exhibited as a collection so our hispanic community as well as art lovers in general be permitted to appreciate the works individually as well as in context. I recommend that an exhibit of the full collection be held at a hispanic institution such as El Museo del Barrio accompanied by a catalog raisonne. This will give credibility and recognition to the collection. The catalog will serve as historical documentation. Hunter Col-

York City; Patricia. Falk, letter to Jackie Johnson, January 27, 1986, President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 38, folder 7, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City; Basilio Serrano, letter to William R. Sunderland, January 29, 1986, Paul LeClerc Papers, box 42, folder 1, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. Assemblyman Serrano urged DASNY to support Hunter’s purchase of the collection, calling the Puerto Rican prints “a long neglected area of contemporary art.” Eileen J. Weber, memorandum to Anthony G. Picciano RE: Evening Session Student Government Deficit, August 14, 1986, President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 37, folder 3, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City; Donna E. Shalala, “A Report on the Status of the ESSG,” *Open Line*, no. 19 (March 26, 1987), President Donna Shalala Collection 1980–1988, box 61, folder 3, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

30. “About El Museo,” El Museo del Barrio, <http://www.elmuseo.org/about-el-museo/>.

31. Rafael Colón Morales, letter and appraisal statement to Linda G. Howard, August 26, 1986, Paul LeClerc Papers, box 42, folder 1, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

lege and its staff are to be commended for bringing together such an important array of art works.³⁴

Morales was contracted to continue his work with the collection. The project plan included appraisal of the entire collection, recommendations for what to do with the collection, general cataloging, label preparation, providing text in English and Spanish for an accompanying catalog, designing/curating the layout of the exhibition, and supervising the hanging of the art. It is worth noting again that nowhere in the project plan does it mention the long-term care of the collection. According to the plan, the artwork was supposed to be installed in a variety of locations throughout Hunter's main campus. Locations mentioned include the fourteenth floor of Hunter's East Building, where Centro's offices are located, and the eleventh floor of Hunter's West Building, home of the Black and Puerto Rican Studies and Inter-American Affairs Program offices.³⁵ Plans changed, however, as security concerns and space usage issues were addressed.³⁶ By the end of March 1987, a new project plan had appeared, the "Library Art Project," which called for the entire collection to be hung in the main campus library. The progress report reveals that the library installation, although a last-minute change, was thoughtfully planned and included curating of the sixth floor to include "all original art and the work of women artists."³⁷ The art was hung in an internal, triangular stairwell in the library, a unique architectural feature that allows students to move around between the floors in the library without having to use the elevators. Even this installation was not without issues as a representative of the Hunter College Galleries expressed chagrin about the displacement of paintings recently installed in the library.³⁸ Following the installation in the library, concern focused on the remaining 173 works of art belonging to the ESSG that were not selected for purchase by the college. Rafael Colón Morales was once again engaged to advise student government representatives concerning the disposition of the remainder of the collection. Morales enlisted the help of Tato Laviera, a well-known Nuyorican poet then working at the Bronx Council on the Arts.³⁹ No further documentation, aside from an inventory list, was located regarding the fate of these prints.

After 1987, documentation about the collection becomes sparse, although two sources mention theft of artworks from the library. In 1992 Campus Safety investigated a library art theft, but the identity of the stolen art is unknown and the result of

34. Ibid.

35. Linda G. Howard, memorandum to Shirley Mow RE: Puerto Rican Art Project/Consultant's Contract, February 5, 1987, Paul LeClerc Papers, box 42, folder 1, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

36. Linda G. Howard, memorandum to Tony Picciano, February 17, 1987, Rafael Colón Morales, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City. It was decided to "tattle tape" the art within the library, utilizing already existing measures for securing books, and bolt the pieces to the walls using special security brackets. Ruth Smallberg, memorandum to Linda G. Howard, March 4, 1987, Rafael Colón Morales, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

37. Linda G. Howard, memorandum to Donna E. Shalala, March 31, 1987, Paul LeClerc Papers, box 42, folder 1, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

38. Mary Duffy, memorandum to Linda G. Howard, April 14, 1987, Rafael Colón Morales, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

39. Linda G. Howard, memorandum to Michael Escott, June 15, 1987, Rafael Colón Morales, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

the investigation was not included.⁴⁰ In 1996, Lizette Lugo's *A la Orilla/To the Shore* was reported stolen.⁴¹ Additionally, when the current inventory of prints is checked against the original lists acquired from Legal Affairs, it is clear that thirty-six pieces from the original 191 are missing.

The prints hung in the library's internal stairwell until the mid-1990s, when a wheelchair-bound student complained that the art was not accessible. Through conversations with colleagues who worked at the library during this time, it was revealed that the pieces were removed from the stairwell and transferred to various floors of the library, where they remained in various states of disrepair until 2014.

"IT IS ONLY FITTING, FOR THE PUERTO RICAN PRINT TRADITION IS NOTHING IF NOT ART MEANT FOR THE PUBLIC"

The efforts made by colleagues from Brooklyn College (another CUNY campus) to catalog and digitize their library's art collection identified a model of what was possible with Hunter's collection.⁴² Inspired by the Brooklyn College project, the author started working in earnest on the collection at Hunter. In 2009–2010, Hunter's library administrators provided limited documentation regarding the collection, consisting of a photocopy of a document labeled "Puerto Rican Graphic Arts Catalog," a list of 157 works of art by forty-one different artists including the basic information about each work: title, artist, medium, year, and print number.⁴³ Additionally, a catalog from an exhibition held at the Hunter College Galleries in 2007 included a selection of prints from the library's collection and a detailed catalog essay about the graphic arts in Puerto Rico.⁴⁴ These two documents provided a clearer picture of the collection as a whole and a starting point for further research. In the summer of 2010, the author created a project plan to inventory, document the history of, digitize, and promote the prints collection.

A list was created of individuals and organizations that appeared in the initial documentation about the collection in order to sort out the details regarding provenance and ownership. Two interns helped create an inventory of the collection in the summer of 2010. They matched up the existing catalog list with the works on the library walls. The condition of each work was noted in the inventory, and a quick digital snapshot was taken for identification purposes. Most of the pieces were still hanging in the library, but many were missing their accompanying wall text or were in damaged frames (Figures 6 and 7). Several were damaged or deteriorating in other ways due to improper framing, display, and environmental conditions such as light exposure and high humidity levels. A number of prints were discovered tucked away

40. Desmond B. Eaton, memorandum to Linda T. Chin, April 24, 1992, Puerto Rican Art Inventory, Hunter College Office of Legal Affairs, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

41. "#62, was stolen . . . as far as PG knows, no other pictures have been stolen." Handwritten notes from telephone call from unidentified person to Pam Gillespie regarding Puerto Rican Graphic Arts Catalog, December 18, 1996.

42. Jill Cirasella, "Brooklyn College Library's Online Art Catalog: Art on the Wall Goes Digital" (presentation, CUNY IT Conference, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York, NY, December 2009), <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Mx4e-RbO5tVPno2KJxwtQnnlYYkSHHH4FD5Qw5OV-NI/present#slide=id.io>.

43. "Puerto Rican Graphic Arts Catalog," n.p., n.d., The Hunter College Libraries.

44. Trelles, *Aesthetic Accomplishments*.

Figure 6. Consuelo Gotay, *Camino verde*. 1980. Linoleum print. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by the artist. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

in a damp storage room on the first floor of the library. A few were unframed and sitting on top of metal filing cabinets, while others in broken, dirty frames were stacked haphazardly (Figure 8). This 2010 inventory found 150 works of art in the collection, identifying seven missing works from the 157 listed in the “Puerto Rican Graphic Arts Catalog.”

Figure 7. Detail of damage to Consuelo Gotay, *Camino verde*. 1980. Linoleum print. The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Graphic Arts. Copyright permission by the artist. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

Miguel Trelles, a printmaker and an adjunct art professor at Hunter College, curated the aforementioned exhibition *Aesthetic Accomplishments, Political Commitments: The Hunter College Collection of Puerto Rican Prints* that took place in 2007 and wrote the accompanying catalog essay.⁴⁵ He began graduate study at Hunter in 1992 and discovered the prints while using the library. He approached library administration and, starting in 1993, worked to put together an exhibition and accompanying catalog.⁴⁶ After several years of false starts, the show was finally realized in 2007. Trelles is currently working on an essay about a complementary collection of Puerto Rican posters and prints owned by Centro, and in his opinion,

[a]n exhibition featuring the combined strengths of both collections would make the whole project very appealing to all involved. . . . I truly wish this possibility can be realized and that we get the opportunity to collaborate on exhibiting the combined collection (a curatorial dream for me), as well as writing about it more extensively, so that scholars and especially the general public get a chance to enjoy it. It is only fitting for the Puerto Rican print tradition is nothing, if not art meant for the PUBLIC.⁴⁷

In 2013, Dr. Edwin Melendez, Centro's director, contacted Chief Librarian Dan Cherubin to discuss the future of the prints, expressing his interest in housing the entire collection at Centro.⁴⁸ This started an important discussion between Centro,

45. Ibid.

46. In the documents from the library administrative offices, there were several versions of the catalog essay and biographical information about the artists.

47. Miguel Trelles, e-mail message to the author, September 20, 2012.

48. Dan Cherubin, e-mail message to the author, May 16, 2013. About the same time, an attorney in the Legal Affairs Department contacted Cherubin concerning portfolios of prints and other material found in a storage room. It was thought that these prints and portfolios might be part of the original collection of prints purchased by the ESSG in the 1980s. Efforts to

Figure 8. Location and condition in which the author found a number of the prints in 2009. Photograph by Sarah Laleman Ward. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

the Office of the Provost, and library administration regarding the future of the collection. The library was, unfortunately, in no position to address the requisite preservation and security issues related to the prints or to undertake digitization to make the collection accessible to a much larger audience. Melendez was ready to begin work immediately on both fronts, so attention focused on the steps needed for the transfer of the prints to Centro. Documentation assembled by the author clarified procedural matters. As long as the collection remained within Hunter and would finally be properly cared for, it did not matter what part of the college actually housed it. Initial plans were made to start the process of transferring the collection from the Cooperman Library to the Centro Library and Archives. However, no actions were taken before events in early 2014. The Cooperman Library renovation began in 2012, necessitating relocation of information technology equipment, furniture, and book stacks. In the process, many of the prints were removed and placed in the aforementioned damp storage room. Several were mishandled, leaving them with broken frames or broken glass. Twenty-six pieces were rescued from various storage places

determine if the prints were indeed part of the ESSG collection revealed that they were actually part of a different collection belonging to Centro. Centro reclaimed these prints and accompanying documents that were important pieces of the organization's history. This find led to a personal working relationship between the author and several individuals at Centro.

and kept in the author's office, along with some unframed prints that were placed in an archival box to keep them from further exposure.

In January 2014, the sixth and seventh floors of the library were being cleared to start the next phase of the renovation. More than thirty prints hung on the walls of these two floors. When the directive came down to clear the floors, no provision had been made for the prints because there was no plan in place for their maintenance and care. They had not been considered in the planning for the renovation, and there was no other space in the library to house the displaced artwork. The author once again contacted Centro concerning the possibility of an accelerated process for the relocation of the prints, since the renovation created a hard deadline for their removal. Pedro Juan Hernandez, Centro's senior archivist, assumed responsibility for the relocation process. While his initial intent was to move only the pieces from the two floors slated for renovation, it became clear that it would be more efficient to move the entire collection all at once. The artworks that had been hanging in the library for over thirty years were finally removed in January 2014 and relocated to the Centro Library and Archives. A new inventory of the pieces was completed as they were being unframed and packed for the move. All of the pieces are currently housed at Centro, where they are being cataloged and digitized. At present, the majority of the prints have been digitized and entered into an in-house database at Centro with plans to make it publicly available sometime in the future. The addition of this collection to Centro's holdings greatly enhances its existing collection of Puerto Rican posters and prints. Since Centro is housed in a building with ample exhibition space, Miguel Trelles may finally be able to realize his "curatorial dream" of a show featuring the combined collections. Already an exhibit featuring works by Lorenzo Homar from both collections along with a panel discussion of his work was held in May 2015.⁴⁹ Additionally, in June 2015, five more prints belonging to this collection were discovered in yet another storage room in the library, bringing the total number up to 155. These five prints were stacked in a pile of broken frames and glass and showed evidence of water damage. They have also been transferred to Centro for conservation and digitization. Given the author's long-term commitment to the collection, it is her intention to remain involved in its evolution to an online, searchable database of images and information about the collection. She also intends to continue the search for missing pieces of the collection on Hunter's campus. Already she is the first person contacted when any unidentified works of art are found in the library. Certainly the publicly available database will be a realization of Trelles's vision: "the Puerto Rican print tradition is nothing, if not art meant for the PUBLIC."⁵⁰

"ITS SIGNIFICANCE CANNOT BE OVERESTIMATED"

The story of this collection repeatedly raises the question: Should art be collected if no plans are made for its maintenance and care? This collection of Puerto Rican prints is not only a group of artworks, but a collection of cultural objects, objects which may not

49. "Lorenzo Homar: Art Binding Ties from Puerto Rico to NYC," Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, May 15, 2015, <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/62273859>.

50. Miguel Trelles, e-mail message to the author, September 20, 2012.

have high monetary value but have great significance to the social and cultural history of Puerto Rico as well as Latina/o art and artists in general. Rita Gonzalez of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center states that “The history of the Latino arts . . . is fragile, ephemeral and—in terms of archival preservation—largely neglected, yet its significance cannot be overestimated.”⁵¹ During the three decades of the “Library Art Project,” valuable opportunities, as well as works of art, were lost when the collection could have been used to engage both students and the public in cross-disciplinary discussions related to many aspects of Puerto Rican art, history, and culture. There are numerous examples in the literature making the case for using art in a library setting to engage users and enhance existing collections.⁵² These prints constitute a portal into the exploration of the history and tradition of Puerto Rican printmaking, Latina/o art and art history, Puerto Rican and Nuyorican artists, government-funded art for the education of the public, art as political protest, art as propaganda, printmaking techniques and styles, and more. Unfortunately, because there was no clear documentation or plan in place for the long-term care of the collection or active engagement with it by the Hunter College community, it was overlooked and simply faded into the background.

Many of the artists represented in this collection were part of an important movement for “cultural affirmation and the social and political empowerment. . . . Participants believed in the power of art as a social tool and chose to develop their expression largely through printmaking and mural painting, media that had been vehicles for propaganda and protest in Latin America for decades.”⁵³ By nature, works on paper tend to be unstable, particularly when the works were intended as posters to be widely distributed and not necessarily as unique works of fine art. But preserving them is still a worthwhile pursuit as evidenced by efforts with similar collections of posters and ephemera, as well as with large-scale works of publicly funded art such as WPA murals in the United States.⁵⁴ Additionally, this collection is an important group of works by a traditionally underrepresented population, and therefore every effort

51. Rita Gonzalez, “Archiving the Latino Arts Before it is Too Late,” *Latino Policy & Issues Brief* 6 (2003): n.p.

52. Martin Aurand, “Teaching and Learning with Collections: The Library as a Site for Exploration and Inspiration,” *Art Documentation* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 12–20; Susannah Benedetti, Annie Wu, and Sherman Hayes, “Art in a Medium-Sized University Library: Acquisition, Cataloging, and Access Issues: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Library Resources and Technical Services* 48, no. 2 (April 2004): 144–54; Jane Carlin and Adrienne Varady, “‘Snow Globes, Valentines, Mail Art, Oh My!’: Weird and Wonderful Art Library Collections,” *Art Documentation* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 46–49; Jill Cirasella and Miriam Deutch, “From Art on the Wall to Something for All: How an Academic Library Turned Its Art Collection into a Campus Attraction,” *Journal of Library Innovation* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1–19; Taylor Fitchett, “Monet, Manet, Mayonnaise: Is the Art Worth the Controversy?” *Virginia Libraries* 48, no. 2 (April/May/June 2002): 10–13; Carol Jinbo and Christopher Mehrens, “Art in the Indiana State University Library: Why Have Original Artworks in an Academic Library?” *Indiana Libraries* 26, no. 2 (2007): 40–42; Kathleen C. Lonbom, “Drawing on Imagination: Children’s Art in the Academic Library,” *Art Documentation* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 11–15; Suzanne Simor, “Art Exhibitions in Academic Libraries: A Necessary (?) Luxury (?)” *Art Documentation* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 137–39.

53. Taina B. Caragol, “Archives of Reality: Contemporary Efforts to Document Latino Art,” *American Art* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2005): p. 2–8.

54. Audra Bellmore and Sever Bordeianu, “Youth, Science, and the Future: Three Sets of New Deal Era Murals at the University of New Mexico,” *Art Documentation* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 71–86; Nina K. Stephenson, “Preserving Dissent: The Sam L. Slick Collection of Latin American and Iberian Posters,” *Art Documentation* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 20–24; “Latin American Posters Collection,” Princeton University Digital Library, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0025>; “Lorenzo Homar Collection, 1937–1999,” Princeton University Digital Library, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0033>; “Taller de Gráfica Popular Prints and Posters,” Princeton University Digital Library, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0012>; “DIVEDCO,” Smithsonian Latino Center, <http://latino.si.edu/DIVEDCO/english/index.html>.

should be made to preserve them for future research and scholarship as well as public education.⁵⁵

The administrators at Hunter College in the 1980s recognized this collection as something of value by choosing to purchase it and display it in the library. However, no resources were provided for its maintenance and care. If institutions are going to collect works of art, then provisions need to be made for trained individuals to care for the art.⁵⁶ To have the desire and the means to possess the art is one thing; to properly take care of it is quite another. Art objects in library and academic settings should be given the same level of attention that would be given in a museum or archive.⁵⁷ Although it is focused on academic libraries managing art, Jane Kemp's article still identifies the basic requirements that must be met by any institution considering collecting art: that there is a genuine interest in the art, that adequate resources are available to manage the art, and that those charged with caring for the art understand, accept, and agree to execute their responsibilities.⁵⁸ At Hunter College at the time this art was acquired there was certainly an interest, but there were neither adequate resources nor an understanding of the long-term responsibilities of caring for a collection of art such as this. Lack of proper cataloging allowed pieces to be stolen, misplaced, or given away without a record. Lack of a specific plan for long-term stewardship of the collection meant that once it was hung in the library it eventually faded into the background, neglected and largely forgotten. Perhaps the Hunter College administration thought the library would be able to properly care for the collection but this was never explicitly stated nor was funding or staffing provided for this purpose.

From the original acquisition of 364 prints by Fernando Quiñones of the ESSG, to the purchase by the college of 191 of those prints, to the current collection of 155 works, the collection has certainly diminished. Consequently, the relocation of these 155 works to Centro, where they can be properly cared for, preserved, and made available to a wider public, was essential. There is hope now that future students, artists, historians, and other interested parties will be able to study this important collection of Puerto Rican graphic arts and that the works will once again be available to the public for whom they were originally created.

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55. Rebecca Hankins and Miguel Juárez, "Art in Special Collections: Latino and African American Fine Art and Photography Collections in Academic Institutions," *Art Documentation* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 31–36.

56. Eumie Imm, "On the Wall, Off the Wall: The Librarian as Exhibition Curator," *Art Documentation* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 71–72.

57. D. Vanessa Kam, "On Collecting and Exhibiting Art Objects in Libraries, Archives, and Research Institutes," *Art Documentation* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 10–15.

58. Jane Kemp, "Art in the Library: Should Academic Libraries Manage Art?" *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 20, no. 3 (July 1994): 162.