

Cilt / Volume 2, Sayı / Issue 4, 2019, pp. 181-198

E - ISSN: 2636-7718

URL: <https://ratingacademy.com.tr/ojs/index.php/arts/index>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31566/arts.2.013>

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

ROLE OF PRINTMAKING IN MEXICAN REVOLUTION

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Geliş Tarihi: 08 Ekim 2019; Kabul Tarihi: 29 Ekim 2019

Received: 08 October 2019; Accepted: 29 October 2019

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 20th century, Mexican Art was in close contact with the political processes in the country. The emergence of different focuses in the struggle for power and the political process exhibited a very dynamic structure politicized not only the Mexican people but also the Mexican art. It has been shown in the study that the repression in the political productions of the artists existed in a privileged structure before and after the Mexican Revolution. Printmaking, which became a political artistic production tool without detaching from the artistic context in the process, constitutes the important productions of Mexican Art during this period. As emphasized in the study, the printmaking productions of artists that relate to social structure, reflect their ideological perspectives and reflect their reflexes to daily and political events are therefore an integral part of the Mexican Revolution. These productions, which have survived until today, are among the most important parts of the most productive period of Mexican Art.

Key Words: Printmaking, Mexican Revolution, TGP, El Machete, LEAR

1. INTRODUCTION

In the years when the First World War reigned in the world, artistic autonomy was a model in which artists positioned themselves against oppression and destruction. Due to the structure of autonomy which is closed to external interventions, artists revealed their art in the context of artistic autonomy for internal reasons. In this sense, artistic autonomy produces political discourse as a result of the artist's own free will. Artists within the autonomous nature of art; they felt themselves responsible for the atrocities, oppression, power, dictatorial structures and were involved in this process by politicizing their art. Especially in the first half of the 20th century, this resistance, which took its most prominent form in many parts of the world during World War I and II, was undoubtedly directly related to the artist's connection with his society. This process, in which printmaking turned into a means of resistance and art became politicized, became particularly characteristic of the Mexican Revolution, which began in the early 20th century against the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship of the Mexican people. This role of art with political discourse, which became evident in the Mexican Revolution; it is directly related to the presence of pioneering artists before the Revolution, as well as to the presence of artists in the Revolution process, who maintained this attitude until the 1950s, when political turmoil occurred after the completion of the Revolution. The most important factor that makes this process important in the context of our subject is the importance given to printmaking in the Mexican Revolution.

Mexico, which has the oldest printmaking culture in Latin America, met printmaking in the sixteenth century. (Mark, 2016) In Mexico, which is familiar with the tradition and production of printmaking, it is therefore not surprising to adopt printmaking in the Revolution. The main reasons for the importance of printmaking in the Mexican Revolution; the role of printmaking became even more important in terms of the transmission of the message through art, as multiple languages were spoken in Mexico and there was not a single language spoken by everyone in many regions, as well as main factors such as reproduction speed, propagation advantage, and low economic cost. Although the attempts to institutionalize revolution started in the Mexican Revolution started the Mexican wall painting tradition, the wall paintings (considering their size) took quite a long time, the inability to reach the whole population, the renewal of the pictures or the integration of a new message had an impossible difficulty compared to the printmaking in the sense that it corresponded to a more cumbersome structure. In addition, because the wall paintings were made by order, the structure that did not include the artists who wanted to be involved in the process directed the artists to printmaking. In this process, printmaking emerged in a rich structure in the production of the artists who supported the process individually or in the productions of the communities they formed together. Printmaking, which was one of the dominant production methods of artists' political productions, took place in the whole process. Therefore, the art of Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century corresponds to a process in which it is almost impossible not to relate to printmaking.

2. FORMATION OF TRADITION

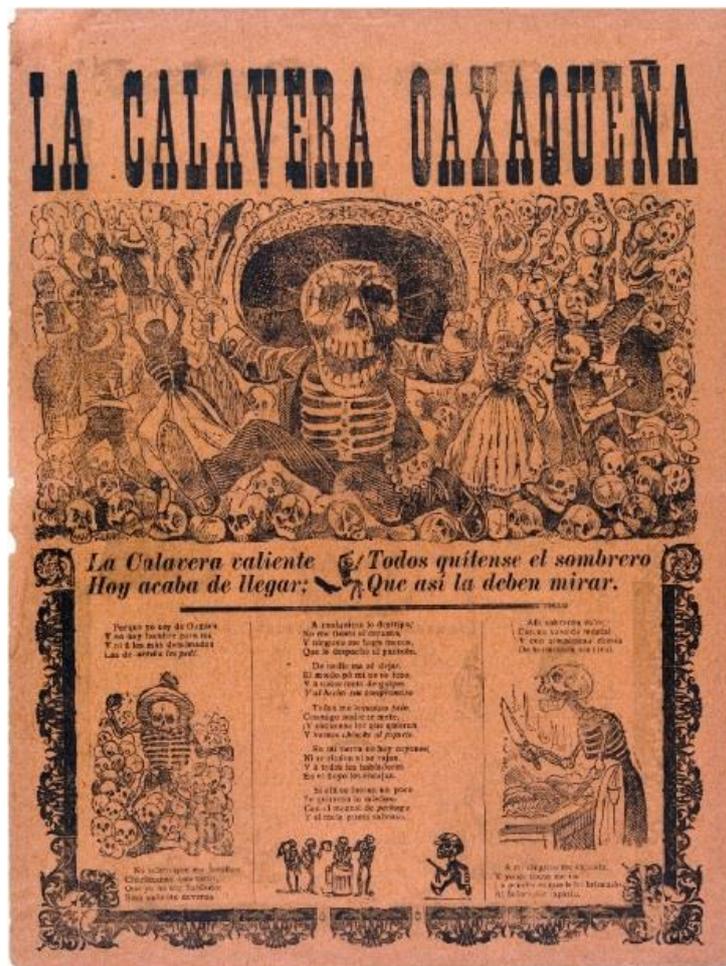
2.1. Jose Guadalupe Posada

The civil war that began with the uprising of Francisco Madero in 1910 against Porfirio Diaz's rule spread throughout the country. This resistance, including Mexican artists, began to unite Mexican artists around a political goal. Jose Guadalupe Posada was the pioneer who made printmaking an important tool in this resistance (1852-1913). Posada devoted his life to printmaking and made it one of the most important tools of social resistance in Mexico. Diego Rivera, a famous Mexican artist who had a great admiration for Posada, described Mexican art in the early 20th century and the influence of Posada on Mexican art as follows;

“It is possible to mention that there are two different types of art in Mexico. One of them is based on positive social values and the other is based on negative social values. Positive art involves people, purity and also wealth in its works. This type of art includes works in which artists reveal their own unique styles; this is reflected in the paintings depicting the masses who work in laboring jobs, oppressed and injustice. Undoubtedly, the greatest name in this art is Jose Guadalupe Posada.” Moore (2010, 119)

The first of the elements that made Posada known as a revolutionary and folk artist started with his work in Antonio Vanegas Arroyo's printing house, which brought him to the masses of people, he became an artist followed by the public with his humorous works dealing with daily political issues, daily life styles of popular groups, the exploitation of Mexican people and his Calaveras (Picture 1) and the misappropriations of the government. Moore (2010) says for Posada's prints; completely inexpensive and short-lived, in these printings, which deals with everyday issues, Posada depicts the sensational news of the day by dramatically and emotionally associating it with the revolution.

Picture 1. J. Guadalupe Posada, ‘La calavera Oaxaqueña’ Litography, 1903, 43 x 30 cm



Kaynak. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005677216/>

With the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, Posada supported the revolutionary movements of Madero and Emiliano Zapata with the prints it produced, and played an important role in supporting these movements on the public side. Posada, who

described Zapata as General Zapata in Picture 2, described him as a leader organizing around the villagers.

Picture 2. J. Guadalupe Posada, 'Gran marcha triunfal-Coro general' Etching, 1911



Kaynak: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2003656163>

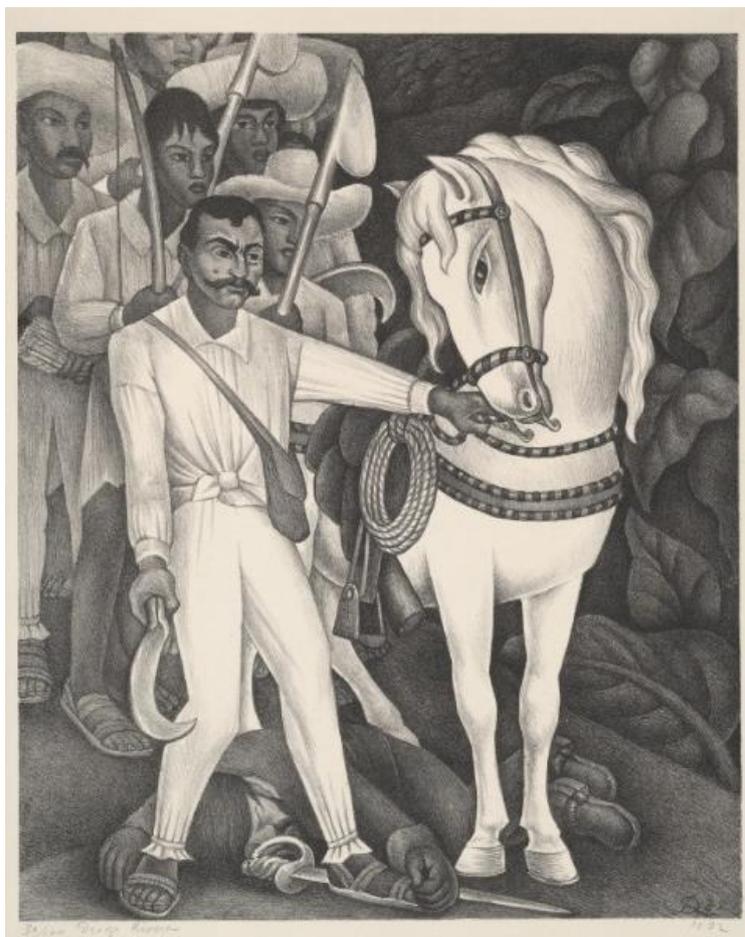
The role of printmaking is undoubtedly important in the success of this function. Printmaking, which paves the way for faster and more practical implementation compared to other production tools, the product that is produced thanks to its reproduction feature, can reach large audiences and that the pictured message can be received by non-common audiences; in this sense it plays an important role in the Mexican Revolution. "Posada handled what was going on around him with a strong and firm fiction. According to Vanegas, Posada, with printings reaching an enormous size of around 15,000; influenced the social and political artists who followed him as if they had found a treasure. " Moore (2010, 120) These prints, the most important legacy of Posada, gave the ensuing artists the idea of how to integrate with the public.

3. MEXICAN REVOLUTION

3.1. Diego Rivera

Having a unique artistic technique, Posada, after his death in 1913, not only the works that aroused admiration but also the artist and socialist personality he left behind deeply influenced the successors. Diego Rivera was one of the most important artists who followed the path that Posada opened. With his deep admiration for Posada, Rivera's sensitive personality to social and political events, led him to carry Posada's legacy. The Mexican Revolution, triggered by the rebellion initiated by Madero, entered its bloodiest period when Madero was killed by General Victoriana Huerta three years after the rebellion began. In the process of rising uprisings against Diaz administration, Pascual Orozco (1882-1915) and Francisco Villa (1878-1923) in the northern part of the country, and in the south new revolts started under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) by the villagers whose lands were taken away from them. Depressed by Diaz's dictatorship and politicized in the process, the Mexican people tightly adhered to the unprivileged policies, supported ideas that proposed land reform in particular. In the process, Emiliano Zapata, who defended the rights of the peasants who lost their land and were sentenced to work in large farms, and promised to carry out land reform, started the so-called Zapatist movement and became one of the important leaders of the Mexican Revolution. Diego Rivera, a member of the Mexican Communist Party, not only made clear his support for the Zapatista movement, but also conducted a study on Emiliano Zapata. Castleman (1988, 119) notes that Rivera's work in which Emiliano Zapata depicts (Picture 3) is perhaps Mexico's best-known printmaking.

Picture 3. Diego Rivera, Zapata, Litography, 41.1 x 33.3 cm, 1932



Kaynak: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/77166>

3.2. David Alfaro Siqueiros and El Machete

Rivera's contemporaries, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Orozco, also transformed their art into a political structure under the conditions of the period.

After the success of the Mexican Revolution, Siqueiros made significant efforts to put into practice the intrinsic values and motifs of Mexican Art and to link Mexican art to modern art in Europe. In 1921, Siqueiros published his manifesto in *Vida Americana*, entitled 'Three Appeals for a Modern Direction to the New Generation of American Painters and Sculptors' addressing the need for a new orientation of Mexican Art. The Manifesto aimed to bring cultural nationalism and modern art together. This new movement, however, "must honor the Mexican revolution fought by Siqueiros and his comrades, address the challenges of the machine age, also draw upon the rich and reconsider the cultural heritage of Meso-america that has been forgotten so far." (URL-1, 2016) This new movement, which Siqueiros dealt with in a political way, was a cultural nationalist art nurtured by cultural notions and local art. Siqueiros's printmaking, in which he depicted Moises Saenz, a deputy and educator in charge of education in Mexico (Picture 4), was an important example of the relationship with the ancient forms that Siqueiros began his quest for.

Castleman, (1988: 120) emphasizes that the relationship between the image and the paper makes the portrait look monumental, while in the pre-Columbian period the Olmecs made the same meaning as portraits of large stones.

Picture 4. David Alfaro Siqueiros, 'Moisés Sáenz' Litografi, 54.5 x 41 cm, 1931



Kaynak: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/61471>

One of the major developments that made Siqueiros important in the field of printmaking was after the withdrawal of the support of the government in wall painting in 1924, he published *El Machete* in order to communicate more quickly and directly with the public instead. *El Machete*, who defended the objectives of the Mexican Revolution, tried to realize social criticism in front of everyone, to disseminate the ideology they undertook, and to ensure that art and culture meet with the public. (Azuela 1993) For *El Machete*, published with the contribution of more than 30 illustrators and print artists; 'We will decorate the walls of public buildings with our revolutionary newspaper,' Siqueiros emphasized his aims, and in a statement published in *El Machete*, asked his supporters to affix *El Machete* to public buildings and streets. (Ades, 2009) Consisting of artistic productions built on a left-leaning political formation, *El Machete* tended to common and social issues and contributed to the support and dissemination of socialist ideas in the post-revolutionary country. Lear (2017) emphasizes that post-revolutionary printmaking and pioneering publications such as *El Machete* were the main form of political art throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

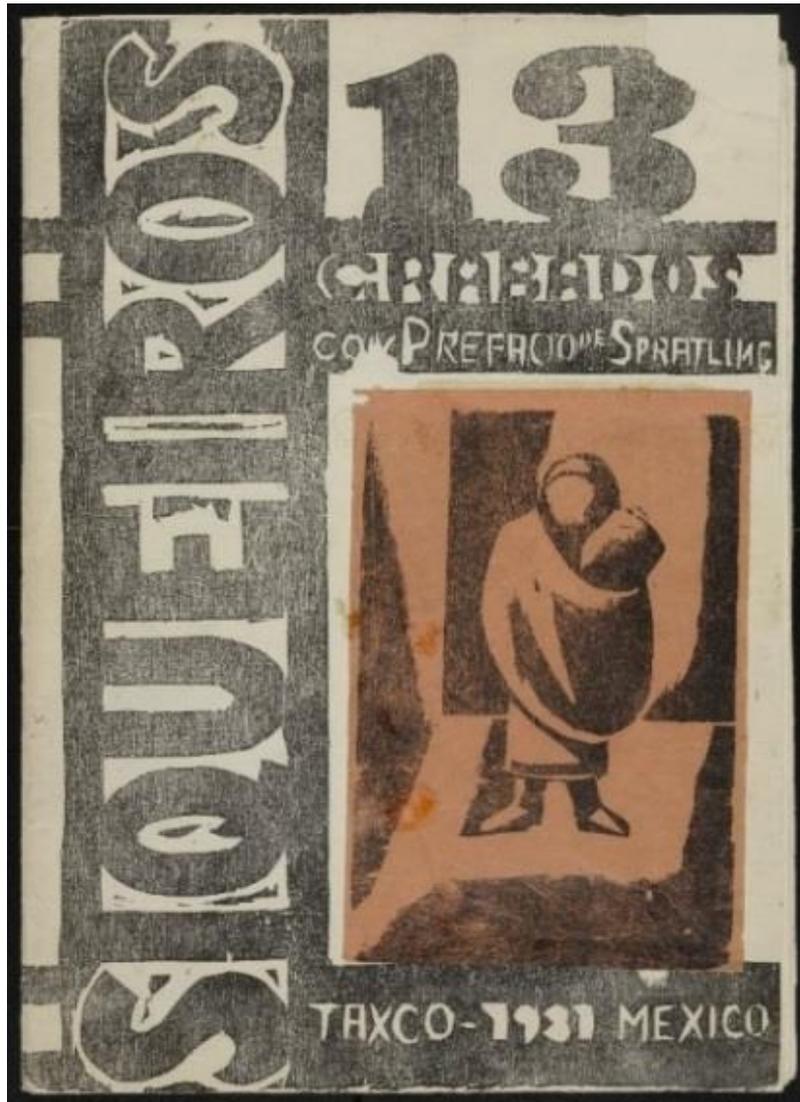
Picture 5 shows the first edition of *El Machete* magazine published in 1924. The figure on the page is the portrait of Karl Marx with a hammer in his hand, made with woodcut printing by Siqueiros. The portrait was printed with a letter calling the villagers to disarm. The name of the magazine was used by the villagers in a manner on the machete used mostly for agricultural work. This logo, which evokes rebellion, coincides with the provocative publications of the magazine.

Picture 5. *El Machete*, woodcut and Tipo print, 1924



Siqueiros, who had an active political personality, spent much of his life and art to realize the ideals of the Mexican Revolution and spent many parts of his life in prisons. Throughout his active art life, he did not break his relationship with printmaking and continued production. Siqueiros was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for being a member of the Communist Party in 1930. During his time in prison, Siqueiros produced a series of printmaking titled 'Siqueiros: 13 Grabados' which consists of thirteen prints in which he deals with issues such as prostitution, poverty, strikes and social class discrimination. In Picture 6 you can see the cover image of the edition.

Picture 6. David Alfaro Siqueiros, 'Cover from 13 Woodcuts by Siqueiros', Woodcut, 25.1 × 17.6 cm, 1931



Kaynak: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/99026>

3.3. Jose Clemente Orozco

One of the most important artists of the time, Jose Clemente Orozco, is known as one of Mexico's "Three Great Muralists" along with Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The violence he witnessed in Mexico shaped Orozco's art and he produced productions that bear the traces of this savagery and gained a politicized identity by carrying the failure of the reconstruction process after the Revolution to his productions.

In his 1930 Mexican landscape and printmakings called Grief (Picture 7), he committed the misery, poverty and helplessness of the people of the country. As can be seen as an example of his 'a Note I' (Picture 8) and Not b Note 2 (Picture 9), he criticized the reforms that were expected to be made after the Mexican revolution but were not implemented. His art career, which he started as a cartoonist, contributed greatly to his productions. Ades (2009) underlines the following points in the analysis of these two pictures. With the help of his art career, which he started as a cartoonist, the crowds represented in 'Note I' are related to the death of the individual in Mexican society controlled by the Mexican state after the revolution. 'Note 2' represents the representative image of the protests that do not work.

Picture 7. José Clemente Orozco, 'Grief' Litograph, 30.8 x 25.7 cm, 1930



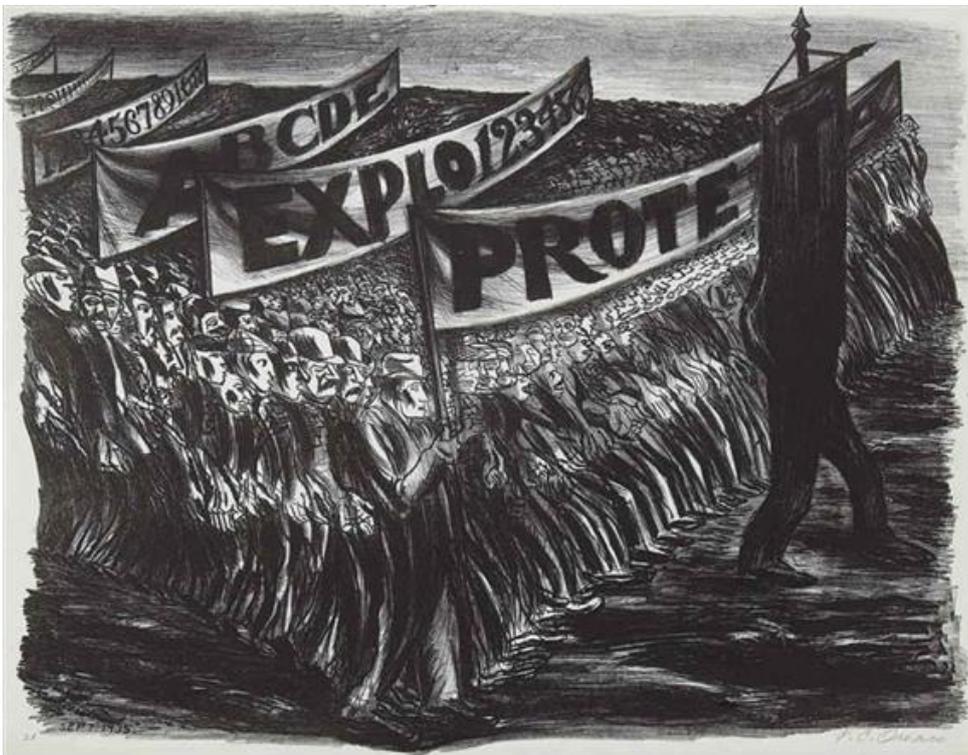
Kaynak: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/66020>

Picture 8. José Clemente Orozco, 'a Not I'(The Masses)' Litograph, 32,5x42,3 cm, 1935



Kaynak: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/61486>

Picture 9. José Clemente Orozco, 'b Not 2'(Manifestation)' Litograph, 33,5x42 cm, 1935



Kaynak: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/MANIFESTATION>

In addition, Mc Clean (2009) states that Frente a Frente served as a showcase for the developing capabilities of LEAR's Department of Print Arts, led by Leopoldo Méndez, Luis Arenal and Pablo O'Higgins. The publications at LEAR provided a critical insight into the problems posed by the Mexican Revolution, while Communist propaganda constituted the bulk of artists' production. LEAR artists, who tried to spread revolutionary ideas and form a front in Mexico against the rising fascism in Europe, supported national development (Picture 11) but criticized the practices that the government did not implement after the Mexican Revolution. In 1938, LEAR artists, who positioned themselves in a political position, lost their influence almost completely in 1938 due to conflicts between candidates and factions supported by group members against the government.

Picture 11. Luis Arenal, 'Lázaro Cárdenas y la reforma agraria', Linolium, 20.4x30 cm, 1934



Kaynak: <http://museoblaisten.com/Obra/1638/Lazaro-Cardenas-y-la-reforma-agraria-1934-1940>

4.2. TGN - National Printmaking Workshop

These developments in printmaking during the post-revolutionary period of Mexico made printmaking a very important artistic form. Talleres Graficos de la Nacion (TGN) (National Printmaking Workshop), which was founded two years before the breakup of LEAR, incorporated artists who had disagreements with LEAR and made efforts to spread printmaking on a national scale. However, the aim is to support the political process in Mexico.

The TGN, which was introduced in 1934 with the decree of the Federal Government Reorganization of Printing Workshops and Printing Houses, produced for the purpose of trying to meet the national expectations of government policies. Jesús Orozco Castellanos (URL-2, 1938), who plays an important role in the TGN, sees TGN as an integral part of the government and defines the TGN as a revolutionary institution in which the working class is involved. Mc Clean (2009) emphasizes that the institution, which does not contradict the aim of supporting

the national development of post-revolutionary artists and spreading art throughout the country, provides the public access to presses and equipment, as well as the inclusion of villagers and workers in the restructuring process. Rivera Mir (2018) emphasizes the political mission of the TGN, underlining that the artists involved in the TGN thus capture the struggles and processes they undertake in the most reliable way and turn the people into pro-actors of the Cardenas government.

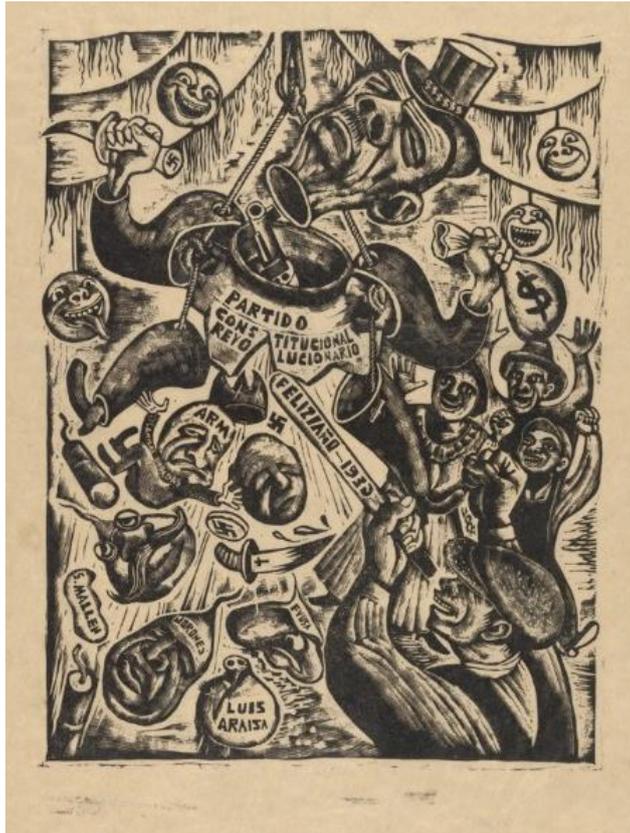
TGN lost its artistic mission and influence as a result of the conflict of artists' cooperation with the government in 1938 for political purposes, the effects of the financial crisis that affected the whole world forcing the Mexican government and the paper industry in Mexico being on the verge of bankruptcy.

4.3. Taller de Graphica Popular - Public Printmaking Atelier

In 1937, after the disintegration of LEAR, the Taller de Graphica Popular (TGP) was established, which would bring Mexican printmakers around and make an international impression. Founded after LEAR and TGN lost their influence, the TGP was a workshop that moved on the path opened by Posada and took on the political legacy of El Machete and LEAR. TGP was founded by Leopoldo Méndez (1902–1969), Luis Arenal (1908 / 9–1985), and Pablo (Paul) O'Higgins (1904–1983), where the symbiosis between politics and the Mexican printmaking was observed in a characteristic and distinct manner. A major part of the productions of the TGP are land reform, reformist politicians, anti-war and anti-imperialist movements, social problems, workers and trade union movements. Shortly after the onset of the TGP, O'Higgins made a statement explaining the purpose, mission and intent of the TGP. 'What gives us strength and will allow us to develop in a beneficial way is to consider how our first action plan will link the art of print to the immediate problems of Mexico immediately after we come together.' (Caplow, 1999) This view, which overlaps printmaking with political aims, does not produce a new meaning in terms of the reintegration of politics, which is the most important factor affecting Mexico's post-Revolutionary art, on the contrary, it is the continuation of existing political art production and this aim ensures that politics continues to influence the art of the period.

TGP, which is still in existence today, made very important and sensational productions especially from the first years of its establishment until the end of 1950s. TGP's international success focused especially the interest of collectors, museums and galleries in the United States. Leopoldo Mendez stands out as one of the most prolific artists, as well as his commitment to the atelier's political vision. Making hundreds of printings demonstrating his talents and artistic sensitivity, Mendez is the dominant actor in leading artists of the TGP to publish the most remarkable political prints of the twentieth century. Mendez, who made hundreds of prints showing his talents and artistic sensitivity, is the leading actor who led the publishing of the most remarkable political prints of the twentieth century as Mc Donald (2016) points out. The political printmaking published by Mendez in 1936 under the name Political Piñata (Picture 12) is the beginning of the political printmaking of the TGP. Printmaking produced by dozens of artists in the TGP corresponds to a large number in numerical terms. The subjects of the artists' production in this period were social injustice, corruption and censorship in the press, post-revolutionary activities, political and daily issues.

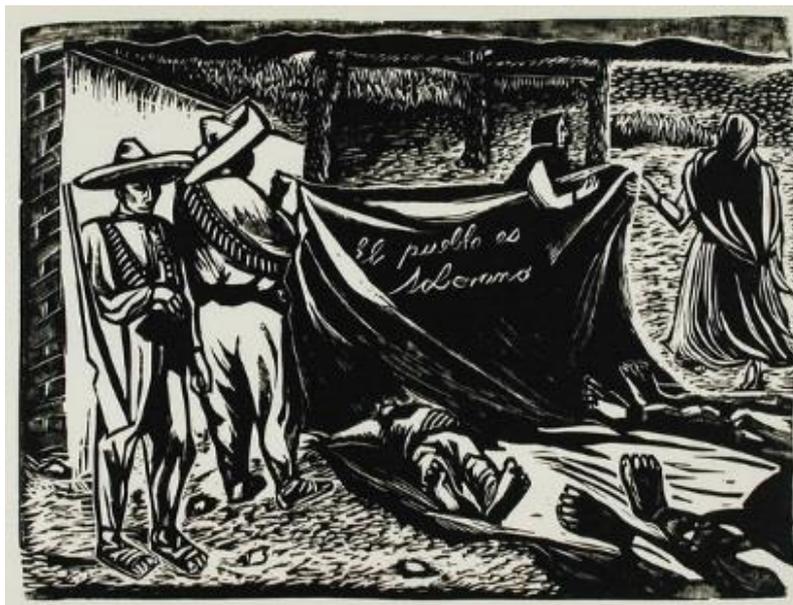
Picture 12. Leopoldo Mendez, 'Political Piñata', Linolium, 28.9 x 21.6 cm, 1936



Kaynak: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/39.16.23/>

When Mexico entered World War II in 1942, the production of propaganda material against the fascist dictatorship in Europe was the subject of the production of left-wing TGP artists. (Picture 13)

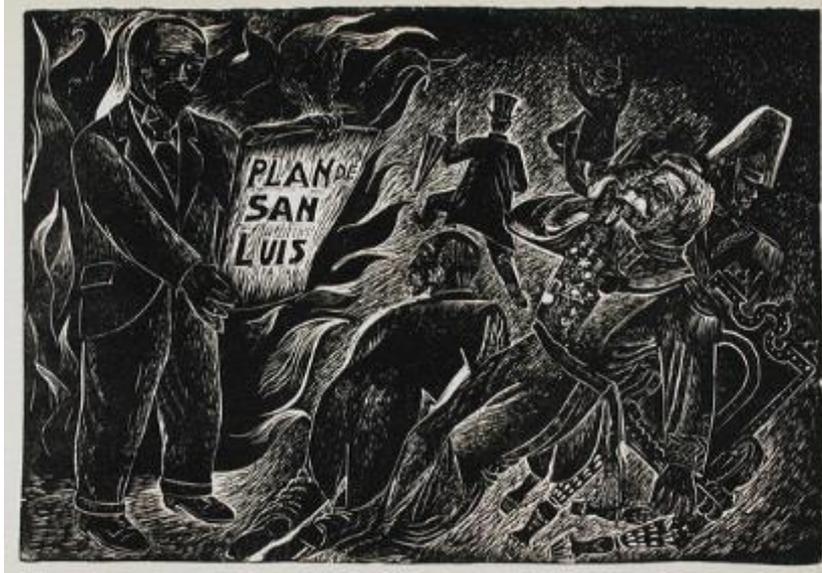
Picture 13. Ignacio Aguirre, 'El pueblo es soberano - Power to the People' 27x40 cm, Woodcut, 1943, (Taller de Grafica Popular)



Kaynak: <http://www.museodeartecarrillogil.com/coleccion/artistas-de-la-coleccion/ignacio-aguirre>

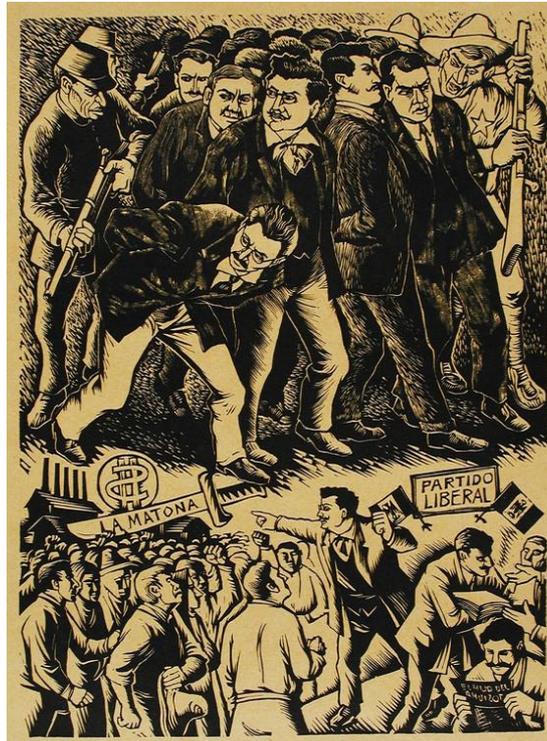
In these years, printmaking produced especially in relation to domestic issues and political problems had significant effects. Reflecting the unstoppable political tension in the country, TGP artists made political productions about Diaz supporters and social reforms that did not take place after the Revolution as can be seen in Pictures 14 and 15.

Picture 14. Everardo Ramírez, ‘El Plan De San Luis Aterroriza A La Dictadura’ 27x40 cm, 1947, (Taller de Grafica Popular)



Kaynak: <http://www.museodeartecarrillogil.com/coleccion/artistas-de-la-coleccion/everardo-ramirez-flores>

Picture 15. Alberto Beltran, ‘Persecucion del Partido Liberal por el Regimen Porfiriano’ 40x27 cm, Woodcut, 1947, (Taller de Grafica Popular)



Kaynak: <http://www.fulltable.com/vts/t/ttf/tgp/edlr/aa/a.htm>

Due to its attitude during the Second World War, neighborly relations with the United States developed considerably, and the friendship and cultural exchange policies established between Mexico and the United States paved the way for the existence of TGP in the USA. These developments, which shaped the Mexican Printmaking in the 1940s, increased the importance given to Mexican Printmaking on an international scale. However, after the Second World War, the US's suspension of relations with the leftist TGP due to its cold war policy against Russia caused unrest among the members of the TGP, almost all of whom were members of radical left-wing artists, and directed TGP activities to Europe and Latin America. The impact of the positive developments in Mexico's political environment in the 1960s led to the loss of influence of the TGP, which pursued a critical and opposing policy.

5. RESULT

This study explores the role of printmaking in the Mexican Revolution and reveals that printmaking is an important means of production by artists in the process. The political movements that started before the Mexican Revolution politicized society and artists in the process and as a result artists entered into a political production process. In the work before and after the Mexican Revolution, printmaking's privileged structure in the political production of the artists was illustrated with examples. Printmaking, which became a political artistic production tool without detaching from the artistic context in the process, constitutes the important productions of Mexican Art during this period. As emphasized in the study, the printmaking productions of artists that relate to social structure, reflect their ideological perspectives and reflect their reflexes to daily and political events are therefore an integral part of the Mexican Revolution. These productions, which have survived until today, are among the most important parts of the most productive period of Mexican Art.

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