

GUATEMALA

VOL. 1 ISSUE 1 | APRIL 2023

SIGNIFICANCE

THE WORLD'S PREMIER ART HISTORY MAGAZINE



*Dissect the eras
of impact.*



References

Corissajoy. (2016, September 12). Guatemala: Guerrillas, Genocide, and Peace. Beyond Intractability. <https://beyondintractability.org/library/guatemala-guerrillas-genocide-and-peace>

Chaffee, L. G. (1993b). Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Gleijeses, P. (1989). The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 21(3), 453–480. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/156959>

Hatcher, R. (2017). “The Work . . . of a Thousand Different Hands” Holding a Thousand Cans of Spray Paint and Buckets of Glue: How Guatemala’s Street Artist-Historians Expand the History of the Country’s Violent Past. *The Public Historian*, 39(1), 10–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26420961>

McGee, Elise (2023). Report I

Russell, G. (2021). March 13, 2021 – 39th anniversary of Rio Negro massacres in Guatemala – Rights Action. Rights Action. <https://rightsaction.org/emails/march-13-2021-39th-anniversary-of-rio-negro-massacres-in-guatemala>

Russell, S. (2015). A Country for a Company – The 1954 US Backed Guatemalan Coup To Support United Fruit Company. Warhistoryonline. <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/country-company-1954-guatemalan-coup-support-united-fruit.html>

Guatemala - Political Flags. (n.d.). <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/Flags/gt%7D.html#egp>

Vallen, M. (2010). Guatemala: Voices of Justice. Art For a Change. <https://art-for-a-change.com/blog/2010/05/guatemala-voices-of-justice.html>

No 1

Let's make art that changes the world

Editor's Note

Significance Magazine explores the intersection of art history, social, and political movements. Analyzing the eras and visual expressions that have transformed the world and resonated with hearts across different communities, *Significance Magazine* offers insightful perspectives.

Each edition of the magazine delves into the art of a particular country that has left a political, social, or emotional impact on its people. In the inaugural edition, we take a closer look at the exquisite and meaningful lost art of Guatemala.

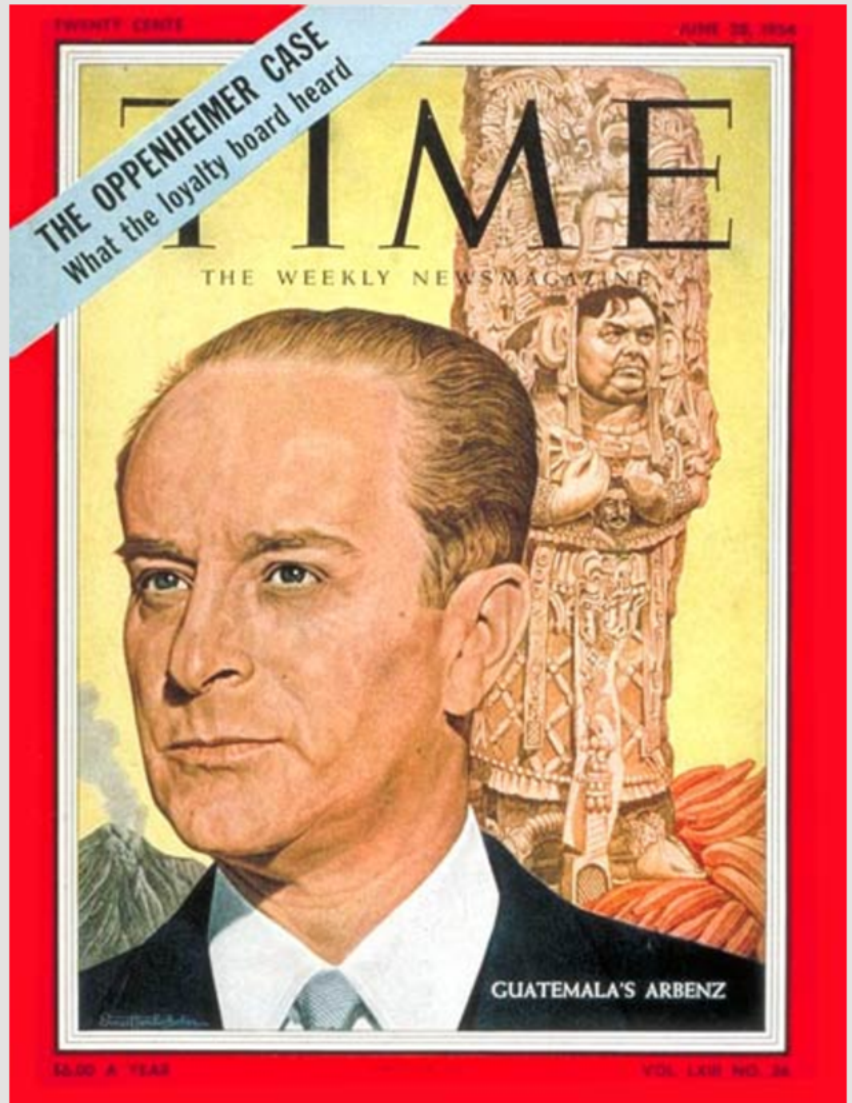
Enjoy the issue,
The Significance Team

Propaganda, Perspectives, & Perceptions

BY ELISE MCGEE

Prior to the Guatemalan Civil War in 1960, the United States employed fearful propaganda tactics to portray Guatemala as a threat to its control. Fearing Guatemala would become a strategic bloc of the Soviet Union in the Western Hemisphere, the United States took action (Jonas, 2000, p. 19). "Operation Success," a scheme for the armed coup of Arbenz, was put into motion in June 1954 with Eisenhower's approval.

Prior to the coup, the United States successfully launched a propaganda campaign against Guatemala, striking fear of communism in U.S. citizens. The U.S. used the media as a campaign outlet against Arbenz; specifically, one example of this propaganda is a New York Times article. In the article, Guatemala was described as "operating under increasingly severe Communist-inspired pressure to rid the country of United States companies." United Fruit was smearing Arbenz in the media to give the impression that the Soviet leadership was only behind the agricultural reform because it wanted to undermine American economic hegemony in Central America. The Cold War fostered an uncompromising stance toward communism in the United States, encouraging fast action.



Time Magazine | June 28 1954 | Jacobo Árbenz, Magazine Cover

President Árbenz and his loyalists had no plan to turn Guatemala into a communist nation. Both he and the party believed that domestic and international constraints rendered such a transformation impossible in the foreseeable future (Gleijeses, 1998, p. 455). With the financial pressure and concern of loss, Eisenhower and several other prominent American government officials were shareholders in United Fruit and were convinced by the company to threaten Árbenz (Gleijeses, 1998, p. 478). They paid The American Mercury's editor, John Clements, \$35,000 (equivalent to \$311,129 now) in 1952 to produce a 235-page report outlining the reasons why Árbenz had to be deposed. Despite being fake, it succeeded in persuading Congress to support Operation Success with a \$2.7 million budget, even though it ultimately ended up costing much more.

The CIA plan, "Operation Success," recruited Honduran civilian militias to invade Guatemala and launch a conflict against Árbenz and his supporters. On June 18, 1954, Castillo Armas entered Guatemala from Honduras, and American airstrikes quickly helped him. As a result of threats and invasion, Árbenz submitted his resignation out of fear for his life. The United States' efforts to position itself as the sole opposition to Communism resulted in the creation of manipulative propaganda that served a different agenda. This propaganda was used to incite support for the invasion and overthrow of Árbenz, even though the claims made were false. When a superpower uses propaganda against a smaller country, it significantly reduces the country's ability to defend itself or retaliate.

Revolutionary Hues and Symbols: The Impact

BY ELISE MCGEE



Color is a powerful tool for communication that can convey actions, evoke emotions, and even impact physical reactions. Guerrilla groups in Guatemala employed a tool that involved specific colors to establish a visual identity. This identity was designed to attract and persuade supporters to join their cause. The most popular colors adopted by revolutionary groups are red, black, and yellow. Red and black are passionate colors, conveying emotions of revolution, death, and violence. Yellow conveys emotions of excitement and inspiration.



The EGP's flag symbolizes the concepts and feelings that they are fighting for. The use of red symbolizes the proletarian revolution and the blood shed by the people for their liberation. The use of black symbolizes war and struggles against imperialism. The use of yellow symbolizes mass organizations in a state of struggle and inspires others to join.



The flag's symbolism holds profound significance. The image of Che Guevara represents the EGP's commitment to a political and internationalist revolution in pursuit of a more socially just state. The semicircle of 23 yellow stars represents the Guatemalan indigenous ethnic groups and the Ladino people. The stars venerate ethnic groups in Guatemala, including those that no longer exist or are disappearing. The two bigger stars at the base of the semicircle represent a peaceful union between workers and farmers. Through its deeply symbolic and thought-out nature, the EGP utilized colors to elicit emotional responses, trigger memories, and prompt action through art.

Developing a visual identity through the use of color and symbolism is of great significance. It has the power to engage people and inspire them to support a cause or movement. The EGP recognized its importance and successfully executed it.



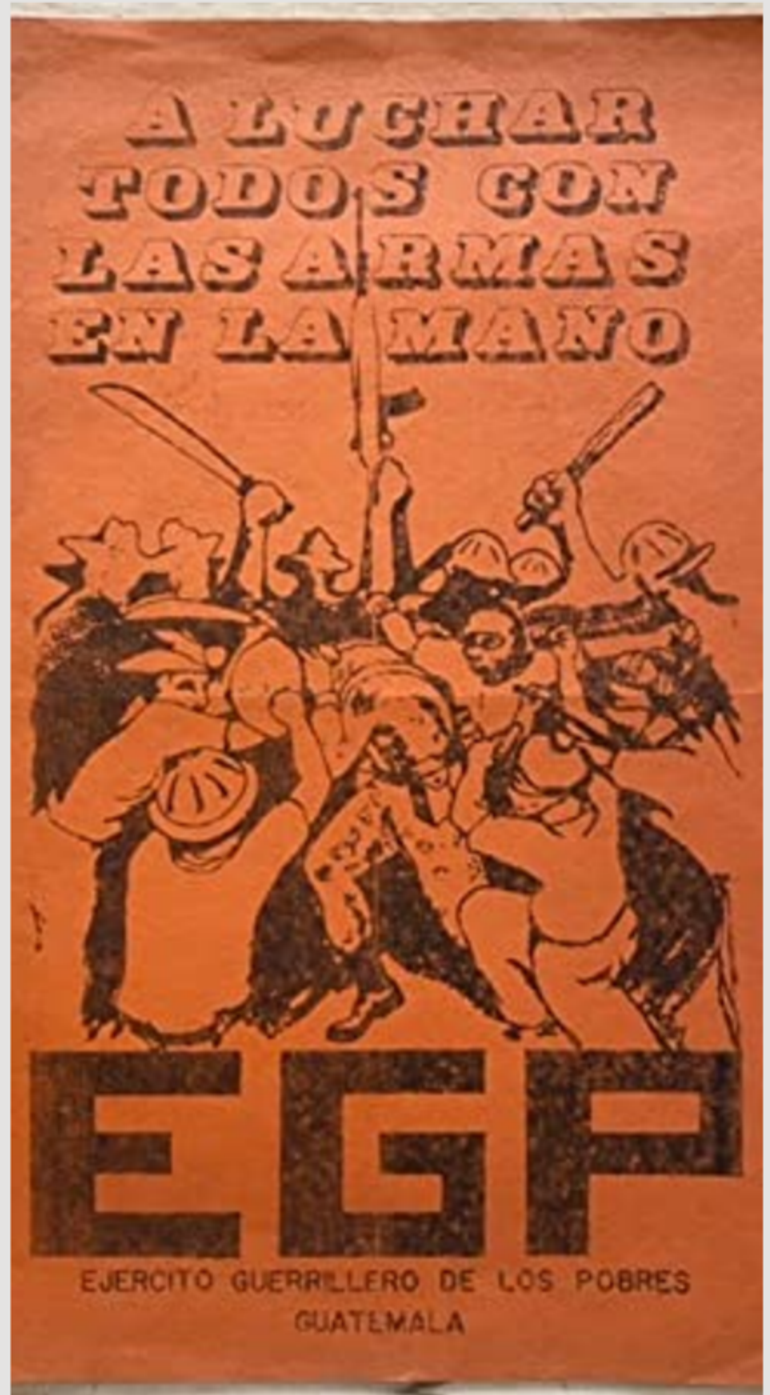
Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) Flag

GUERRILLA GRAPHICS

BY ELISE MCGEE

To gain insight into the strategies and methods employed by Latin guerrilla organizations in the realm of art, it is worthwhile to closely examine the creations of Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor). The EGP aimed to create a government that prioritized democracy and represented the working class, peasants, and indigenous people. They used bold propaganda to generate interest in the movement and give the citizens the option of taking an active role in the revolution. The poster "A Luchar Todos con Las Armas en la Mano" ("To fight with all arms in hand") portrays a conflict between the EGP and a Guatemalan military member, wielding machetes, guns, and baseball bats.

The poster's purpose is to give the general public the impression that the guns carried by the EGP are, in some indirect way, their weapons to defend themselves and aid them in the struggle against an oppressive regime. This poster created the notion that armed guerrilla forces are the strength of the peasants against the repressive Guatemalan government, instead of the impression that the "arms" have strength over the peasants. The art featuring the prominent letters "EGP" evokes a strong emotional response, while the subdued yellow background represents a yearning for democracy and change within the organization. The psychological impact is significant in mobilizing supporters.



"A Luchar Todos con Las Armas en la Mano" by EGP
"To Fight With All Arms in Hand" by Guerrilla Army of the Poor

EJERCITO GUERRILLERO DE LOS POBRES

MIEMBRO DE LA UNIDAD REVOLUCIONARIA NACIONAL GUATEMALTECA - URNG -

GUATEMALA



The poster represents a movement of rebellion that brought together various social groups, including workers, women, peasants, and scholars. They all took up arms to fight against injustice.

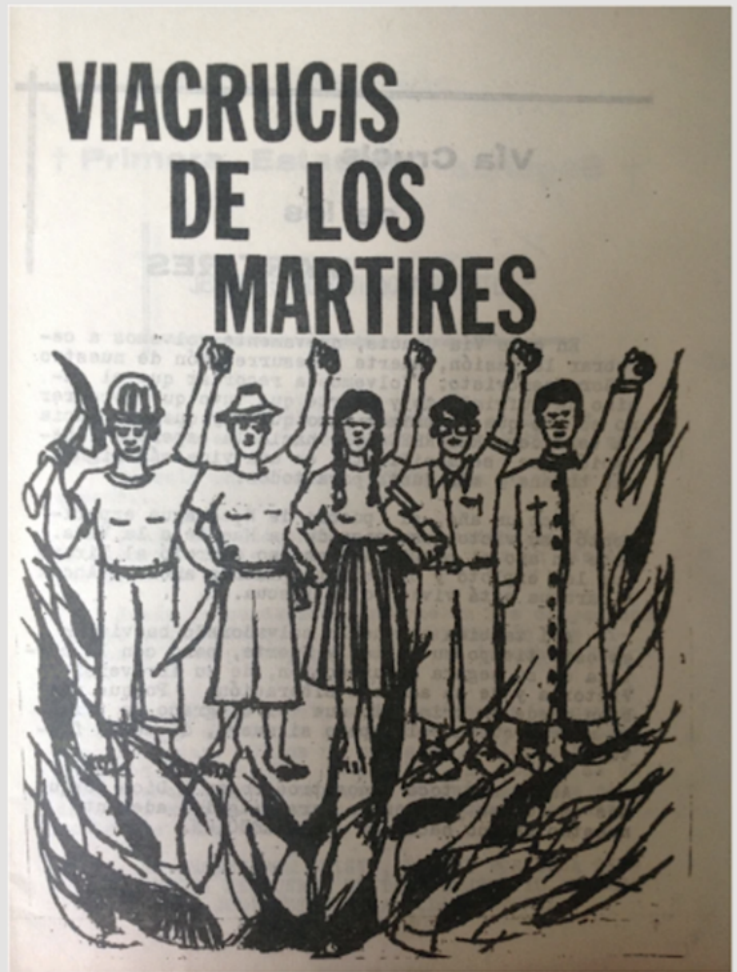
Translation: Guerrilla Army of the Poor"
"Member of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit-URNG"
"Ever Onward to Victory"

HASTA LA VICTORIA SIEMPRE

The Healing Power of Art: How Communities are Commemorating Regime Trauma

BY ELISE MCGEE

The "Viacrucis de los Martires" (Martyr's Way of the Cross) poster is a reminder of the EGP's tactic of incorporating emotional appeals, such as religious iconography, into its rhetoric and actions. Poor communities in Suchitepequez, Guatemala, developed posters full of optimism to share with the rebel occupation in Nebaj, which encouraged locals to join the revolt against non-native landlords and the army of the wealthy. The "Viacrucis de los Martires" poster depicts indigenous citizens with fists to represent their defiance against oppression. It symbolizes the steps for change, the stations of the cross, and the journey to be saved. Indigenous cultures have traditionally embraced art and murals as a means of expressing their identity and fending off cultural assimilation.



"Viacrucis De Los Martires"



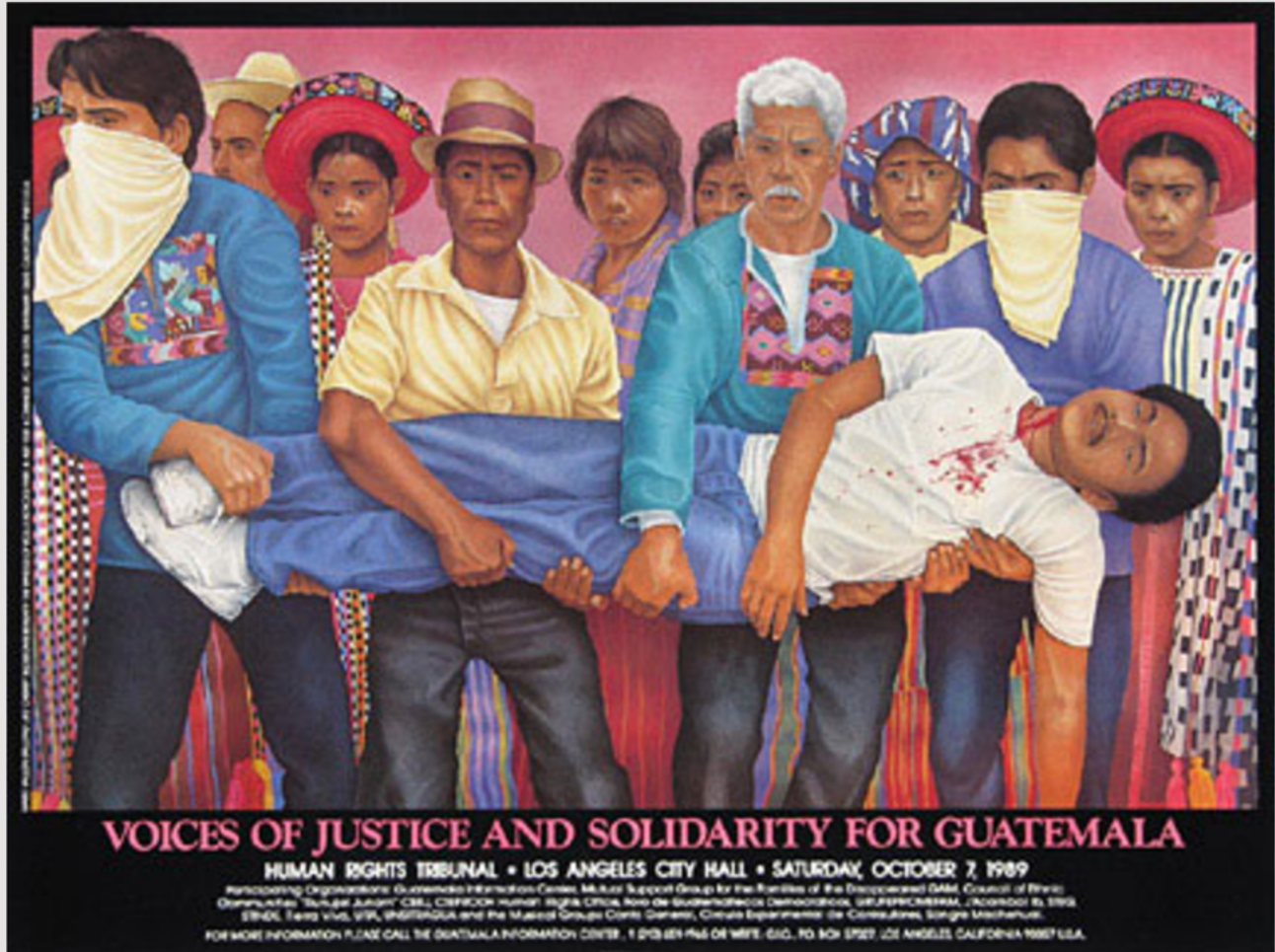
Río Negro Massacre Mural

The Río Negro massacres were a brutal instance of indigenous violence in Guatemala in 1980 and 1982. The Guatemalan Army and Civil Self-Defense Patrols massacred the Mayan community of Río Negro, who were protesting the construction of a hydroelectric project. The brutality of these killings is difficult to comprehend, with villagers slain by machete blows, gang rapes, and beatings, people strangled; tiny children battered against rocks; and people shot. In response, activists, artists, and members of the local community banded together to create a memorial to honor the victims and raise awareness about the brutality.

The community of Río Negro made murals to memorialize the lives lost, express their sadness and outrage, and raise awareness about the violence and injustice they had witnessed. The murals served as a symbolic act of protest and defiance against fallen regimes, as well as to symbolize the regenerated values of democracy. The murals depicted graphic images of women and children being murdered by the Guatemalan Army, serving as a reminder of the Río Negro Massacres' lasting impact on Guatemala's fight for social justice and human rights.

Art as a Catalyst for Global Justice: Exploring the Power of Socially Engaged Artwork

BY ELISE MCGEE



"Voices of Justice." Mark Vallen 1989. Offset poster. 11" x 15." Commissioned by the Guatemalan Information Center (GIC). The poster was based upon a 3 x 5 foot chalk pastel drawing on paper.

In 1989, the Guatemalan Information Center (GIC) commissioned Mark Vallen to make a poster announcing the Guatemalan Human Rights Tribunal, which focused on the raging war that once existed in Guatemala. Hundreds of people attended the group's City Hall gathering as a result of the free poster. Witness testimonies from Guatemalan labor union members, clergy, indigenous peoples' leaders, students, human rights workers, and others offered firsthand recollections of the war at the tribunal. Reports about the plight of Guatemalans, such as the 1982 slaughter of 350 men, women, and children at Las Dos Erres, served as inspiration for the artwork. The slaughter only left two five-year-old boys alive. After experiencing horrifying atrocities, members of local communities, including activists and artists, unite to construct a memorial in honor of the victims and to raise awareness about the injustices and atrocities.

The significance of artwork cannot be overstated when it comes to the preservation of a nation's history and culture. It is a tangible representation of the struggles and triumphs of a people against oppression and brutality. It serves as an act of symbolic protest against overthrown governments, while also representing the values of a resurrected democracy. What's more, the art is accessible to anyone, regardless of their background, allowing them to understand and appreciate the history depicted without having to engage in physical protests or suffer repercussions. These paintings give a voice and a sense of belonging to those who are illiterate or too afraid to express their emotions, making them a valuable tool for social and political change.

dissected the impact.



The End