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Memory Ricanstruction: literary portfolios based on poetry created by José R. Alicea
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I investigate Puerto Rican graphic art and memory by studying three literary portfolios created by José R. Alicea. I demonstrate that while some imagery strongly supports the hegemonic view of the colonial elite, the artist also incorporates individual memory and popular culture into these portfolios to question and provoke critical analysis and give voice to another version of history. I conclude by explaining how Alicea uses both collective and individual memory to rescue and immortalize facets of Puerto Rican history and culture in portfolios that can be considered visual documents with universal resonance.

Keywords: graphic art, memory, culture, literature, history, oblivion
Identification and analysis of the problem

This research attempts to examine the complex relationship between art, text, and culture. The importance of memory in relationship with the creation of art cannot be underestimated as memory allows for reflection on an event that has happened in the past, analysis of the event in the present, and knowledge that can be for and confront the future. Therefore, not remembering or the inability to remember is extremely problematic. It is a problem that is not limited to the minimization or blocking of memories, but can also extend itself to the destruction and oblivion of memory. In addition, culture (dominant and popular) plays a role in society in regards to both the conservation and negation of memory. For this reason, based on the importance of memory and how works of art facilitate the conservation of memory, I propose to carry out an analysis of José R. Alicea's portfolios.

José R. Alicea is a prolific artist with a vast body of work. For this reason I have limited the scope of this investigation to focus on his literary portfolios. Of the body of work that constitutes Alicea's literary portfolios I have selected three portfolios to investigate on are rich texts full of memories, emotions, and information, waiting to be read. What is the importance of conducting research on portfolios, using memory as a starting point? In what way does the study of portfolios help to better understand the relationship between memory, dominant culture, and popular culture? These are some of the questions I will try to answer in this investigation.

I am especially interested in establishing how the artist's literary portfolios both offer visual poetry accessible to all. Inspired by verses written by poets such as Luis Palés Matos, Julia de Burgos, and Luis Lloréns Torres, Alicea visually renders the essence of the poetry and the poet: he creates tangible cultural memories of images, text, color, and texture. Therefore, the prints that comprise these portfolios either narrate a Puerto Rican reality as well as recover aspects of Puerto Rican society that have lived as his art responds to and is connected with our reality. Furthermore, the artist's numerous portfolios based on poetry, which combine verses with imagery, have lived as his art responds to and is connected with our reality. Furthermore, the prints that comprise these portfolios either narrate a Puerto Rican reality as well as recover aspects of Puerto Rican society that have lived as his art responds to and is connected with our reality.

Works of art and oblivion of memory. In addition, culture (dominant and popular) plays a role in society in regards to both the conservation and negation of memory. For this reason, based on the importance of memory and how works of art facilitate the conservation of memory, I propose to carry out an analysis of José R. Alicea's portfolios.
A brief history of the graphic arts in Puerto Rico

The graphic arts have been and continue to be one of the most original and innovative artistic expressions in Puerto Rico. Its history as an art form on the Island can be traced to the late 1940s. It was during this era that the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) became conscientious of the role visual arts could play in the diffusion of social values and attitudes to facilitate the adaptation of the Puerto Rican society to a new industrial order (Benítez 1998: 116). Consequently, the graphic arts began to be used as an economical art form that would be able to reach a large public as it lent itself to multiple reproductions and easy transportation.

Therefore, in 1949, with the economic support of the PPD public administration, the graphic arts workshop the División de la Educación de la Comunidad (DIVEDCO) was founded. One year later, in 1950, another important workshop was established, the Centro de Arte Puertorriqueño, founded by the following artists: Félix Rodríguez Báez, Lorenzo Homar, Rafael Tufiño, and José A. Torres Martinó. The two workshops greatly contributed to the development of Puerto Rican graphic art and played a vital role in the dissemination of visual arts in the country.
Alicea’s portfolios based on poetry

From its conception Puerto Rican graphic art has had an intimate relationship with literature, and the combination of the written word with graphic images is not a rare occurrence. José R. Alicea has worked extensively with images based on the words of a poem as a constant battle. Because of this, he believes he must make an effort to separate himself from the verses of poetry to search for and create other images: “A veces lo que el artista dice con la imagen es completamente diferente a lo que está diciendo el poeta.”

But, in portfolios such as Valle de Collores created tension between the grabado and the literatura están creado para ir juntos. José R. Alicea

(1999); (1979) by Federico García Lorca; (1966); (1987) by Luis Lloréns Torres; (1998) by Rafael Colon Oliviesi (1988); (1975) and (1998) by Rafael Alberti (1998); (1968); (1975) and many of the prints in El llamado La búsqueda asesina El patito feo by Juan Antonio Corretjer (1968); Distancia by Julia de Burgos (1971); La plenitud y del vacío by Miguel Delibes (1974); La voz de mi amante by César de la Torre (1977); El Cancionero popular jíbaro by Juan Antonio Corretjer y Arcadio Díaz Quiñones (1979); Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías by Luis Palés Matos (1980); Funerales by Luis Palés Matos (1980); Poemas de La fundación y del retorno. Puertas abiertas by Pérez de la Fuente y García Lorca (1983); El libro de un enigmático by Juan Antonio Corretjer (1984); El cantar de los héroes by Luis Palés Matos (1986); El arzaño by Julia de Burgos (1987); El fuego por dentro by Rafael Alberti (1988); El llamado by Rafael Alberti (1988); Creo que la poesía y las artes plásticas están unidas... Y el grabado y la literatura están creada para ir juntos.

José R. Alicea
Consequently, according to Ferrao, the criollo intellectuals, who were greatly interested in giving the Island a sense of collective identity, embraced a Hispanist perspective of Spain as the Motherland. Such a step also led toward the creation of a Puerto Rican nationality (Ferrao 1993: 51).

Accordingly, artists, writers, and musicians assumed resistance against the cultural aggression of the United States of America, which was understood as a force that threatened the "spiritual prerogatives" of the dominant class, by cultivating affirmative expressions of the criollo. In regards to the visual arts, José A. Torres Martínó explains that the artists' primary interest was to give prestige to values based on Puerto Rico's spiritual and material wealth with the hope that Puerto Ricans would internalize these values (Torres Martínó 1998: 83–7). Therefore, most artists participated in a pictorial celebration of Puerto Rico's natural landscape which was "one of the two faces of the jibarista coin: the other face is the worker of the land from whom the word jíbaro derives" (Torres Martínó 1998: 84). Concerning Puerto Rican literature, González argues that the writing produced by the elite in the 20th century does not respond to an uninterested lyrical sensibility moved by the beauty of the tropical landscape as a symbol or metaphor, if not "…como medio de producción material cuya propiedad pasó a manos extrañas"… quien ya no pudieron seguir "volteando la finca"… (Río Grande de Loíza IV)

Grande, mi manantial… (Río Grande de Loíza V)
Meanwhile, the jíbaro's waving family members are in front of la casita de madera. They are small and distant, framed by lush green vegetation and the jíbaro's family bidding him farewell. Verses from the poem “Vale de Collores” to the right:

¡Río Grande de Loíza!... Río grande.
El más grande de todos nuestros llantos
no fuere más grande el que demí se salte
por los ojos del alma para mí esclavo puente.

Of all of the portfolios that Alicea has created, only one has been made on the traditional paper “Cachú” mesh. The portfolio titled “Quinteto” (Vale de Collores IV)” was commissioned by Pepito Valdivieso in 1987 and was made in eleven woodcuts (8 1/2” by 12 1/2”), colored by hand, that are placed behind her, alluding to his powerlessness regarding the loss of his oldest child to the land, a situation symbolic of the poverty being witnessed by many Puerto Rican mothers, because the land cannot offer her son a livelihood. This catastrophe is happening to her, and has happened and will continue to happen to many Puerto Rican mothers, because the land cannot offer her son a livelihood.

In this print of the four images of the jíbaro it is the last that is the most riveting. It is the image is of the jíbaro mounted on his mare with his back to the spectator. The print captures a crucial point of the jíbaro's life and of Puerto Rican imagery that dominates the portfolio is the lush flora and fauna with his nostalgia for “better times.” Remorse that the jíbaro feels after all has been said and done as he struggles through a life in high society as he participates in and enjoys all that the city has to offer his humble family. Complementing the vegetation are images that focus on the jíbaro's family, and the jíbaro's achievements. In the forefront to the right there is a collage of different images of the jíbaro, the first image framed by lush vegetation to the left and symbols of the academia to the right. In the background to the far left is the casita de madera. The print is made up of nine woodprints (8 1/2” by 13 1/2”), colored by hand, that combine both images and verses of the poem “Vale de Collores.” An important aspect of Lloréns Torres' poem is the exaltation of the natural beauty of Collores. Therefore, the imagery that dominates the portfolio is the lush flora and fauna of Puerto Rico. Therefore, the imagery that dominates the portfolio is the lush flora and fauna of Puerto Rico.
The jíbaro has turned his back to society and is rejecting social norms to return to his "casita de madera. Thus, this image is in direct relationship with the memories that the jíbaro fantasizes about and his desire to return to a simpler time, eager to engage with the collective memory of "better times":

Ay, si estuviera en mis manos
borrar mis triunfos mayores,
y a mi bohío de Collores
volver en la jaca baya
por el sendero entre mayas
arropás de cundiamores.

The poem "Valle de Collores," by Luis Lloréns Torres, is an excellent example of "jíbarismo literario" that glorifies the land and longs for an idealized past. The beauty and importance of the land is represented and important in the portfolio. Alicea does much the same, the poems of "Charco So'ay" is the case. José R. Alicea, a great admirer of de Burgos' work, created the portfolio "Poemas en 20 surcos" with "La historia toda de nuestras letras" (Rivera de Álvarez 1983: 413). In this poem de Burgos describes her joy of living, her loves, her frustrations with love, and describes events that affected and continue to affect Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans to this day.21

In December 1938, de Burgos published the poem "Río Grande de Loíza," in her first book of poetry, Poemas en 20 surcos (Rivera de Álvarez 1983: xix). This poem, which is considered to be de Burgos' most important work, demonstrates that de Burgos was neither afraid nor timid in regards to writing. She was a willful poet who tested the limits of her craft and did not hesitate to say what she wanted to say.22 Poems such as "A Julia de Burgos" (Singerman 1997: xix) and "Ay, ay, ay de la grifa negra" ("Ay, ay, ay of the Kinky-Haired Negress") demonstrate that de Burgos was neither afraid nor timid in regards to writing.
happened to her: “Para mí, ‘Río Grande de Loíza’ es Julia de Burgos. Empezó el poema de su niñez punta arriba luego pasa a las partes de amor” (Alicea 2003). Therefore, the sensual and fanciful portfolio set in the lush vegetation of the background the radiant sun and the beautiful flowers in full bloom reinforce de Burgos’ dreams and wonders, and how the Río Grande transforms itself to be many different things.

a.) *Río Grande... (Río Grande de Loíza II)*

The print *Río Grande...* is dominated by the beautiful face of a Taíno woman with a chiseled nose and full lips, shown in three quarters to the right of the print. To the left of the face there is the small image of the naked backside of a woman and to the right of the face the image of a bird. The face and hair of the woman is composed of multiple curvilinear lines that create an interesting play of lights and darks, giving her a sculptural feel, as if she has been carved out of a piece of rich Jasper. The woman has her head tilted downward with a serene expression, reflecting her beauty and the power of the river. Her hair cascades down her face and neck, transforming itself into streams of a river that flow down the two sides of her head to her shoulders.
Yo te maté, Filí-Melé, tan leer
en esencia, tan apera su picadura,
que apenas íbas nube ya eres nieve,
apenas íbas nieve ya eras nada.
La memoria puede conferirle forma a una tradición, evitando que se desgaste y se muera — que sea colonizada en la triste y misma de todos los demás pueblos, insulares y continentales, hacia un futuro que, apoyándose en la tradición cultural de las masas populares, redescubra y rescate la caribeñidad esencial de nuestra identidad colectiva y comprenda de una...
histories, combats oblivion, and is vital in the healing process of the Puerto Rican memory. It is only by rescuing and conserving memory that we will one day be capable of identifying with and become a part of the Caribbean identity that us, and José R. Alicea is crucial in rescuing this identity as he demystifies the homogenous social, racial, and cultural realities of Puerto Rico and aids in the process of a better understanding of the Island’s true diversity.31

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NOTES

1 Arcadio Díaz Quiñones writes: “Se iniciaba así una complicada estrategia de memoria: una práctica que consistía en la creación de un archivo cuyos materia
18 For more information about Luis Lloréns Torres and his work see Manrique Cabrera (1977: 242–7).
19 A casita de madera is a small wooden house, typical of housing found in the countryside in the early 20th century.
20 In regards to the Puerto Rican intellectual elite, Ferro writes: “Queremos insistir un poco en lo relativo a las características sociales de esta élite intelectual puertorriqueña, que la dotaban de una coherencia de grupo. A casi todos sus miembros los distinguía su condición de residentes de la urbe sanjuanera, donde estaban localizados el Ateneo Casino, la Casa de España, el Teatro Municipal (hoy Tapia), la Universidad, las imprentas, empresas periodísticas, estaciones de radio (que eran solo dos); en fin, toda la amplia gama de instituciones que les daban sentido de pertenencia y, sobre todo, proyección social” (Ferro 1993: 41).
21 For more information about Puerto Rican Migration please see Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (1979: 40–63).
22 Jack Agüeros writes that reportedly Julia de Burgos was married twice (to Rodíguez Beauchamp and Armando Marín), had a number of lovers (these lovers possibly include the poets Luis Lloréns Torres and Juan Antonio Corretjer), and