

The Future of Print Report: Latin American Women Photographers and Human Rights

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Partial view of the display at the Design and the Arts Library, Tempe Campus

About the Future of Print

ASU Library was awarded a \$381K grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to experiment with different ways in which libraries present print materials to the public. We know that information is more digitally accessible than ever before. As students turn to what is quick and convenient for them, ASU Library is exploring how to present our print materials in ways that remain engaging and relevant to the twenty-first century user. Through a series of book displays, The Future of Print team hopes to gain a sense for how students perceive print collections, how they use the library, and what it takes to engage them in physical books. For more information on our projects, visit <https://lib.asu.edu/futureprint>.

Philosophy

Co-curation encourages a bilateral relationship for faculty and the Library. First, faculty participation instills a sense of ownership for library collections. In cooperation with the Library, faculty can create opportunities outside of the classroom for their students to continue learning from materials not included in their course curricula. Additionally, the Library has the opportunity to

demonstrate the value that it can have for teaching, as well as welcome new perspectives on materials students are likely to engage with. Partnering directly with academic departments has the potential to increase the visibility and usefulness of our resources.

Project Background and Research Questions

This project grew out of a collaboration between the ASU Library and Dr. David Foster, a Regents Professor of Spanish and women and gender studies at ASU's School of International Languages and Cultures (SILC). Dr. Foster, a perpetual advocate for library collection development work and himself an avid collector, taught two courses (undergraduate and graduate level at the Fall and Spring 2020 semesters) and organized an international symposium on photography and human rights in Latin America. The symposium, planned for mid-March 2020, intended to bring together scholars, students, and photographers in Hayden Library, and mark the culmination of Dr. Foster's decades-long scholarship and teaching in this intradisciplinary field.¹ It was Dr. Foster's wish to accompany the symposium with a library display—and include items from his own collection.



Latin American Women Photographers and Human Rights

In conjunction with the Symposium, throughout Spring Semester

A unique collection of photography-based books about Latin American Human Rights issues, from the personal collection of Dr. David William Foster, a Regents Professor of Spanish and women and gender studies, and ASU Library collections.

All books may be checked out.

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The project poster: A two-day symposium and library display

The display would showcase photobooks documenting daily life as well as dramatic situations and human rights violations in Latin America. As an art form that fuses short texts and images in exhibit-catalog style into critical statements, this genre is classified under Photography in the Library of Congress classification scheme (TR) and is set within the Design and the Arts Library collections. The display was hosted in that location, though the symposium was to take place in Hayden Library (both on the Tempe Campus). The genre's graphic qualities determined the placement of the photobooks in the New Books area at the Design Library, where the colorful, horizontal shelving system highlighted and showcased the books' cover art.

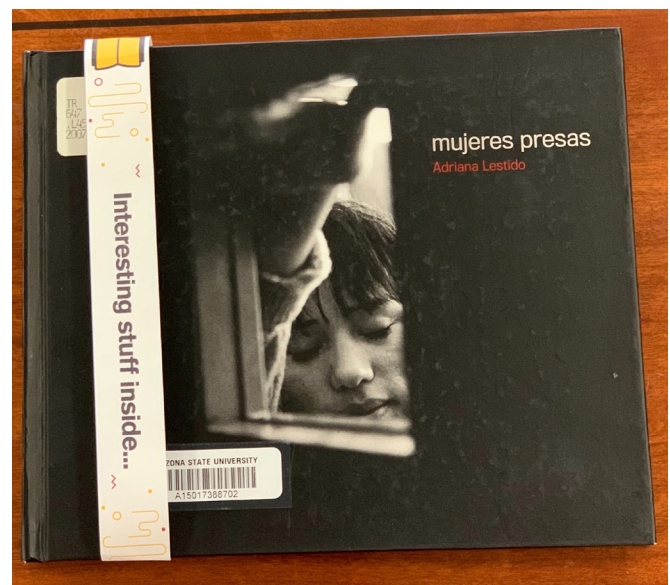
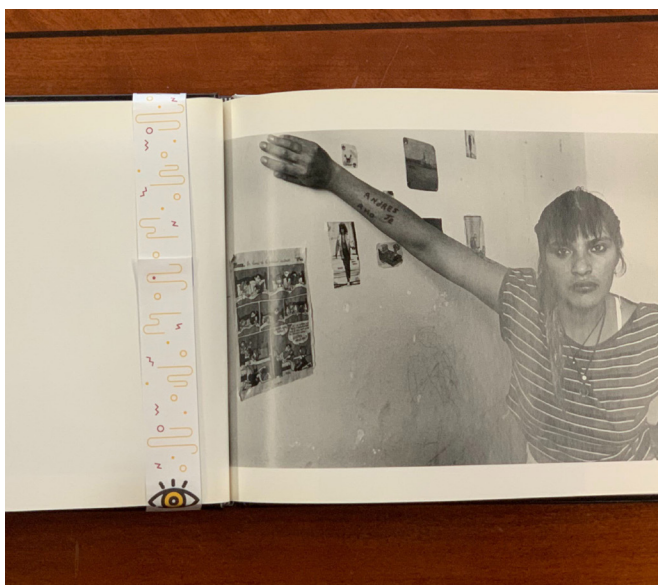
¹ See Foster's 2014 book, *Argentine, Mexican, and Guatemalan Photography: Feminist, Queer, and Post-Masculinist Perspectives* (Austin: University of Texas Press).

Beyond the logistics of making privately-owned books available for public display and check-out—a process that would potentially open the door for similar collaborations—the Future of Print team was interested to learn how the selection methodology would work outside of the library settings and how graduate students could contribute to this process. Expecting a high interest in the Hayden Library symposium, the team also wanted to learn how many participants would walk over to the Design Library to engage with the display items.

Workflow

In a preliminary meeting (April 2019), Dr. Foster gave his permission to have books from his own collection circulate and, for that purpose, be taped with a temporary ASU Library sticker. Following that meeting, Dr. Foster sent us an inventory of his 335 photobooks, listed in a Word file with their Library of Congress call number (TR647–TR830).² These bibliographic entries were copied into a spreadsheet to facilitate the management of this project. In order to enable the circulation of the non-library display books, Learning and Student Success Manager Chris Thuenen used the Ex-Libris Reading Lists tool to designate an online space for them and limit their check-out time to seven days.

Once the co-curated collection was finalized (see below), all materials were brought into the Design Library for processing. We worked with the symposium's photographer speakers and the Library's Communications team on appropriate images for the press release, an event poster, and display materials. These included a horizontal poster and an in-book band that marked pages with photos of interest. We also collaborated with the Latin Americana Collection Curator Seonaid Valiant on promoting the events among students and faculty.



The in-book band, wraps around the book to mark pages with photographs of interest

² Unlike the library-owned photobooks, Dr. Foster self-cataloged books were interfiled by the photographer's last name, not the book's subject.

Full Selection Methodology

After measuring the horizontal shelving space at the Design Library, we realized that it would accommodate about sixty items. We therefore decided in consultation with Dr. Foster to focus on a subset of his 335-item collection. Due to his interest in gender studies, we decided to give prominence to women photographers.

With this goal in mind, we visited Dr. Foster's private library to identify those items which were either authored by, or featured the work of women photographers (December 2019). Before the visit, we marked any seemingly relevant items on the spreadsheet (143 titles), and used it to indicate which items were selected after our physical review. Dr. Foster's graduate student, Jesús Galán Díaz, helped in the review and curation process. Unlike university libraries, private libraries are rarely easy to navigate due to unsystematic shelving. That was not the case with Dr. Foster's library, which was pretty much arranged by the Library of Congress call number order.

The books were reviewed for their content (female author/photographer), subject relevancy (preference for human rights), possible duplication (excluded titles owned by ASU Library), physical condition (excluded fragile items), and rarity (based on WorldCat holdings, excluded rare items from this circulating display). The review process consisted of the careful review of each book, removal of dust jackets and occasional research notes, and recording of such items for later re-assembling. At the end of the process, which took several hours, we boxed 36 photobooks from Dr. Foster's library and transferred them to ASU's Design Library for processing and tagging. Next, we complemented this co-curated collection with 27 ASU-owned books in the same call number range (TR647–TR830) and a few DVDs. These items were also reviewed and selected under the same parameters by the librarian and graduate student co-curators (February 2020).

Finally, in early March, we curated the display, bringing into play the colors and compositions of the photobooks' cover art. The books whose dust jackets were removed were grouped at the end of the stack's range, some warped with the in-book bands, next to the DVDs.

Assessment Mechanisms

We would have considered the project successful based on the number of the mid-March symposium attendees, traffic at the Design Library during the symposium, and checkouts during the Spring 2020 semester (mid-March to late May).

Unfortunately, we were unable to assess the project due to the 2020 global pandemic: The symposium was canceled March 13 and all ASU Library locations closed on March 16, before the display's official opening.

Discussion

The internal process developed for this project successfully integrated a unique, privately-held book collection (57%) and library materials (43%) into a seamless display. It was thanks to a creative usage of technological improvements to library systems that this process came about: Originally, the Reading Lists tool (a feature of Alma, a library services platform) was designed for creating and managing electronic Course Reserve lists. These Reading Lists include both electronic and physical objects, with occasional faculty-owned materials temporarily assigned a library barcode to enable short-term circulation periods, with no need to formally add them to the library collection. Faculty collaborators are asked to sign an agreement that removes responsibility from the library in case the materials are damaged or not returned, and to agree that a temporary, easily-removed library barcode is taped on the materials. For this project, Dr. Foster generously noted that if any student likes his books as much as to not return them, he would feel that he has accomplished his educational mission.

Off-library collaborative curation requires some flexibility on the part of the faculty, since the selection is mostly done before the books arrive at the library—at the faculty’s home. Dr. Foster hosted a librarian and a graduate student at his home library for several hours, but this type of untraditional collaboration may not work for everyone.

Parenting with a graduate student was very helpful for this project, since he was able to contribute to the selection process on both off- and in-library locations. Although the library took the lead in this case when developing publicity materials, partnering with the School of International Letters and Cultures helped with publicity efforts. These efforts were also aided by partnering with the curator for ASU’s Latin Americana Collections, who planned to participate in the symposium and use her on- and off-campus connections to promote the symposium and display.

Partnerships

School of International Letters and Cultures

Liaison librarian

A graduate student

Photographers (symposium speakers)