

philagrafika



WHYY interview transcripts- Aired February 6, 2009, 8:35AM
Transcripts by Dan Pohlig ~ February 9th, 2009. Filed under: Visual Art.

Philly bids to be World Champs... of Printmaking **by Alex Schmidt, WHYY Arts and Culture Reporter**

A year from now, Philadelphia will bid to become the worldwide nexus of contemporary printmaking. Philagrafika 2010, a new art biennial based here, will commence next year. From WHYY's Arts and Culture Desk, Alex Schmidt reports.

The three full-time staff members of Philagrafika crowd around curator **Jose Roca's** laptop. He's showing them video of a work by Oscar Munoz. The Colombian artist makes graphite prints on water. When he removes the screen, the image morphs as it swirls down the drain.

Roca: "It's called biographies, Biografias."

Female voice: "We're definitely kids in a candy store when Jose's in town, especially when he gets back from trips."

Roca has been travelling the globe for two years. He has chosen 34 artists from 20 countries, whose work will be shown at venues across Philadelphia. Roca, who is from Colombia, divides his time between Bogota and Philly.

Roca: "Philagrafika is going to be a citywide festival of contemporary art that has ideas associated with printmaking at the core. Works that are associated with concepts like dissemination, accessibility, the democratization of the work of art."

This is an ambitious event, not least because it's trying to get the public interested in prints. Faye Hirsch, senior editor of *Art in America*, has been writing about contemporary prints for two decades.

Hirsch: "The minute people hear prints, they kinda glaze over and say, 'Oh yeah, it's so technical, who wants to really get into it.' But i think if you can make a case for its essential relationship to the broader currents of art, you've got something really interesting going."

That's exactly what Philagrafika is trying to do. The core of the show will have five core venues - the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Moore College of Art and Design, The Print Center, Temple Gallery and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Thirty other venues have agreed to participate. At The Print Center, on Latimer Street near Rittenhouse Square, curator **John Caperton** envisions his space transforming from your average gallery to more of a lounge where people can interact with prints, as they would at a library or newsstand.

philagrafika



Caperton: “We used to be called the print club and it literally was a club for print makers. This is intended for the general public, but it’s also a return to our roots in a way.”

Roca says the rich print making history here makes Philadelphia the perfect city for Philagrafika 2010.

Roca: “Philadelphia, being one of the first cities in the us and a very important one, has a long tradition of prints - The Constitution was printed here, Benjamin Franklin’s press, some of the oldest printing industries in the country. So if you think of a theme for an event in Philadelphia, maybe it would be difficult to come up with something that is better fitted than prints.”

With one year left to go, the three staffers are working overtime to raise money amid a difficult funding landscape but they have ambitious visions. There’s talk, for example, of inviting the public on board the Independence Seaport Museum’s Olympia warship, which happens to have an 18th century printing press, for a swashbuckling participatory print exercise. That event, and others, have yet to be funded. **Caitlin Perkins** is program manager at Philagrafika.

Perkins: “It’s a challenging time to try to be doing a new event. This hasn’t been done before. Building trust among the institutions, working with the funders and making sure that they understand that we’re capable of taking on this kind of challenge and doing it well. We have a lot of challenges in front of us.”

If those challenges are met, *Art in America* editor Faye Hirsch says Philagrafika could transform the public profile of this widely practiced but overlooked medium.