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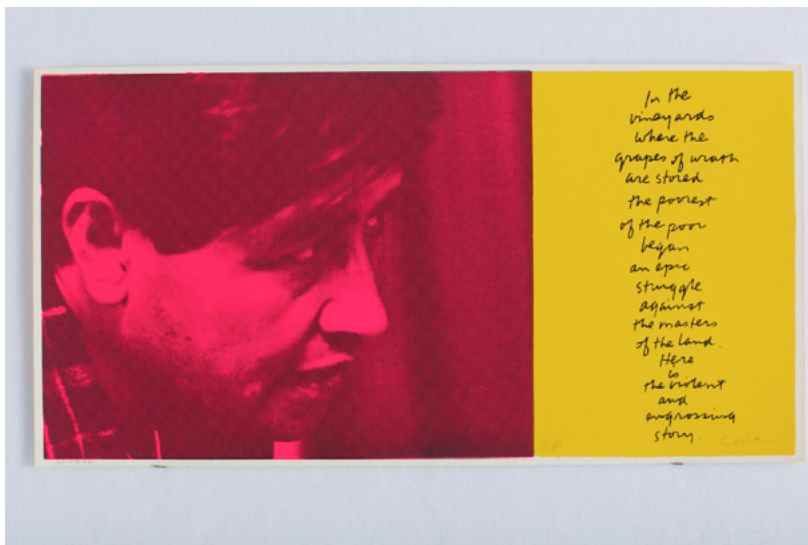
PHOTO ESSAYS

Corita Kent, the Nun-Turned-Artist, and Her Political Prints From 1969

The *Heroes and Sheroes* series, comprised of 29 works, features the faces of figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, Cesar Chavez, and Daniel and Philip Berrigan.



Eva Recinos February 4, 2020



Corita Kent, "chavez" (1969), 11 ½ x 22 ½ inches (photo by Arthur Evans, courtesy the Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)

LOS ANGELES — Just a short drive from the madness of Hollywood and Highland in Los Angeles — home to the infamous Walk of Fame and numerous Spiderman impersonators — sits the Immaculate Heart Community. Tracing its roots back to the 1840s, the space now also houses a singular space dedicated to one artist: Corita Kent.

A nun-turned-artist, Kent is known for her bold and graphic serigraphs (silkscreened artworks often made with stencils). She became a part of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at 18 years old but ultimately left in 1968; while her time as a nun ended, her career as an artist continued. After she died in 1986, her estate was donated to the Immaculate Heart, which founded the Corita Art Center to archive Kent's hundreds of prints.



The Corita Kent archives (photo by Eva Recinos)

I recently visited the Kent archives and was introduced to a lesser-known series of 1969 serigraphs that shed light on the ways in which Kent highlighted the political climate of the 1960s — and her ability to process it through art. The *Heroes and Sheroes* series, comprised of 29 works, features the faces of figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, Cesar Chavez, and Daniel and Philip Berrigan. Kent created them just after she took a sabbatical from Immaculate Heart College (and right before leaving altogether).

The center hopes to look more closely at the 29 pieces as a series, not just individual pieces.

“Recognizing their collective strength in message, we look forward to promoting further research and exhibition of the artworks as a complete series,” Nellie Scott, Corita Art Center Director, told Hyperallergic.



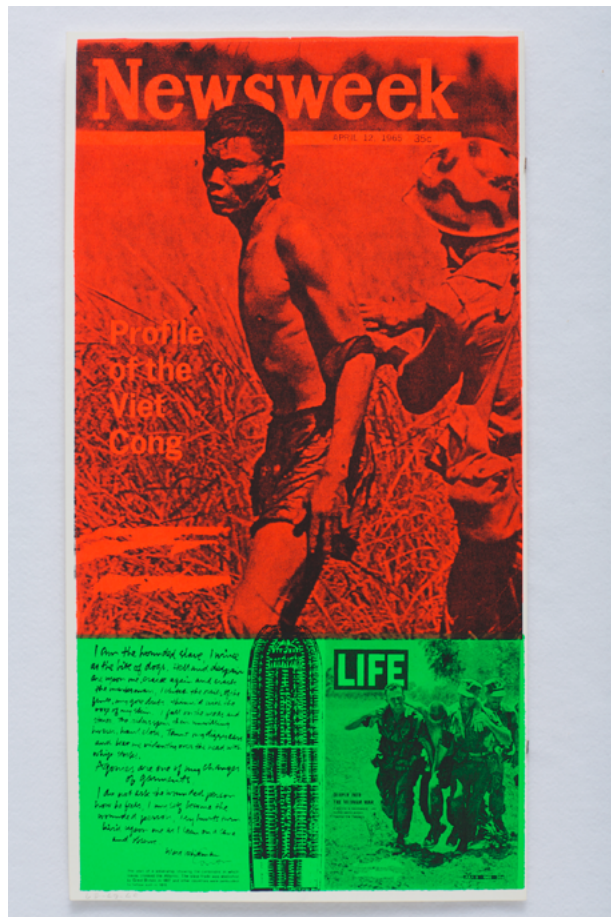
The Corita Kent archives (photo by Eva Recinos)

The series illuminates a significant shift in her career. It prominently features images from mass media, sometimes juxtaposed with historical photos, like a historical slave ship diagram, or quotes from songs and speeches, like “Give a Damn” by Spanky & Our Gang. The images include snapshots from *Newsweek* and *Life* magazines. At this time, Kent started working with a Santa Cruz printer named Harry Hambly, who helped her introduce found photography into her work.

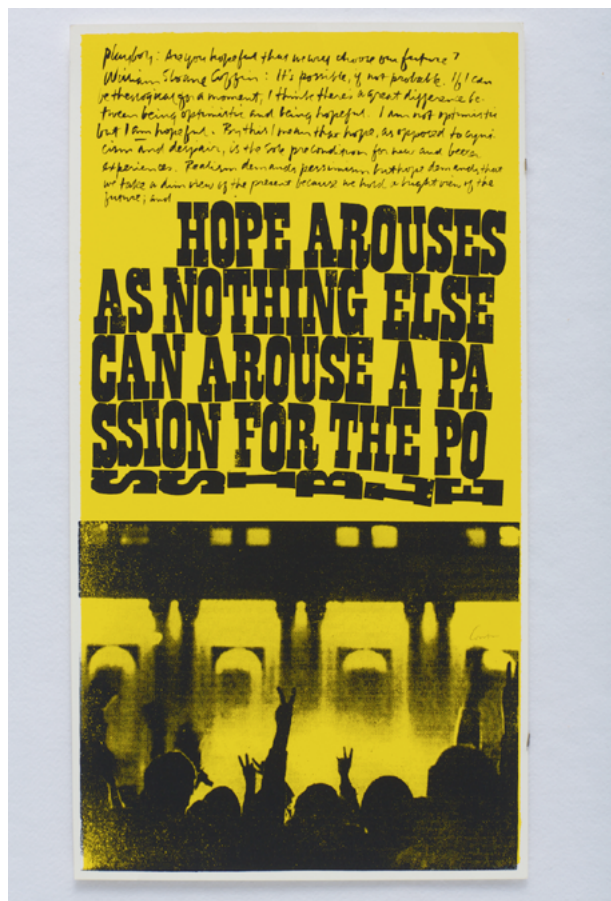


Corita Kent, “the cry that will be heard” (1969), serigraph, 23 x 12 in. (photo by Arthur Evans, Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)

The pieces show a sort of awareness and political statement perhaps less possible when Kent was still part of the church. Today, a viewer might ask if Kent considered her own social position when creating these works, since as a white woman artist she tackles issues from other communities. But the pieces definitely show Kent’s efforts in taking a more defined stance. The artist often gleaned inspiration from protest posters, even before she created this series.



Corita Kent, "news of the week" (1969), serigraph, 23 x 12 in. (photo by Arthur Evans, Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)



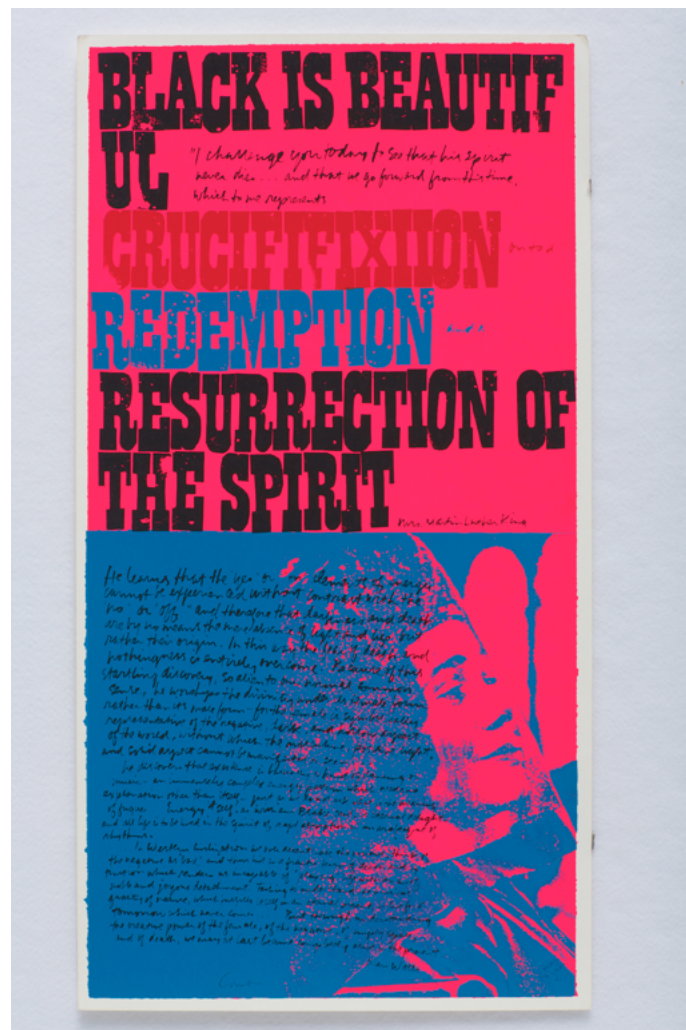
Corita Kent, "a passion for the possible" (1969), serigraph, 23 x 12 in. (photo by Arthur Evans, Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)



Corita Kent, "american sampler" (1969), serigraph, 23 x 12 in. (photo by Arthur Evans, Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)

“When Corita took over the [Mary’s Day celebration] as a creative director, she made the event a lot more celebratory, but also borrowed a lot from protest aesthetics,” Olivian Cha, the curator and collections manager at the Corita Art Center, told Hyperallergic. “She was very aware of what was happening visually at the time, especially in this decade.” You can see this in the posters that nuns and students carry during the celebration — they resemble protest posters in their use of large lettering and bold hues but instead show phrases like “give us our daily bread.”

In Cha’s view, the *Heroes and Sheroes* series is a striking example of Kent’s “use, and sometimes critique, of more socially graphic, photojournalistic imagery taken from mass media sources like newspapers.” Cha points out that while Kent is generally associated with figures such as Andy Warhol and the larger Pop art movement of the ’60s, she was also “a precursor to contemporary art movements like the Pictures Generation,” a group of artists in the 1970s and 1980s that often took influence from or incorporated mass media images, such as advertisements and TV. The movement’s most well-known figures run the gamut, from Cindy Sherman to Sarah Charlesworth to Jack Goldstein.



Corita Kent, "if i" (1969), serigraph, 23 x 12 in. (photo by Arthur Evans, Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community)

Kent herself would become an interesting figure to the media and Los Angeles at large. In 1967, she made the cover of Newsweek. In 2019, the Los Angeles City Council and the County Board of Supervisors officially called November 20 "Corita Day."

The Kent archives will be expanding soon to continue highlighting series like *Heroes and Sheroes*. With its Corita: The Next 100 campaign, the organization hopes to create "an expanded exhibition, education and conservation space." The space will facilitate more research and interrogations of Kent's work.

The Corita Art Center (5515 Franklin Ave, Hollywood Hills, Los Angeles) welcomes walk-in visitors Thursdays and Fridays, 10am-4pm. To make an appointment visit their [website](#).