



EFA Robert
Blackburn
Printmaking
Workshop

The Only Thing That Lasts:

An Oral History of Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop interview with Juan Sánchez

Born to working-class Puerto Rican immigrants in Brooklyn, NY, Juan Sánchez has been part of several New York City collectives and communities including Exit Art, Taller Boricua, En Foco, and organizer with the Comité Pro Libertad de los Nacionalistas. In 1984, Juan was invited to participate in the *Third World Artists Portfolio* as a Jerome Fellow.

In this excerpt, Sánchez discusses the international community of The Printmaking Workshop and its many years of cross-cultural collaboration, including travels to Egypt for the Cairo Biennale curated by Deborah Cullen-Morales with artists Michael Kelly Williams, Kay WalkingStick, Faith Ringgold, and Mel Edwards.

Interview conducted by Camille Crain Drummond

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Juan Sánchez:

He created an environment that, I would say, was the “United Nations of printmaking,” you know. So many different people coming from all over, and some of them paying fees, and some of them not paying fees. And Robin would get at his case. But it was an open door where he would meet people, and they just came into the United States, into New York, or whatever, he immediately invites them to come to the print shop. So every time I came to the print shop, even during the time that I was doing my residency there, you know, you meet people from Ethiopia, you meet people from Peru, you meet people from China, you meet people from various parts of Latin America. You know, it was kind of funny, though, sometimes I would walk into the print shop and everybody is speaking Spanish, so that to me also was added to the experience because all of a sudden I'm meeting artists who I may not have ever met, who are here working, making prints, in addition to having their own studio, doing their sculptures or paintings or whatever. And so I met so many different artists. I even met a young artist from the Middle East, I think it was Palestinian, who also was doing graduate work at Pratt. And that was the United Nations—this was a whole ‘nother world, you know? This was a whole ‘nother universe on West 17th Street.

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So, even during the trip that we had in Egypt—we participated in the Cairo biennial there—he was always talking to whoever he met, be that a curator in Cairo or a curator from Chicago or whatever, always trying to open up doors for artists. It's like, *Oh, this is so-and-so. You should look at his work, you know, maybe he could exhibit. Is there is there a scholarship? Is there a fellowship?* He's always looking and asking people for opportunities for his artists because we were all there together. And Mel Edwards was among them, and Kay WalkingStick. Who else? Faith Ringgold. And he was in Egypt to network, and he was networking for the print shop and, for the most part, networking for the artists. [Michael] Kelly Williams was with us as well, and I remember we were having dinner somewhere and—I forgot who was the person that was with us—but, he wanted to know if this person can bring him back to Egypt. So he's always championing for artists. It feels as if what he's doing with the print shop is not enough. If he could if he could get an artist a show or another residency elsewhere or whatever, he's hustling for us, you know?