BRINGING THE OUTSIDE INSIDE
BRAZILIAN GRAFFITI AND “STRING LITERATURE” ON THE WALLS ARE NOT YOUR TYPICAL ART IN THE LIBRARY EXHIBIT

CHRISTIANE ERBOLATO-RAMSEY
Fine Arts Librarian, Harold B. Lee Library
Brigham Young University, Provo, UT

ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA
2015 Annual Conference, Fort Worth, TX
March 19-23, 2015

Collaboration
These two projects were a collaboration between the Fine Arts Librarian, Christiane Ramsey, and Rex Nelson, professor of Brazilian Studies in the Spanish & Portuguese Department. The exhibition design and execution were the creative work of MFA Graphic Design students Daniel Sappenfield and Emily Sollow.

Art exhibitions in academic libraries traditionally display works by visual arts students, faculty, or visiting artists. In an effort to strengthen the liaison between the Brigham Young University Lee Library and the area of Brazilian Studies in the Spanish & Portuguese Department, two exhibitions were organized to bring exposure to BYU students of inaccessible art found only on the streets in Brazil.

The first one featured the Lee Library’s collection of “Literatura de Cordel”, zine-like booklets containing traditional and contemporary folk stories and beautiful woodcut illustrations on the covers. These fragile booklets from the Northeast region of Brazil are typically kept in the Locked Case area and not easily visible or available. The second exhibition showcased a variety of Brazilian graffiti found in the streets of São Paulo. Although these images are easily available online, one is not likely to find them without knowing what to look for. Presenting them in a gallery inside the library was a way to transplant a small section of that distant art scene into the library space.

The content of both exhibitions originally belongs in dynamic, outdoor public spaces and is meant to be discovered by passersby. The same idea was extended to the space inside the library. Both exhibitions lasted three months and were very well attended by general patrons and by assigned classes. Students were encouraged to study the topics presented by the exhibitions, and to write papers or make presentations.

For more information: http://net.lib.byu.edu/art/cordel.html

LITERATURA DE CORDEL = STRING LITERATURE:
POPULAR FOLK STORIES FROM THE NORTHEAST OF BRAZIL

Cordel literature means “string literature” in Portuguese. The inexpensively printed chapbooks contain popular poetry, and typically portray traditional folk tales, Bible stories, local and international political events, historical figures, famous literary works, and moral tales. More recently, these booklets have also reflected current issues related to people’s lives such as the national health system, sustainable agricultural projects, and environmental awareness. They are typically hung from strings, when sold at local fairs in the Northeast area of Brazil, mainly in the states of Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Ceará. Usually printed in black and white, their covers are illustrated with stunning woodcuts (arginguereirias). It is customary for the authors (corredores) to sing or recite aloud the contents of their books to large crowds in markets or public gatherings. A selection from the Lee Library’s unique collection of cordéis was hung on strings in the gallery walls, as they are traditionally sold in the open markets in Brazil. The exhibition space also included the projection of animated tales of the same genre on one of the walls.

For more information: http://guides.lib.byu.edu/braziliangraffiti

BRAZILIAN GRAFFITI: THE NEW ART ON THE STREET

This most recent exhibition featured a large group of staggered graffiti images representing a random sample of what you would encounter if you drove through certain streets in São Paulo, Brazil. Six prominent artists were featured in the project, besides a large wall with images initiating the spontaneity and lack of explanation or description that passersby would typically experience. They are works in a “Galeria de Céu Aberto” (open sky gallery) and illustrations of “Cultura de Rua” (street culture), without the confinement and arbitrary selection of an art gallery. Brazilian graffiti has its own place in the world. Graffiti artists don’t seek to validate their own name and existence, but work to freely articulate social, political, aesthetic, and cultural views in a dialogue with society. Selections of recent documentaries about graffiti artists were also projected on the wall, and a computer screen inside the gallery.