

Preserving Memories of Cultural Resistance in Chile: The Archival Process of Tallersol's Poster Collection³⁰

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Introduction

The Tallersol Cultural Centre was founded in Santiago de Chile in 1977 by a collective of artists, and cultural and political activists who resisted military repression by creating space for cultural freedom under the Pinochet dictatorship. They produced posters, pamphlets, and other records to support the campaigns of human rights organisations, political bodies, social movements in Santiago's shantytowns, opposition cultural centres in the city and its popular neighbourhoods, trades unions, religious groups, among others. The posters that this project proposes to digitise address themes such as political disappearances and imprisonment, diverse human rights violations, women's and Indigenous rights, youth resistance, counterculture as well as international solidarity [Figure 1].

³⁰ This project is supported by the Modern Endangered Archives Program at the UCLA library with funding from Arcadia.

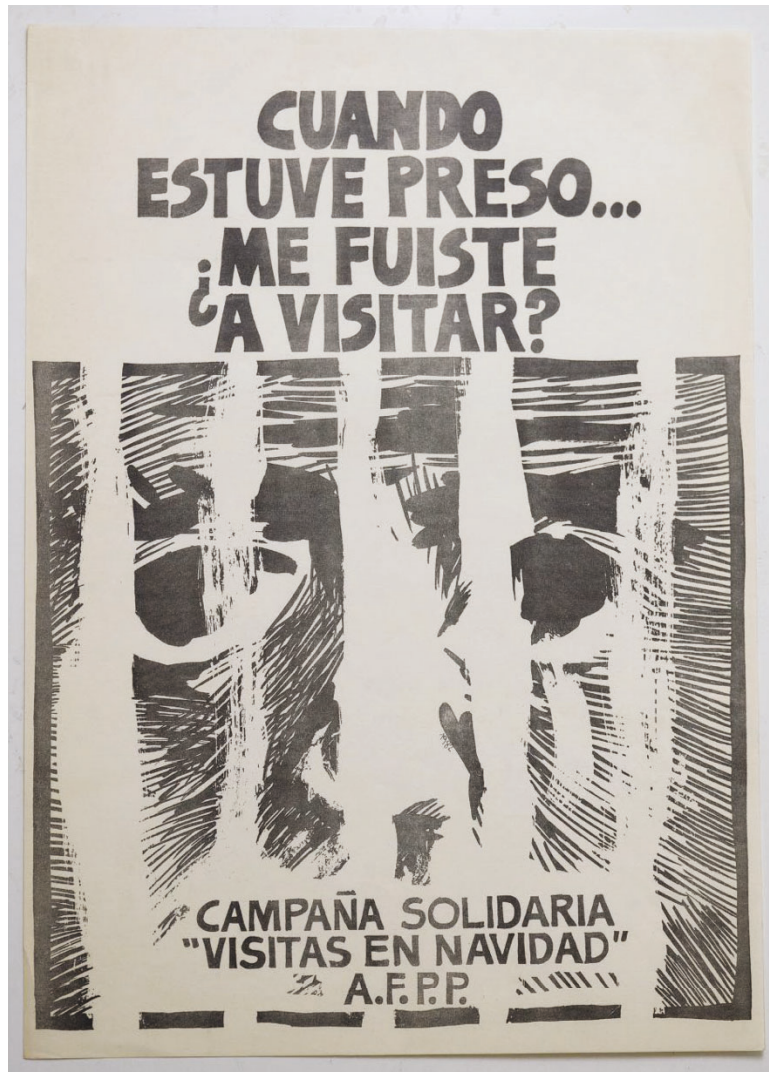


Figure 1: [When I was in prison, did you visit me?](#), 1983. Poster that promotes awareness of political imprisonment in Chile as part of the solidarity campaign “Visits at Christmas”, organised by the Agrupación de Familiares de Presos Políticos, AFPP (Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners). This organisation commissioned Antonio Kadima to make a poster for their campaign.

The design, production and distribution of the works was all done clandestinely, and security forces repeatedly raided the workshop, while its members were detained, tortured and internally exiled (Cristi and Manzi, 2016). Tallersol’s founder, Antonio Kadima, estimates that in the early 1980s they were responsible for 50-60% of all the posters produced by the resistance in Santiago. Therefore, the archive is not only testament to a remarkable underground graphic workshop, but also chronicles the intertwined network of popular, political, social, cultural, and religious groups that actively resisted the dictatorship, and details the opposition campaigns, positions, and activities of those groups as the dictatorship unfolded [Figure 2].

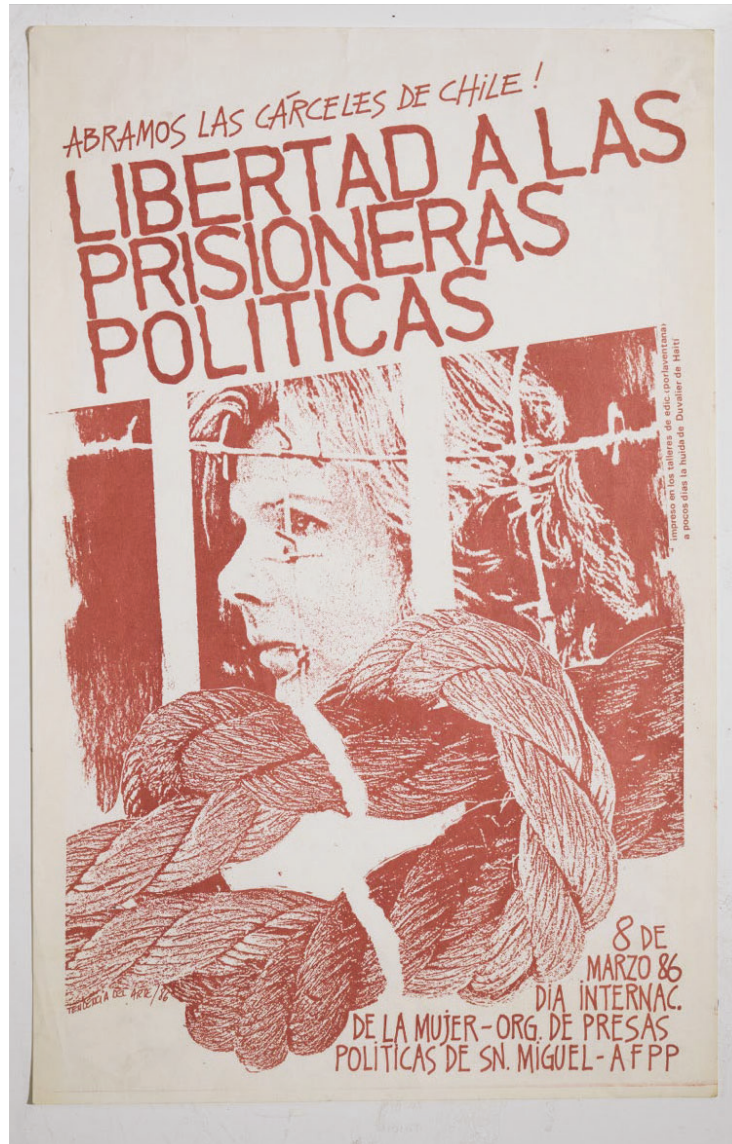


Figure 2: [Freedom for female political prisoners – Let’s open Chile’s prisons!](#), 8 March 1986. Poster commemorating International Women’s Day, urging the release of the female political prisoners of the Chilean military regime. The Organización de Presas Políticas de San Miguel (Saint Michael Organisation of Female Political Prisoners) and AFPP commissioned Antonio Kadima to make this poster for International Women’s Day.

A team of activists, archivists and academics from Chile and Liverpool obtained funding from the Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP) to digitise this unique collection for publication online. The aim of the project, entitled [Memories of Resistance: A Digital Archive of Chile's Graphic Resistance](#), is to facilitate research on and public understanding of this key aspect of cultural resistance at the grassroots and community level. The involvement of Antonio Kadima and his networks in this project represents a fascinating opportunity to provide a unique perspective in the archive metadata and our intention is to further explore with our collaborators how the political context informed artistic choices.³¹ The purpose of this article is to discuss the first stage of the project during which our team prepared a sample of 150 posters for online publication. The next stage involves the digitisation of the full collection of approximately 6,000 posters within the 9,000 printed artefacts in the collection. Because the project is collaborative and community-based, we highlight the importance of working with Tallersol's political and organisational principles, which has in turn enriched our collective understanding of grassroots opposition in Chile.

Tallersol's Archive of Resistance

The posters and other items in the collection, which include leaflets, pamphlets, cassette inserts and other items, were selected and preserved by Antonio Kadima at the time of their production. The 6,000 posters include: campaigning and awareness-raising posters (see Figures 1 and 2); commissions for cultural events in Santiago, paid-for and at no cost; designs produced for sale by Tallersol to fund the collective; and announcements of Tallersol's own activities. The campaigning posters illustrate the network of resistance in which Tallersol played an important part; it included human rights and religious groups, trades unions, political groups and representative bodies, many of which were unauthorised. Figure 1 illustrates the campaigns to raise public awareness of political imprisonment in the early 1980s. The Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners (AFPP) campaigned for the rights of political prisoners, including their release and the acknowledgement of political imprisonment as a violation of human rights. The evocative image of the face behind bars on this black-and-white poster encourages the viewer to empathise with the fate of these prisoners and their relatives, while continuing to support the campaigns for their freedom.

³¹ In the video "Archivo Resistencia Gráfica" (2022), Antonio Kadima discusses the production process and his artistic choices in relation to a selection of the digitised posters. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQAz6QA8gdE>.

**CUANDO
ESTUVE PRESO...
¿ME FUISTE
A VISITAR?**



**CAMPAÑA SOLIDARIA
"VISITAS EN NAVIDAD"
A.F.P.P.**

Figure 1 caption: [When I was in prison, did you visit me?](#), 1983. Poster that promotes awareness of political imprisonment in Chile as part of the solidarity campaign “Visits at Christmas”, organised by the Agrupación de Familiares de Presos Políticos, AFPP (Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners). This organisation commissioned Antonio Kadima to make a poster for their campaign.

Antonio Kadima’s interest is in “recovering the resistance work that took place [in Chile] during the dictatorship, which is not well-known” (Carvalho, 2023) compared to political activism in exile and solidarity networks. Through their cultural resistance, Tallersol and its networks could develop a counternarrative to challenge the suppression of cultural activities and provide spaces for opposition. The posters announcing events and activities, put on by commercial groups, voluntary bodies, the church and Tallersol itself, include theatre, cinema, music and poetry readings, together provide a vivid depiction of the cultural life of dictatorship-era Santiago. Those produced for sale include national and international icons, such as Gabriela Mistral, Víctor Jara, John Lennon and Violeta Parra, most of whom were not favoured by the civil-military dictatorship in power in Chile at the time. Figure 2 shows another central theme in the collection, women’s rights, portraying a campaign to liberate female political prisoners in the context of international women’s day protests. Between 1983 and 1986, Chile saw unprecedented mass demonstrations and the growing importance of women’s movements, as also echoed in the Tallersol archive. The image of a young woman behind bars and barbed wire serves as a reminder of the dangers these protesters faced, with the severed rope symbolising the call for their release.

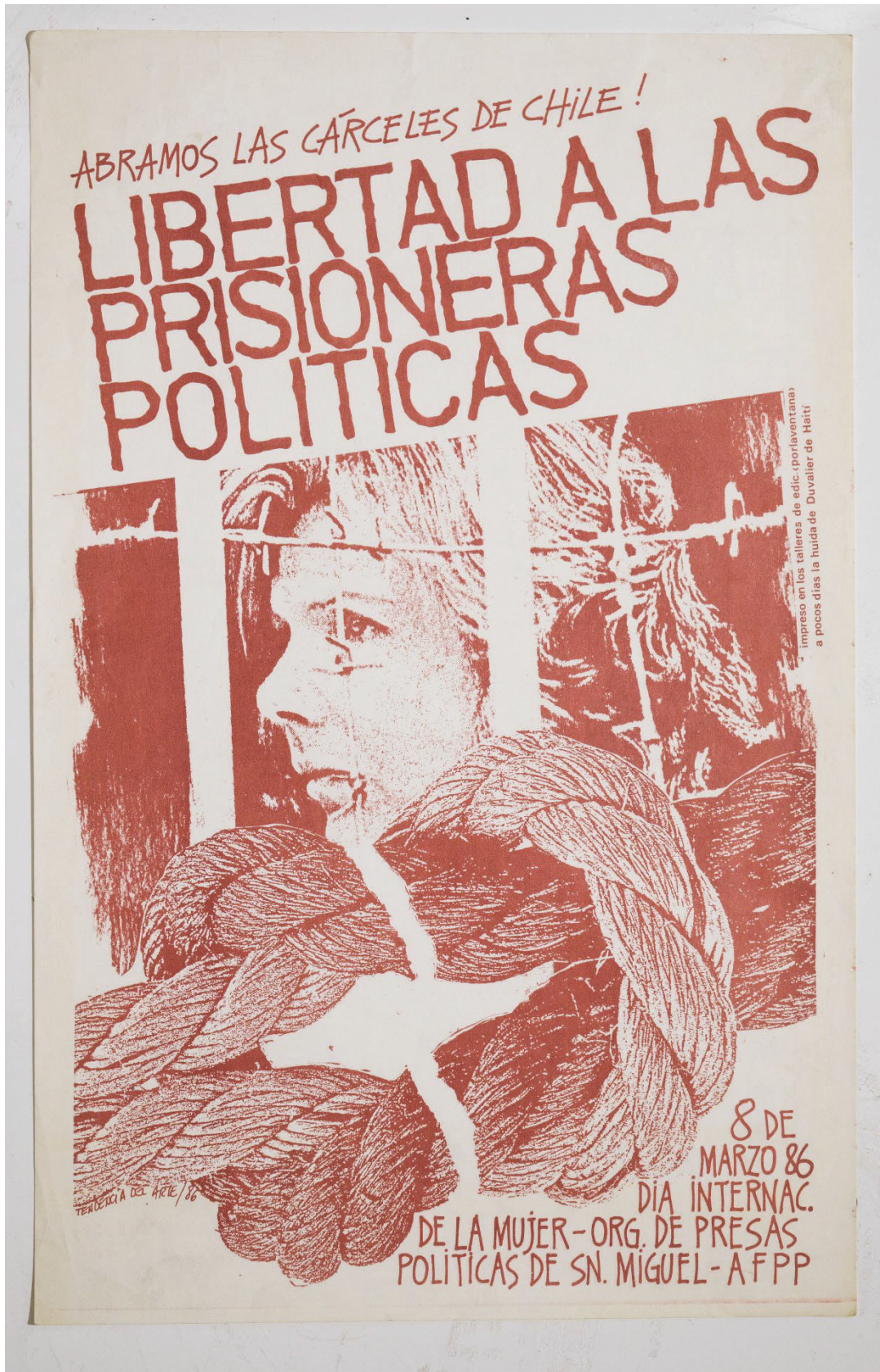


Figure 2 caption: [Freedom for female political prisoners – Let’s open Chile’s prisons!](#), 8 March 1986. Poster commemorating International Women’s Day, urging the release of the female political prisoners of the Chilean military regime. The Organización de Presas Políticas de San Miguel (Saint Michael Organisation of Female Political Prisoners) and AFPP commissioned Antonio Kadima to make this poster for International Women’s Day.

Describing political posters at Tallersol: Problems, challenges, and solutions

The archival descriptive process was conducted by three archivists from Chile with extensive experience working with community archives’ records and non-traditional archival materials.² The aim of the work was to deliver two products: an individualised description of a sample of 150 political posters, and a catalogue to contextualise the archival work and characterise the archival collection, thereby facilitating its use by various audiences and publics. To achieve this, the archival team prepared a plan of activities that included researching the graphic collection, identifying and analysing of existing preliminary inventories and descriptions at Tallersol, studying the ISAD-G (General International Standard Archival Description), and, finally, preparing to create contextual metadata following UCLA Library guidelines based on a community-participatory approach. These tasks were carried out over two years during which the team faced multiple problems and developed creative solutions to overcome them. These reflections aim to summarise these challenges to assist archivists working with similar records and institutional contexts in the future.

Historically, archivists have agreed that archival description is an activity to synthesise information about the context and content of records, making them accessible to future audiences. For this reason, the archivist Antonia Heredia Herrera states that it is “the bridge that connects the document with the users” (Heredia Herrera, 1995: 300), while Michel Duchein offers a concordant and poetic vision: “Without an adequate description, archives are like an unknown city without a map, like a treasure chest without a key” (Duchein, 1982 in Heredia Herrera, 1995: 125). The project seeks to give an identity to records to facilitate their identification, retrieval, and consultation, which also serves as an internal control tool for the archival institution, allowing it to know what it has, where it is located, and the multiple significances of its records, materials and collections. As a result of the current “community paradigm” (Cook, 2013) or “community turn” (Poppo et al., 2020: 4) within the archival discipline, archivists have recognised the value of community archives and actively incorporated producers’ and users’ reflections, ideas, and practices into the archival work. This intellectual context strongly suggests a collaborative partnership between the professional archivists and researchers, and those who own, manage, and use the archival collections, under the conviction that – as Andrew Flinn eloquently affirms – this perspective “would ultimately result in a richer and more rounded heritage for all” (Flinn, 2012: 33).

Different problems hindered the swift execution of this approach. Tallersol as a social organisation embodies four principles: autonomy, self-management, memory, and resistance. This was the first time they had participated in an internationally funded project and hosted a group of professional archivists. In addition, the archive was in the process of moving and did not have a definitive classification of the 9,000 records, hindering the placement of the poster collection within a broader documentary structure. Moreover, another team was working in parallel on the digitisation process. These obstacles caused delays in the original planning and, in turn, a constant search for new strategies. The pandemic further complicated matters with lockdowns and schedule restrictions in Chile, and the danger of testing positive, necessitating a protocol for safe fieldwork.

To ensure a collaborative working formula, the archival team prepared activities to demonstrate the benefits for Tallersol of aligning their archival processes to international professional standards. This involved comparing the system Tallersol extensively used with various methods of other graphic archives such as “[Archivo Contra la Pared: Gráfica política sevillana del 78 al presente](#)” (Against the Wall Archive: Sevillian political graphics from 1978 to the present day) and “[Docs Populi: documents for the public](#)”, alongside other international standards such as ISAD-G and IDEP Metadata. We reached a collective understanding that the proposed work plan enriched existing work, while respecting the political and ethical values of Tallersol. An intermediate *ficha de descripción* (descriptive label) was agreed, including 35 fields of information divided into the following groups: (1) identifiers, (2) titles, (3) creators and contributors, (4) publication information, (5) language, (6) type of resource, (7) physical descriptions, (8) local repository and physical collections information (9) copyright (10) notes and, finally, (11) subject terms.

During the first stage, the archival team worked independently to describe the 150 political posters. To mitigate pandemic risk and minimise unnecessary handling of the records, the team created low-quality digital images and temporarily labelled them to facilitate cataloguing and digitisation. Each archivist completed the *ficha de descripción* of 50 posters. The team also created a Poster Description Protocol, containing basic guidelines to standardise the archival work and create consistent metadata. We used team meetings to review the description process, seeking collective solutions for any problems we identified. We incorporated these solutions into the individual descriptions, the catalogue, and the protocol. This document can be considered a living memory of the archival description process and we created a final draft to guide future archival processes. The final stages consisted of normalising subject terms or access points: names, institutions, subjects, and places. One of the main debates was whether to focus exclusively on textual information or to include graphic references. For instance, some posters featured highly recognisable places, artists, and political leaders in Chile such as Salvador Allende and Plaza Italia (informally renamed “Plaza de la Dignidad” after October

2019). These questions reinforced the need of an interdisciplinary approach in archival activities to meet current and future users' needs and recognise the expanding knowledge required by archivists working with non-traditional materials.

In the second stage, the descriptions were enriched in collaboration with one of the producers, Antonio Kadima. In his role as founder and director of Tallersol, Kadima has intimate knowledge of the archive, and he was involved in the production of almost 60% of the full collection. Kadima provided significant background context and production details and incorporated a variety of suggestions. Some information which is not normally included in poster metadata, such as date, title and creators could therefore be deciphered. Finally, the data collected was systematised in a catalogue based on the ISAD-G, containing the administrative and archival history, scope and content, conditions governing access, as well as the rules and conventions previously used in the process. We subsequently revised the fields in consultation with the funder to highlight the contextual information for each item and to facilitate the multilingual presentation of the posters online (Spanish, English and Mapudungun).

Conclusion

Political posters are ambivalent documents: mute and talkative at the same time. While they usually hide information such as date, author and conditions of creation, they present non-textual references such as drawings, figures, colours, and the type of paper. To meaningfully capture their archival nature in the description process, the active participation of producers and an interdisciplinary approach are indispensable. A collaborative approach to artefact description requires mutual trust between a record's creators and archivers and consensus on that description. As the digitisation and cataloguing of the 6000 posters proceeds over the next two years, information about the content, circumstances and context of the posters' commissioning, production and deployment, that would otherwise be definitively lost, will be captured.

Chile has a vibrant tradition of political murals and graphic design. It was part of the identity of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity coalition government and was a distinctive symbol of opposition to the subsequent Pinochet dictatorship. In this context, Tallersol's archive is a crucial resource for scholars researching and mapping the emerging grassroots opposition given the dangerous conditions in which artefacts in the archive were produced and distributed and the relative lack of tangible records. Within the 150 sample images are examples of cultural activities, political and human rights campaigns, and initiatives to support specific groups such as children, youth, and women. The sample both demonstrates the breadth, depth and structure of the social movement networks that challenged the dictatorship, their campaign tactics and visual language.

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