Miguel Rivera

Miguel Rivera's work is best experienced up close, in person, and with a history book on hand. Every print is like digging through historical bedrock to understand a timeline of human movement, politics, climate, and culture. This is especially the case in the print *Fin de siècle II* titled for a phrase used to characterize the end of the 19th century a period of such artistic movements as symbolism and modernism. Here, Rivera presents facets of a polyhedron, a centered jewel interrupting a red belt and dotted grid in the background.

The print suggests something plebeian disrupted by the excessive visual layering, like a bird's eye view of a crystal tower obscuring the foundations on which it was built. Logical social connections develop as Rivera climbs up through the layers. In other prints, baroque church facades in Mexico and early marine navigational systems used by colonialists make up the initial layers. But in most cases, the topmost image is the same polygonal blueprint for a perfect world, built on a foundation of imperfection. Rivera's prints take us through history, religion, architecture, political power, and colonialism.

Rivera is quick to acknowledge he is not a traditional printmaker—that his process is more in line with painterly behaviors. The convergence is something he considers in his studio. "The difference between printmaking and painting is—for printmaking you have to have a plan before you execute anything. I get bored with having a plan and prefer to think in layers and chance." At the base of the image, a map provides the foundation for everything that follows. "I can see all the layers, like strata, when I look at a print. I think about architecture and living in

transparent houses. I want to see what those houses were built upon, to see the foundation underneath." The region depicted in the maps informs the next layer: the image of a virus, like Chagas disease, common to the poorest classes of South and Central America. Rivera manipulates the virus images, pushing the layer back when he applies the polyhedrons. Rivera uses this approach in *Simplicity in Rejection*, integrating cultural and historical information without altering the original maps he uses at the base. Orbital marks circle the print's outer edge, corralling the shapes towards the center of the composition where the eye is thrust into a flushed, bodily red.

"At one point, I must come to terms with the fact that I'm going to deny the first layers of information," Rivera says, his hand on the edge of *Simplicity in Rejection*. "I think, 'what if I push a little more?' I've lost images that way." So have the history books, as geographical and regional memories are overwritten by time and hierarchy, buried deeper beneath new layers of time and information. It's only a matter of time until that top layer—the recurring blueprint for perfection—is negated by another vision.

Annie Raab