



Mesoamérica Resiste Press Kit

Beehive Design Collective
1 Elm Street
Machias, Maine 04654
207.669.4117
www.beehivecollective.org
pollinators@beehivecollective.org

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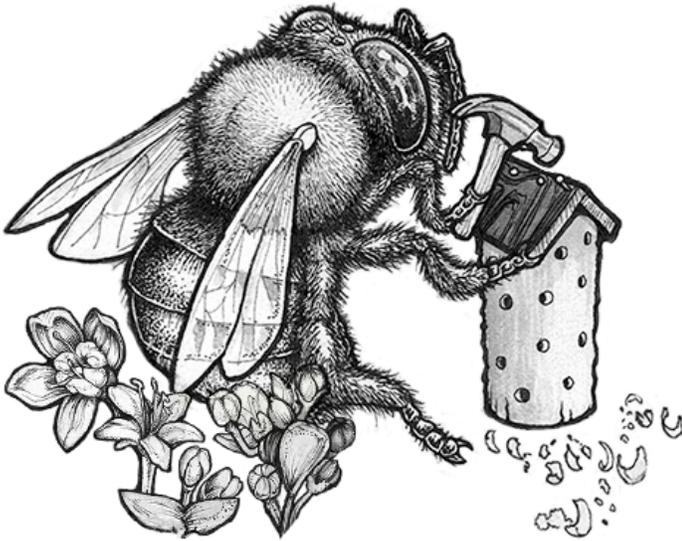
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About the Beehive



The Beehive Design Collective is a wildly motivated, all-volunteer, activist arts collective that has gained international attention for its collaboratively produced graphics campaigns focusing on globalization, resource extraction, and stories of resistance.

The Bees are based in eastern Maine, with a decentralized swarm spread throughout the Americas and Europe. Our mission is to “cross-pollinate the grassroots” by creating collaborative, anti-copyright images for use as educational and organizing tools.

The Beehive’s issue-based graphics campaigns are the product of interviews with affected communities and extensive research, culminating in richly detailed narrative posters. These narrative posters explore a wide range of urgent topics: from mountaintop removal coal mining in central Appalachia (*The True Cost of Coal*), to biotechnology and food systems (*Resist Biotechnology, Biodevastation*), to struggles for sovereignty in the face of free trade agreements, the War on Drugs, and mega-infrastructure development plans (*Free Trade Area of the Americas, Plan Colombia, and most recently, Mesoamérica Resiste*).

We work anonymously as word-to-image translators of global issues, retelling them through images and storytelling to facilitate understanding of complex issues for everyone, regardless of background or knowledge base. All of the Beehive’s graphic work is anti-copyright and distributed through sliding scale donation. About half of the posters made by the collective are donated for free to youth, educators, and organizers, with an emphasis on bringing them back to the regions where the stories in the graphics come from, or to regions affected by similar issues.

We work to dispel the tradition of activism rooted in academia in books, experts, speeches, and other forms of privileged and hoarded knowledge. We rely on communication methods that are accessible and participatory, inspiring critical reflection and action instead of passive listening. Our hope as we build and disseminate these visual tools is that they will begin to self-replicate and, as with any good story, take on a life of their own.

The Beehive gathers information about issues as directly from the source as possible, by traveling to meet with community members and organizers who have first-hand understandings of the issues we depict. We research each topic of our graphics thoroughly, down to the specific species of animals and plants we draw, and the complex ecosystems they exist within. *Mesoamérica Resiste* features over 500 unique species native to the Mesoamerican region.

We share our ideas and images with many people for critique before they take shape on the poster and get sent out to the world. This back and forth process is a filter that helps us avoid subtle racist assumptions, cultural appropriation, and myopic North American perspectives. Though we are a group spread throughout the Americas, most of us are rooted in North America, and ultimately we are only a megaphone for sharing stories and struggles that belong to folks who live in the regions affected by each issue. We take this request to share stories seriously, and we try really hard to get the story right!

The Mesoamérica Resiste graphics campaign

is the culmination of nine years of story gathering, research, and illustration. The title, Mesoamérica Resiste, reflects our efforts to document and share diverse stories of resistance, inspiration and solidarity. Our hope in releasing it into the world is that it will live and evolve as a dynamic tool for organizing and educating about some of the most important issues of our times.

This collaboratively produced illustration was created through an intensive process of grassroots research. It all started in 2004, when an initial team from the US, Canada, and Mexico traveled together from Mexico to Panama. Our most ambitious and elaborate graphic to date, Mesoamérica Resiste is a tale of widespread resistance to the mega-infrastructure projects of the Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project, or Project Mesoamerica.

Project Mesoamerica, previously known as Plan Puebla Panama, is a plan crafted by government and big business to build more infrastructure throughout the Mesoamerican region, from southern Mexico to Colombia. While the plan has multiple tracks meant to address a range of development issues (like communication, health, and the environment), the bulk of the funding so far is going towards industrial scale mega-projects: i.e., super highways, ports, and canals that connect with factory zones, mines, and large scale energy projects that power it all. Project Mesoamerica is focused on making the region competitive in global markets, and paves the way for increased exploitation of resources, including oil, gold, fresh water, and labor.

The setting of the poster, Mesoamerica, is a cultural and geographic region that forms a thin land bridge (or isthmus) between North and South America and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Due to its geography, this region is incredibly biodiverse, and also highly strategic for trade. On our original research trip, we repeatedly heard people say that this plan is a continuation and acceleration of the long succession of foreign colonizers and transnational

corporations that have occupied and exploited Mesoamerica. Residents of the region have fiercely opposed many parts of the plan. Community organizing efforts have successfully canceled some of the projects, and have forced reevaluation and rebranding of the plan overall. The poster highlights organizing led by indigenous peoples, who have fought back against genocide and ongoing threats to survival from colonial times to today's Project Mesoamerica.

The Mesoamérica Resiste graphic is an effort to go beyond illustrating just the bad news, to also share stories of collective action and inspiration and celebrate cultural and ecological diversity. This graphic documents many examples of local and regional alternatives to top-down development plans. Like the stunning diversity of the ecosystems of Mesoamerica, a multitude of characters symbolize diverse strategies for building and defending autonomy. Every critter in the poster is based on a real species native to somewhere between Mexico and Colombia. We've depicted over 500 individual species of insects, plants, and animals, which is just a glimpse into the incredible biodiversity of the region. Many species were chosen, or suggested to us, because of their cultural significance as well.

Though the poster's details come from specific struggles in southern Mexico and Central America, the bigger picture extends to the entire Western hemisphere and beyond. Just in the past decade since we started this graphic, direct action in North America has escalated against extreme energy extraction projects like the tar sands, fracking, and mountaintop removal, as well as against the highways and pipelines and power plants that are connected to them. This graphics campaign was crafted to be a useful storytelling and educational tool for people in many places, who are fighting to protect their land and livelihoods all over the planet.



Press Releases & One Sheet - Extended Version

For immediate release

Contact

Mandy Skinner / Beehive Design Collective
1 Elm Street, Machias, ME 04654
Email: mandy@beehivecollective.org
Phone: 812-340-9981
Web: www.beehivecollective.org

The Beehive Collective Releases *Mesoamérica Resiste* The Final Graphic in an Epic Trilogy about Globalization & Resistance in the Americas

The Beehive Design Collective, a nonprofit arts and activism organization dedicated to “cross-pollinating the grassroots,” is launching a Kickstarter campaign this month to fund the release of their much anticipated recently completed graphic, *Mesoamérica Resiste*. Supporting the project on Kickstarter will enable the Bees to print thousands of posters and dozens of banners, to tour with widely across the Americas and beyond in the coming year.

The Beehive is an all-volunteer swarm of educators, artists, and activists using images to communicate and educate about the complex realities of our times. The Bees craft visual metaphors, piecing them together into a patchwork quilt of images. The dizzyingly detailed, hand drawn, large-format posters and banners they tour with are portable murals that come alive through storytelling, illuminating how single issues are interconnected and part of bigger systems.

The *Mesoamérica Resiste* graphic illustrates stories of resistance, resilience, and solidarity from Mexico to Colombia. The intricately woven narrative documents contemporary tales of community opposition to mega-projects like super-highways, dams, and mines, while exploring the bigger historical picture of colonialism and the high stakes of today’s global economy. The Beehive uses metaphors from the natural world to connect social and environmental struggles, and celebrate cultural and ecological diversity. The cast of characters in the graphic includes over 500 endemic, endangered, and requested species of animals, plants, and insects from Mesoamerica.

Nine years in the making, this collaboratively produced illustration was created through an intensive and ongoing process of grassroots research. The project started with an initial team of Bees traveling from Mexico to Panama in 2004 to meet with communities directly impacted by large-scale infrastructure projects. The Beehive’s design and illustration process is also a team effort. Many hands have worked on conceptualizing, laying out, sketching, and inking the graphics.

Mesoamérica Resiste is the Beehive’s first two-sided poster. The poster folds to show a *conquistador’s* map of Mesoamerica - the outsider’s view, looking at the region from the top down. The poster opens up to reveal the view from below, from the grassroots: stories of communities protecting their homes and ecosystems, preserving traditional knowledge and histories, and exercising their collective power.

The Beehive hums with activity and has produced many other graphics, tackling big issues like globalization, colonialism, biotechnology, industrial agriculture, and climate change. Their body of work is anti-copyright. Individuals and organizations are encouraged to reproduce the graphics for nonprofit use. Grassroots fundraising and individual donations are what sustain this unique approach to activism!

For more information, and to view graphics and a video about the project, visit www.beehivecollective.org.

Press Releases & One Sheet - Brief Version

For immediate release

Contact

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Phone: 812-340-9981
Web: www.beehivecollective.org

The Beehive Collective Releases *Mesoamérica Resiste* The Final Graphic in an Epic Trilogy about Globalization in the Americas

A swarm is coming! The Beehive Design Collective, a non-profit arts and activism organization dedicated to “cross-pollinating the grassroots,” is heading this way to share their recently completed work, *Mesoamérica Resiste*. [add your event details here!] The event is free and open to the public.

The Beehive is an all-volunteer swarm of educators, artists, and activists using images to communicate and educate about the complex realities of our times. The dizzyingly detailed, hand-drawn, large-format posters and banners they tour with are portable murals that come alive through storytelling, illuminating how single issues are interconnected and part of bigger systems. Join in as the Bees deconstruct often overwhelming global issues in an engaging and interactive presentation, using metaphors from the natural world to connect social and environmental struggles.

Mesoamérica Resiste is the final installment in a trilogy of graphics about corporate globalization and militarization in the Americas. With this project the Bees’ strive to go beyond illustrating only the bad news to also sharing stories of grassroots organizing, collective action, and inspiration. The story begins with exploring the legacy of colonialism, connecting that history to today’s industrial development plans and resource extraction. The rest of the graphic documents many examples of resistance and alternatives to these top-down plans, especially organizing led by indigenous peoples. Celebrating the ecological diversity of Mesoamerica is also a goal of this graphics campaign, with a cast of characters that includes over 500 species of insects, animals, and plants.

This collaboratively produced, educational illustration was created through an intensive and ongoing process of grassroots research, starting with an initial team of Bees traveling from Mexico to Panama in 2004. After nine years in the making, the Bees are now touring and distributing the completed graphics widely as tools for storytelling, popular education, organizing, and movement building.

The Beehive depends on grassroots fundraising and individual donations to sustain this unique approach to activism! Posters and patches of graphics will be available for purchase by sliding scale donation.

For more information, visit www.beehivecollective.org.

Mesoamérica Resiste

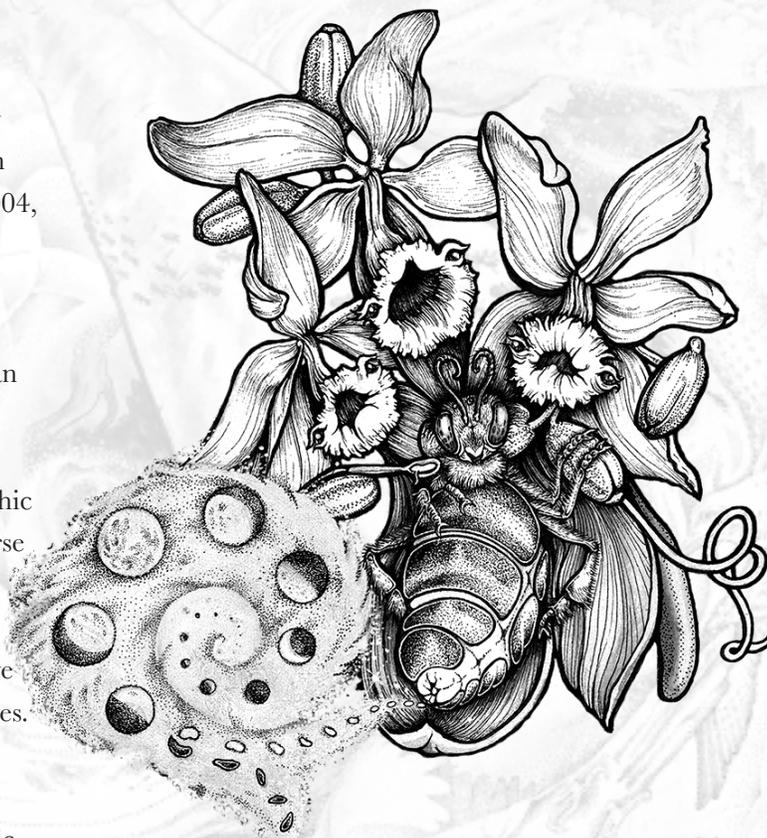
“The work of the Beehive Collective goes far beyond the traditional understanding of Solidarity. It is actively fostering equal exchanges and relationship building between communities that are involved in the same struggle for justice and democracy throughout the Western Hemisphere....The Beehive Collective are pioneers and their work is telling and effective.” - *Hendrik Voss, School of the Americas Watch Network Coordinator, Washington D.C.*

About the Project Mesoamérica Resiste is the long awaited final installment in the Beehive’s graphic trilogy about globalization in the Americas! This collaboratively produced educational illustration was created through an intensive process of grassroots research that started in 2004, when an initial team from the US, Canada, and Mexico traveled together from Mexico to Panama to meet with communities organizing against the megainfrastructure projects of a regional integration plan then known as Plan Puebla Panama.

Nine years in the making, the Mesoamérica Resiste graphic reflects the Beehive’s efforts to document and share diverse stories of communities defending their sovereignty and building alternatives to top-down development plans especially organizing led by indigenous peoples, who have fought back against colonialism and genocide for centuries.

Today, our planet is being transformed by extreme resource extraction, rapid industrialization, and economic globalization. With climate change compounding the high stakes, the exchange of stories and strategies is more important than ever to our collective survival.

Stories of social and environmental struggles are depicted through highly detailed drawings of over 500 unique species of plants, animals, and insects that are native to Mesoamerica, highlighting the immense importance of cultural and ecological diversity. The result is a visual tour de force, packed full of compelling and inspirational tales of resistance and resiliency in this era of immense change. Our hope in releasing this graphic into the world is that it



will live and evolve as a dynamic tool for organizing and educating about some of the most important issues of our times.

About us The Beehive Design Collective is a wildly-motivated, all-volunteer, activist-art collective dedicated to “cross-pollinating the grassroots” by creating collaborative, anti-copyright images for use as educational and organizing tools. We work anonymously as word-to-image translators of complex global stories, gathered and shared through first hand conversations with affected communities.

Reviews & Love Letters

“The work of the Beehive Collective goes far beyond the traditional understanding of Solidarity. It is actively fostering equal exchanges and relationship building between communities that are involved in the same struggle for justice and democracy throughout the Western Hemisphere. Their open and inclusive process and the incorporation of Latin American mythology into their work transcends borders and language barriers. The Beehive collective breaks away from traditional forms of education...The Beehive collective are pioneers and their work is telling and effective.”

- **Hendrik Voss**, *School of the Americas Watch Networking Coordinator, Washington D.C.*

“The Beehive Collective is one of the most inspiring political art collectives I have ever come across. I am a student of tropical entomology and conservation: my interest is motivated by the loss of tropical habitats as a result of profit incentives, accelerated by institutions and programs such as NAFTA, the WTO, Plan Colombia, [and] the World Bank, technologies such as biotechnology and the proposed CAFTA and FTAA...Their approach in using insects shows their respect for all forms of life, even the most tiniest creatures, and the impact these programs will have on them. The Beehive Collective is a unique, creative, and effective political arts collective that deserves all the support they can get.”- **Lisa Schonberg**, *Neotropical Entomologist, Drummer, Olympia Colombia Committee, Olympia, WA*

“All of us at the Grupo de Trabajo Colectivo del Istmo are excited about the coming PPP poster. One of the real benefits of the posters is that they are true popular education - no need to read English - or any language - to get the message.”- **Wendy**, *El Grupo de Trabajo Colectivo del Istmo, Mexico*

“Having written, directed, and acted in educational political performance art for seven years, I have never seen such an appealing graphic art presented with such integrity and diligence and respect for the audience. I also have produced news and public affairs radio for twelve years. I've told Boston's radio listeners about the Beehive Collective's gorgeous, intricate and diligent work. Their graphic medium conveys complex connections among social issues like a symphony of ideas. I cannot convey the same amount as appealingly with words on the airwaves. The Beehive Collective is creating an educational revolution in both art and classroom instruction.” - **John Grebe**, *WGBH radio, Boston, MA*



“That presentation made me pay attention and learn more useful information per square minute than any lecture ever could. There's something about illustrations that teaches more than words, spoken or written. Especially in history teaching, when most everything is factual, and the only thing that changes is the lens that you see it through. It was refreshingly the only lens that I haven't seen the situation through yet. This is the point of view that people need to know, that comes straight from the Colombian people, not just defiant hippies bravely defending civilians they've never met.” - **Margaret Siple**, *17, student at Garfield High School, Seattle, WA*

Frequently Asked Questions

Who/what is the Beehive Collective?

The Beehive Collective is a multi-faceted organism with many people and varied projects. Over the past 13 years we have expanded and evolved much more than we initially could have imagined!

The work that most people recognize us for is our large format posters - graphics that we use and offer to others as tools for educating and organizing. A committed group of mostly women, we collaborate to create visual narratives that break down and deconstruct complex and overwhelming global issues, turning them into a more digestible format that appeals to folks who might be alienated by high-brow lectures or books.

Since 2000, we have also been engaged in community organizing in Eastern Maine, notably by restoring the once-endangered Machias Valley Grange Hall. Built in 1905 and now on the National Register of Historic Places, this rural cultural center hosts a variety of events for all ages and demographics.

How did the project take shape?

The Beehive originally started as a stone mosaic cooperative. A large mosaic commission in eastern Maine brought together a group of activists and artists to start working together. This original group invested in restoring the Machias Valley Grange Hall, and planted the seeds that turned into the Beehive. Soon the focus of our group shifted from mosaics to illustration, as early posters and bumper stickers we made about biotechnology gave way to more intensive campaigns around other complex themes. Mosaics and our graphics have much in common -- they are both forms of murals that tell stories, made up of lots of little pieces.

We still joke that we are making it up as we go, and that we are more of an organism than an organization. Our work often takes on a life of its own, and is bigger than any one of us! Not only is our work not intended for the expert

audiences we're certainly not experts ourselves. Trial and error, but mostly trial and success (and lots of hard work) is the story of how the Beehive and its many facets came to life.

How many people are in the Beehive Collective?

Well, that depends on which way you count them! People relate to and participate in the Hive in a variety of ways. We have a base in eastern Maine, but we are also a decentralized swarm, and not everyone lives in Maine, or lives in Maine year-round. There are usually about 15 worker Bees actively involved in the collective at any given time, which includes full-time, core Bees, as well as part-time or "autonomous Bees". We distinguish the core as Bees who are based out of our collective house in Machias, ME and who spend the bulk of their waking hours (and sometimes sleeping hours too!) trying their hardest to make our vision of the Beehive a reality. Autonomous Bees also put a lot of their life energy into the collective, just usually from a distance and in a "custom-fit" sort of way. We also have Bee-advisors (the folks we go to when we need a reality check) and a network of Bee-alumni (folks who have helped shape this project in some way, and have moved on, but who sometimes still help out now and then).

And then there are all the dozens of part-time volunteers and "wannabee" apprentices that chip in at various points throughout the year - our Hive tends to swell in the summer months. It's impossible to define ourselves without including the contributions of so many individuals. Often times folks seem to fall from the sky in our darkest hours illustrating a section of a poster, or pitching in to help us complete a gargantuan DIY building restoration project.

What's the process of designing the graphics?

The graphics are designed through a multi-step process. First, we research the issues by gathering stories and facts from as close to the source as possible. During our research and listening trips, we visit with lots of different communities who are impacted by the issues we're

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depicting. We dialogue with community leaders, educators, women's groups, farmers, organizers, botanists, entomologists...sharing our work, learning about theirs, and collaborating on shaping the narrative of the graphics. This process yields a massive amount of personal anecdotes, stories, and statistical information. We pour over these for long hours, stay up late talking, and make lots of mind-maps that explore all the overlapping themes and connections between the stories. We brainstorm animal, insect, and plant metaphors based on what folks tell us with people about where they live and how they want to be depicted, and we begin the graphic design process, filling up many sketchbooks with early drafts of drawings. Our illustration process is highly collaborative too. Many hands work on drawing and inking a graphic, often in multiple studios with rotating teams of illustrators working on it at different points.

Where does the Beehive generally appear and show their work?

The Beehive hits the road at least twice a year for speaking tours in North America, in the spring and fall, sometimes with multiple touring teams in different regions. These tours in the North usually double as fundraisers for our projects, though sometimes our tours are more focused on movement-building and collaborating with specific groups. We accept donations at our events, but it's important to us that our presentations are free and open to the public. We build our fundraising tours around venues that have capacity to offer honorariums for our presentations and workshops, such as universities and colleges, conferences, and performance venues. However we go out of our way to schedule free events at middle schools or high schools, public parks, and community spaces along the way. We also frequently attend large mobilizations and social forums.

We have the goal of distributing about half of our posters for free to front-line communities, especially to communities in the global South and the regions where the stories in our graphics come from, which is subsidized by our speaking

tours and donations received in the North. One of our Bees is based in Colombia, and other Bees and Bee friends can often be found traveling in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. We've collaborated with folks in Europe to do events and tours there, and sometimes we get the chance to go other places...including Australia, India and Iceland! Everywhere we go we encourage others to become pollinators of our graphics, so our posters have also traveled far without us...We love it when people send us photos of poster sightings in out-of-the-way places!

What reaction do you get from people experiencing your work?

The reaction we've gotten to our work is overwhelmingly positive. It shows us that there's a real thirst for creating alternative education strategies. What's most valuable, though, is the enthusiasm that comes from the communities and struggles whose stories we are trying to amplify. To us, it means we're doing something right. In our experience, even folks who don't agree with all the content of our graphics regard them with a certain amount of respect, and appreciate the research and skill that has gone into making them.

What is it like visiting high schools and talking to students about your work?

We consider speaking with younger students very rewarding! They're often our most inquisitive and interactive audiences. What's special about shows in the public education circuit is that we find ourselves presenting a bunch of information that kids are usually not lucky enough to learn about through their institution. This doesn't mean they aren't informed, though! We're often surprised about how much the story unravels itself in discussion, without us having to interpret. Teachers, too, are also happy to be able to have a group that is presenting current political, social, and economic affairs in an unusual and creative way that really grabs students' attention.

The imagery looks so consistent, is it really just one

Frequently Asked Questions

person drawing?

A very common question! Most people assume that there's a single star artist hiding in the folds of this "collective" rhetoric. In truth, many workers spend long hours in crafting our graphics. Some do line-work, some shade. If a bee has a knack for illustrating plants, they'll work on the flora and fauna that is interspersed through the graphic. The image is layered in this way, like group production of a comic book, with different bees doing different tasks. That is how it creates a well-orchestrated, some would say uniform, texture. Sometimes our illustrators can only stay for a night and then they're gone, leaving behind a starry sky or cluster of trees.

How does the Hive sustain itself?

"Your donations are the only source of our honey!" is emblazoned on some of our tabling placards. The entire operation is amazingly funded entirely through the generosity of donations in exchange for posters, and honey we get as speaker fees - though we are starting to receive grants for our local work. However, we seldom capture the attention of grant foundations as our methodology is often considered too "outside of the box." Political grant foundations dismiss us as "art" and art foundations direct us back towards the political grantors. We are not particularly troubled by not meeting the constraints of foundations - it strengthens our resolve that we've come this far, keeps us very self-sufficient and is a positive indicator that we're onto something unique and dynamic.

What is in the Beehive's future?

As far as what our next big graphics project will be, we can't say just yet... Right now we're most focused on building our capacity to distribute and tour with the Mesoamerica Resiste graphics campaign, which includes collaborations with organizers and educators throughout the Americas. The nine year process of birthing this graphic has been one of the most humbling and instructive experiences in our collective lives!

Many of our Bees are excited about doing more residencies and hands-on projects and workshops with groups. We are always interested in hearing proposals and requests, and sometimes we have Bees available to take on smaller graphics projects.

We are also digging into more collaborative local work at our Hive in downeast Maine, working with many groups in town to build a new community arts center, contribute to downtown restoration efforts, and support local food systems.

