the True Cost of Coal

PRESS KIT

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Greetings!

First and foremost, thank you for your interest in the work we do! The Beehive is a wildly motivated, all-volunteer, art-activist collective that has gained international attention for its collaborativel produced graphics campaigns focused on globalization, resource extraction and stories of resistance. Our mission is to “cross-pollinate the grassroots” by creating, collaborative, anti-copyright images for use as education and organizing tools.

The graphic campaigns of the Beehive Collective are the product of interviews and exchanges focused on the globally pertinent issues of our time: from struggles for sovereignty and widespread indigenous resistance in Latin America, to the impacts of climate change and fossil fuel extraction, to ecosystem-shattering industrial development, and much more. Extensive travel and dialogue with communities directly affected by the myriad faces of corporate globalization forms the source of the stories, history, and inspiration that comprise our imagery. This gathered information is then woven together and converted to drawings to create the intricate quilt of our visual narratives. The result is a circuit of progressions and contrasts, entirely hand-illustrated that inform and engage the viewer throughout their navigation of the graphic.

Over the past 10 years of our life as an organization, we have produced graphic material on many subjects and have grown organically into a multifaceted organism. We would love to tell you about all the different aspects of our work; however we cannot fit the entirety of who we are into one simple document. For more information about the history of the Beehive and our past work on globalization in the Americas, please review the Dismantling Monoculture press kit on the “Press” page of our website.

This press kit is specifically designed to provide information about our recently released The True Cost of Coal graphic campaign, an elaborate narrative illustration that explores the complex story of mountaintop removal coal mining and the broader impacts of coal in Appalachia and throughout the world. Just off the press, it is our first graphic to address the themes of resource extraction and land-based struggle within the borders of the United States. Teeming with intricate images of plants and animals from the most bio-diverse temperate forest on the planet, The True Cost of Coal is the culmination of two years of an intensive and collaborative research process. The resulting image is the narrative of these stories, histories, statistics, and anecdotes as told to us throughout our travels in Appalachia.

In these pages you will find an explanation of our project and how the work was created, as well as a bit of background on the larger Beehive. Also enclosed is our contact information, press release materials, and visuals that correspond to our graphic campaigns and picture lecture tours. Enjoy! And don’t hesitate to contact us for more information!
CONTENTS

I. About the Project

II. Reviews & Love Letters

III. Press Releases & One Sheets

IV. Frequently Asked Questions
I. ABOUT THE PROJECT

The True Cost of Coal is a narrative illustration developed over 2 ½ years of interviews, discussions, story-tellings, and song-sharing between the Beehive Collective and community organizers, activists, and folks in the Appalachian Mountains whose lives and livelihoods have been impacted by coal and Mountaintop Removal mining (MTR), one of the most devastating environmental catastrophes of our times.

These exchanges of inspiration and information were collaboratively woven together into a tapestry of hand-illustrated graphics, designed to strengthen and support genuine dialogue, critical reflection, and strategic action in defense of the Appalachian Mountains and the cultural and biological diversity they nurture. Printed on large format banners and wall-sized paper posters, the graphic is an educational tool designed for classrooms, libraries, church basements, street protests, and dorm rooms. Beehive Collective members travel throughout the western hemisphere with supporting educational materials and a dynamic, engaging, interactive presentation, bringing the graphic to life for audiences while “cross-pollinating the grassroots” with Appalachian history, critical analysis, complex questions, and always a silver lining of humor and hope! Ultimately, the Bees share stories of resistance, resiliency, and regeneration inspired by the robust courage of coalfield residents who live the daily reality of Mountaintop Removal.

All Beehive Collective graphics are anti-copyright, collaborative endeavors that rely on compelling cartoons of plants and animals to break down complex issues into digestible bites. We avoid the use of both text and of human characters, to make our images accessible regardless of literacy and language and to draw attention to the interconnectedness of social justice and ecological issues. In The True Cost of Coal, over 100 distinct plant and animal species endemic to the Appalachian region are featured, highlighting the irreplaceable diversity and wealth of the most ancient mountains on earth.

Appalachian coalfield organizers have worked tirelessly for decades to bring MTR to national consciousness and to stop the practice from decimating more mountains, waterways, and communities downstream. The Beehive Collective contributes a unique superpower to these efforts- a visual strategy for depicting both the big these efforts- a visual strategy for depicting both the big picture of climate change, overconsumption and globalization while simultaneously honoring the small, human-scale stories of loss and survival that are never visible in dramatic, overwhelming aerial photographs of open pit mines. The True Cost of Coal raises difficult questions and depicts hard truths without through a medium that opens up dialogue in coal-impacted and coal-consuming communities alike and makes space for changes of heart and, ultimately, changes of power.

At its root, The True Cost of Coal is an exploration of energy and power. Who benefits from MTR? Who pays for it? What difference would it make to imagine generating our energy, instead of extracting it? What would it mean to think of power not in terms of domination and control and military might, but in terms of our ability to contribute to our communities and provide enough for everyone without sacrificing any place to wholesale destruction and toxification? With over 50% of all electricity consumed in the US coming from coal, the graphic implicates all of us in the destruction of the mountains while demanding system change - not just lightbulb change! - to honor and protect the mountains.
"The coal industry has done a really good job of not only reframing the MTR issue, but really co-opting and hijacking the issue away from the true self interest of the people of Appalachia. What’s unique about this project and what makes it so important to social change is that through art, [they are] creating a tool that will circumvent what the industry is trying to do. [They] are redirecting the frame of Friends of Coal, who say the identity of the people is only mining coal, who ignore the strength of self-sustaining mountain people.” –Patty Torquino, KY Coalfield Community Organizer

“There are seven hundred different people working on social and environmental change in the region that can quote statistics, share personal stories, use documentary film and audio to depict MTR and issues in the region, but the Bees are the only ones who have found a medium that tells different perspectives of this story in a way that does not polarize the audience. This medium is a very important tool for dialogue around mountain top removal issues and could also work for generating dialogue and understanding around other social issues in the region.”

-Cassie Robinson, Appalachian Studies Association, Pine Mountain Settlement School

“Appalachians have been silenced and ignored for so long that we no longer need someone else to do this- we keep ourselves silenced from habit. The True Cost of Coal image gave my voice back. It validated my perspectives and understandings of my surroundings that I thought were betrayal.”

-Tanya Bernice Turner, Native of Pineville, KY, Mountian Justice Organizer

“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 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 can not 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
For immediate release

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The Beehive Collective releases their innovative graphic, "The True Cost of Coal:"
a visual exploration of Mountaintop Removal coal mining and Resistance

A swarm is coming! The Beehive Design Collective is heading this way to release their long-anticipated "True Cost of Coal" graphics campaign!

Two years in the making, "The True Cost of Coal" is an elaborate narrative illustration that explores the complex story of mountaintop removal coal mining and the broader impacts of coal in Appalachia and beyond. The image is the culmination of an intensive and collaborative research process, as the Beehive methodology centers on first hand story-sharing. To create the poster, the Beehive interviewed hundreds of community members throughout the Appalachia region. "We feel it's extremely important to gather our information from as close to the source as possible," a Beehive illustrator says.

The Bees craft visual metaphors and weave them together in a patchwork "quilt" of personal stories. In their interactive picture-lectures, the Bees lead audiences through an engaging, larger-than-life banner version of the graphic, interweaving anecdotes, statistics, and history. The experience prompts discussion and understanding of contemporary struggles about energy and coal, while honoring the deep legacy of the Appalachian experience. Upon seeing the graphic, Tanya Turner of Pineville, KY said, "'The True Cost of Coal' image gave my voice back. It validated my perspectives and understandings of my surroundings that I thought were betrayal."

"The True Cost of Coal" is only the latest work in the Beehive’s repertoire of graphics campaigns. The Beehive hums with activity, tackling issues as diverse as biotechnology, corporate globalization, food and agriculture, and colonialism. The group’s mission is to "cross-pollinate the grassroots" by creating images that educate the public and deconstruct complex geopolitical issues. Their body of work is distributed as "anti-copyright;" individuals and organizations are encouraged to reproduce the graphics for non-profit use as a means of circulating information and awareness.

The Beehive Collective is currently booking a nation-wide tour to distribute the graphic. For more information and to view the graphics visit [www.beehivecollective.org](http://www.beehivecollective.org) OR [beehivecollective.blogspot.com](http://beehivecollective.blogspot.com).
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The Beehive’s picture-lectures prompt discussion and understanding of contemporary struggles about energy and coal, while honoring the deep legacy of the Appalachian experience. Upon seeing the graphic, Tanya Turner of Pineville, KY said, “‘The True Cost of Coal’ image gave my voice back. It validated my perspectives and understandings of my surroundings that I thought were betrayal.”

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The True Cost of Coal: Mountaintop Removal and the Fight for Our Future

“The Bees and organizations they are working with changed my life. This image is changing Appalachia. Appalachians are taking back Appalachia and this image is a tool for that change.”

—Tanya Turner, Native of Pineville, KY Mountain Justice Volunteer Organizer

About the project: Long exploited as a resource-extraction colony within the US, the Appalachian Mountains are home to a fight for survival whose outcome will determine in part the industrial might of this country. Our insatiable demand for cheap power has lead to the most extreme, devastating form of coal mining yet—Mountaintop Removal (MTR). The TRUE COST OF COAL graphic is an elaborate narrative illustration that visually explores the interconnections between of ENERGY, RESOURCE EXTRACTION, CLIMATE CHANGE and of GRASSROOTS RESILIENCY.

Teeming with intricate images of plants and animals from the most bio-divers temperate forest on the planet, the TRUE COST OF COAL is the culmination of two years of an intensive and collaborative research process. To create the graphic, the Beehive interviewed hundreds of community members through the Appalachian region. The image is a patchwork “quilt” of anecdotes, statistics, and history that strives to share stories of how coal mining and mountaintop removal affects communities and ecosystems throughout Appalachia and beyond.

The TRUE COST OF COAL will challenge all of us who casually flip on a light switch to examine our own connections to MTR—and to think about what we can do to stop it from within our own communities.

About us: The Beehive Design Collective is a wildly-motivated, all-volunteer, art-activist 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 through conversations with affected communities.

We distribute educational graphics through the Americas entirely by grassroots, hand-to-hand distribution. Our graphics, workshops, and presentations tackle issues from globalization, trade and resource extraction to energy, biotechnology, and climate change.

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Who/what is the Beehive Collective?

The Beehive Collective is a multi-faceted organism with many people and varied projects. Over the past 10 years we have grown and evolved a heck of a lot!

The work that most people recognize us for is our posters—these are a graphic approach to alternative 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 political/social issues, turning them into a more digestible format that appeals to folks who might be alienated by hi-brow lectures or books.

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

How did the project take shape?

The Collective at first had no resemblance to what it is now. Springing from a large stone mosaic commission, a small group of bees created a seed in eastern Maine, and when the root took hold, graphic campaigns ensued. Early posters and bumper stickers about biotechnology gave way to more intensive campaigns against larger unifying themes. If it sounds like magic, in a way it is— we still joke that we are making it up as we go, and the evolution of our bee organism, from the onset, had a life of its own! 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 how you count! People relate to and participate in the Hive in a variety of degrees. Currently, we are about 14 workerbees strong, with 6 full-time core bees and 6 or 7 part-time or “autonomous bees.” We distinguish this ‘core’ as bees who are based out of our collective house in Machias, ME and who spend the bulk of their wakening 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 bee-alumni (folks who have helped shape this project in someway and moved on to new projects).

And then there all the dozens of part-time volunteers and “wannabee” apprentices that chip in at various points throughout the year.

It’s impossible to define ourselves without including the contributions from 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 d.i.y. building restoration project.

(more questions continued on the following page)
What’s the process of designing the graphics?

The graphics are designed through a multi-step process. First, we research the issues by obtaining stories and facts from as close to the source as possible. During investigative travels (for example, from Mexico to Panamá to inform our upcoming graphic) we conduct extensive interviews with community members. We collaborate on shaping the story and depicting its parts through dialogue with community leaders, teachers, women’s groups, farmers, organizers, botanists, and entomologists. The sum of our interview process yields a massive framework of personal anecdotes, stories, and statistical information. We pore over these for long hours and fit them into a working mind-map that exposes the connections between the stories. The points where they overlap and interact are literally visible. From here, we incorporate people’s suggested animal or insect metaphors of their situations and begin the graphic design process. Our illustration process is collaborative too, and the poster travels where it needs to go to have workerbees draw on it.

Where does the Beehive generally appear and show their work?

In the U.S. and other parts of the so-called “first world”, the Beehive hits the road twice a year for long speaking tours, which often double as fundraisers for our projects. We visit universities and colleges, community centers, and performance venues as a part of this. Often times when we’re hosted in a town, we try to schedule free events at local middle or high schools, or in public parks. We are also a presence at large mobilizations, demonstrations, and social forums.

When bees travel in Latin America our presentations are always free and public, as homage and thanksgiving to places and people who are the origin of our work. We have the goal of distributing 50% of our posters at no cost to communities, subsidized by our speaking tours and donations received in the north. As in the North, we are in attendance at massive rallies, demonstrations, and social forums.

What reaction do you get from people experiencing your work?

The reaction we’ve gotten to our work is overwhelmingly, dare we say exclusively, positive. It shows us that there’s a real thirst for creating alternative education strategies. What’s most valuable, though, is the approval 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 the content of our graphics regard them with a certain amount of respect.

What’s 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 about corporate mercenaries and war for oil, 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 way that really grabs students’ attention.

(more questions continued on the following page)
The imagery looks so consistent, is it really just one 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, very 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 a comic book, with different bees doing different tasks. That’s 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, tho we are starting to get a bit better at writing grants. 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 towards back towards the political grantors. It’s unfortunate that our project is so unique, as we wish there could be more of a visual landscape exploring these issues! It makes our work all the more necessary in creating an alternative technique for critical dialogue about issues. We are not particularly troubled by not meeting the constraints of foundations—it strengthens our resolve that we’ve come this far, and is a positive indicator that we’re onto something new and dynamic.

What’s in the Beehive’s future?

Well, we have just finished our latest project, “The True Cost of Coal,” an elaborate narrative illustration that explores the complex story of mountaintop removal coal mining and the broader impacts of coal in Appalachia and throughout the world. Just off the press, it is our first graphic to address the themes of resource extraction and land-based struggle within the borders of the United States. Much of our next year will be devoted getting this graphic back in to the hands of coalfield communities to use in their organizing efforts. We will also be working to focus and expand our relationship with educators of all sorts in an effort make this an even more powerful teaching tool. We will be developing supporting educational materials for this graphic to help integrate it into teaching curriculum for folks of all educational approaches.

Our other main focus is on finishing our most epic work to date, our Beehive doctoral thesis if you will, on globalization in the Americas, Mesoamerica Resisté. Seven years in the making, the process of birthing this graphic has been one of the most humbling and instructive experiences in our collective lives. With over 400 different plant and animal species depicted, it is by far and away our most elaborate and detailed graphic and will likely be our magnum opus when it is completed.

Once it is printed, our first priority is to return it to the people of Latin America on a speaking tour. We then hope to work to develop some comprehensive, visual educational materials about corporate globalization and colonialism.

After that, it’s hard to see too much further into the future. We still have a lot of visioning and on-going organizational housekeeping to about all the aspects of our work. We Bees are still very much making this path by walking it, but we promise that you’ll find out what our next step is as soon as we do!