

MATERIALS

Papel Picado Using Scissors

- scissors
- colored tissue paper
- string
- glue stick

Papel Picado Using an Art Knife

- art knife (X-Acto with triangular blade is preferred)
- colored tissue paper
- glue stick
- scissors
- stapler
- string
- pattern

RESOURCES

- Smithsonian Latino Center. Day of the Dead Resources, including lesson plans <http://latino.si.edu/dayofthedead/>
- The Aztecs and the Day of the Dead, Part 1 <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/home/dayof-the-dead-1>
- The Aztecs and the Day of the Dead, Part 2 <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/home/dayof-the-dead-2>

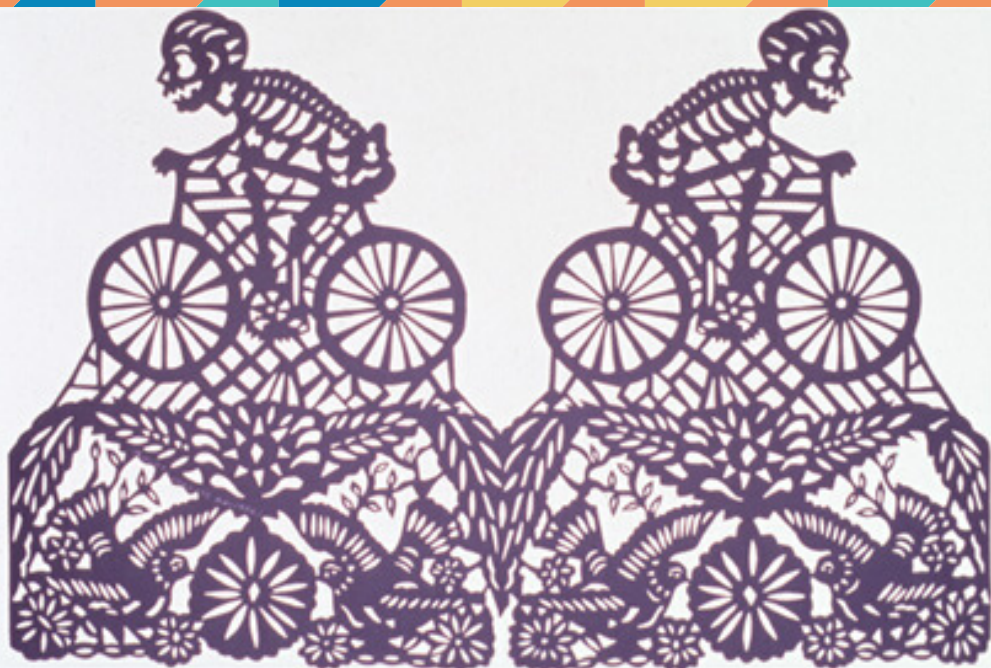
VOCABULARY (Definitions on page 6)

- **Folk Art / Crafts**
- **Craftsman**
- **Tissue paper**
- **Paper-cutting**
- **Pattern**
- **Workshop**
- **Chisel**
- **Amate**

NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS

STANDARDS

- **Creating:** Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- **Presenting:** Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- **Responding:** Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- **Connecting:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



Ciclistas Calaveras by Catalina Delgado Trunk

Papel Picado / Cut Paper Banners

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Christopher Gibson

INTRODUCTION

Papel Picado literally means “punched” or “perforated” paper. This traditional cut paper folk art is found throughout Mexico and the former colonies of Spain, as well as in the folk traditions of many other countries.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the history and development of the papel picado tradition in Mexico and its origins in Pre-Columbian, Asian, and European cut paper traditions and how papel picado banners relate to the older traditions (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about the materials and designs used to create papel picado banners and methods of construction (perceiving, analyzing, and responding).
- To design and create Mexican papel picado banners and develop solutions to design problems through the use of line, form, combinations of color symmetry, repetition and variation of pattern (creating and performing).

MOTIVATION

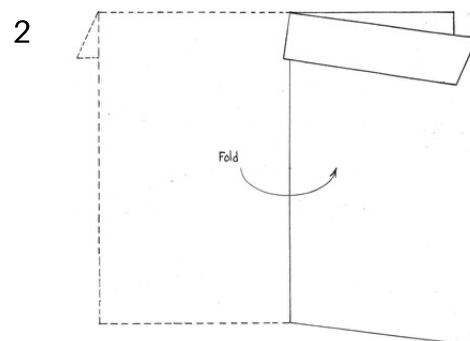
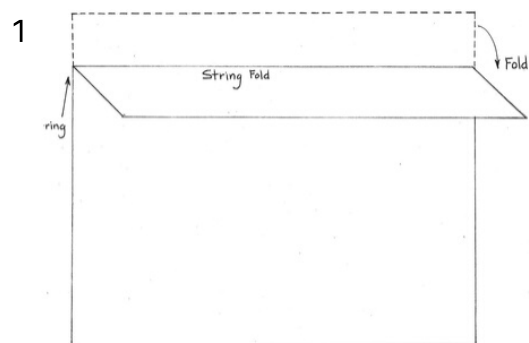
- Show students examples of Mexican papel picado (artifacts, photos or slides).
- Discuss the history of paper-cutting in Mexico. Discuss how paper and paper-cutting designs have Native and foreign origins.
- Explain that you are going to make papel picado banners. Ask the following questions: What materials are used in making papel picado? For which holidays are papel picado banners created? What kind of designs would you like to use?

PROCEDURE

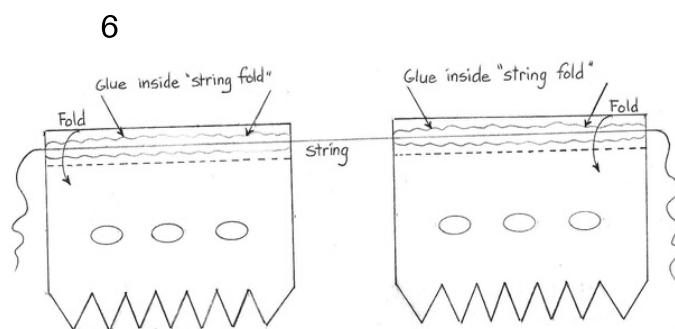
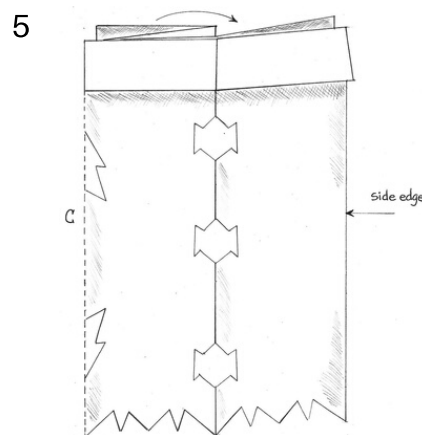
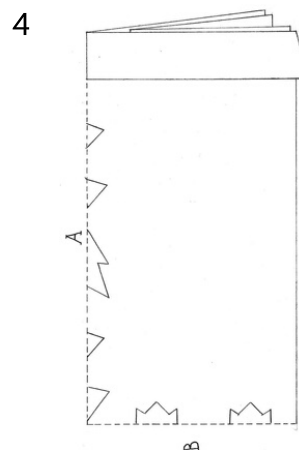
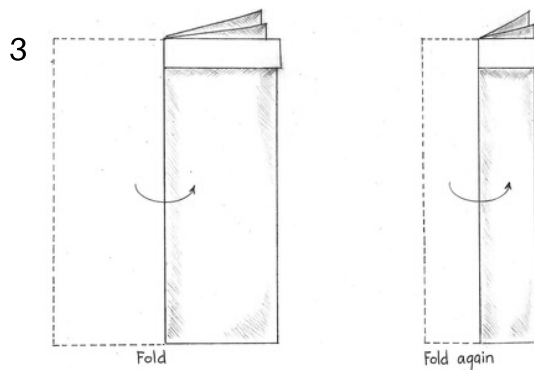
Making Papel Picado Using Scissors



1. Place your tissue paper in front of you so that the longest side is at the top. From the top of the paper fold down approximately one inch and form a crease. This first fold is called the “string fold”. The string will be glued inside this fold when you are finished cutting the paper. You must always remember to keep this fold in sight so as not to cut through it.
2. Turn your tissue paper over so that the “string fold” is facing down on the table. Bring the upper left edge over to the upper right edge and fold the paper in half forming a crease down the center.



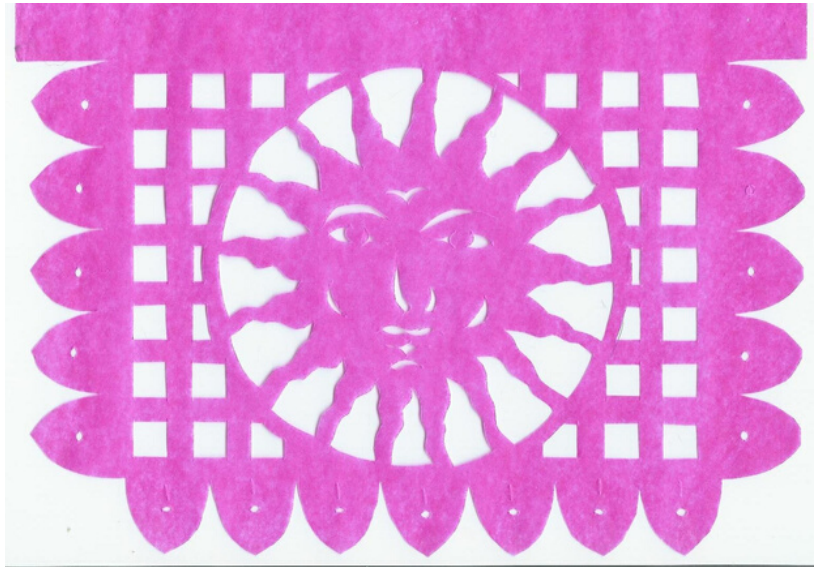
3. Repeat the process of folding the paper in half lengthwise two more times, aligning and creasing the edges each time you fold
4. Cut notches along side edge (A) and bottom edge (B) being certain to leave space between the cuts. For best control over the materials, sit up straight with the paper and scissors at eye level and rotate the paper rather than the scissors. It is advisable to provide small children with round-tip scissors.
5. Unfold the paper once to expose the side edges (C) and cut notches along this edge. Repeat this process with each of the side edges remembering to not cut through the "string fold".
6. When you have finished cutting all your notches carefully unfold the banner leaving the "string edge" folded. Repeat steps 1 through 6 until you have 5 - 6 small banners cut from tissue.
7. Once you have completed your cutouts you will then glue them to a piece of string. Lay your cut outs face down on a table in the order that you would like them to hang. Make certain that the "string fold" is facing up. Measure and cut the string so that it is about 4 feet longer than the length of your paper banners. The best method is to stretch your string leaving a foot or more of spare string hanging down on both sides. Take your glue stick and carefully swipe it down both sides of the interior of the "string fold". Holding both edges of the "string fold" place the cut paper over the string so that it fits in the crease. Using your thumb and forefinger run your hand down both sides of the crease so that the paper adheres to itself. Repeat this process with each of your cutouts leaving a space of about 2-3 inches between each sheet of paper. Think about color combinations and contrast as you hang each sheet.



PROCEDURE

Making Papel Picado Using an Art Knife

This process is much more complex than working with scissors and involves using a very sharp instrument. It is best recommended for secondary school and adult education.



El Sol - Christopher Gibson

1. Take one of the designs created for this lesson plan (you can also create your own pattern) and place it over ten sheets of colored tissue paper cut to the same size. Staple the corners and the center edge of each side so that all the sheets in the stack are firmly attached.
2. Holding the art knife between your thumb and forefinger (as you would a pencil) begin to carefully cut through the multiple layers of paper removing the negative space portion of the design. Remove the smallest portions of the design first and work from the center of the design outwards.
3. When all of the negative space has been cut from the design, cut the scallops on the outside edge and remove the staples which hold the multiple images together.
4. Once you have completed your cutouts, you will then glue them to a piece of string. Lay your cut outs face down on a table in the order that you would like them to hang. Make certain that the "string fold" is facing up. Measure and cut the string so that it is about 4 feet longer than the length of your paper banners. The best method is to stretch your string, leaving a foot or more of spare string hanging down on both sides. Take your glue stick and carefully swipe it down both sides of the interior of the "string fold". Holding both edges of the "string fold", place the cut paper over the string so that it fits in the crease. Using your thumb and forefinger, run your hand down both sides of the crease so that the paper adheres to itself. Repeat this process with each of your cutouts leaving a space of about two to three inches between each sheet of paper. Think about color combination and contrast as you hang each sheet.

EVALUATION

Hang the papel picado banners together in the classroom or schoolyard. Discuss the different solutions that the students developed for cutting, gluing, and arranging the color combinations of their paper banners. Ask the following questions: How did you arrive at this design? How did you decide on patterns of alternating colors? How does the size of the cuts affect the overall design? Invite the students to demonstrate papel picado techniques to another class. Discuss other materials (new or recycled) that might be used to create banners. Have the class experiment with other paper folding techniques.

CONNECTIONS & EXTENTIONS

Science

The use of paper is fundamental to the papel picado craft tradition. Investigate how paper is made. What materials are used to make various kinds of paper? How are the raw materials processed? What chemical processes are involved? How do the paper fibers adhere together? How are the paper fibers woven or matted?

Investigate ecological issues related to paper. What impact has the production and use of paper had on the natural environment? What are people doing today to counter any negative impacts the production and use of paper has had on delicate ecosystems? Are there any alternatives to the use of paper in papel picado such as plastic? What are the pros and cons of such alternatives?

Math

Introduce, practice, and perfect measuring skills in the creation of papel picado projects. Relate the folding of sheets of paper to whole numbers, fractions, and division. Identify factors of the numbers used in measuring and folding. Create math problems and solutions utilizing the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Identify and describe geometric shapes created in the production of papel picado. Identify and measure any angles used in papel picado projects. Measure the various sides of the papel picado projects to determine their area and perimeter. Identify, describe, and label sides of the papel picado as rays, lines, and line segments.

Art

Research the wide variety of paper-making techniques practiced around the world. Create homemade paper with a assortment of materials such as old cotton rags, old newspaper, recycled paper bags, laundry lint, and plant fibers such as cornhusk. Use the homemade paper for papel picado projects.

Research traditional cut paper designs. Reproduce these designs on the homemade paper or create original designs suitable for a wide variety of celebrations. Cut the designs with scissors or with art knives. Try folding the designs in order to score the paper and then tearing them to create a rustic or primitive look to the banners.

Investigate the use of dyes in paper production. Create dyes using natural pigments such as ground minerals, plant materials such as flower petals, and even insects such as cochinitilla. Use the natural dyes to color commercially produced or handmade paper.

Social Studies

Research the history and use of paper in Mexico as the focus of a report.

Investigate the cultural impact of papel picado on the regions where it is produced and on areas to which the use of papel picado has been exported such as Hispanic neighborhoods in the United States.

CONNECTIONS & EXTENTIONS

Describe transcultural influences on the development of papel picado such as the synthesis of Mexican indigenous paper cutting traditions with those brought by the Spanish.

Discuss the decline or the continuing development of papel picado in Mexico and the United States as communities evolve. How has the use of papel picado changed in response to the adoption of non-traditional holidays in Mexico, such as Halloween along the Mexico-U.S. border? What impact have these changes had on traditional practitioners of the craft?

Discuss parallel changes on the U.S. side of the border where papel picado is used to celebrate traditional Mexican holidays as well as U.S. festivities associated with Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and St. Patrick's Day.

Language Arts

Develop vocabulary lists related to the art of papel picado. Discuss the origins and meanings of terms such as "paper" (from "papyrus"). Make a list of cognates to help English Language Learners gain maximum comprehension. Post new vocabulary on Four Blocks Word Walls. Integrate Six Trait Writing characteristics into all writing activities.

Write, illustrate, and share original stories relating to the history, production, or use of papel picado in Mexico or other regions of the world. Display the stories in the school media center or in the classroom library. Record the stories in English and in Spanish. Create and perform dramatizations of the stories to the class or to the school at large. Post these stories on the school's website.

VOCABULARY

Folk art: Is of, by, and for the people; all people, inclusive of class, status, culture, community, ethnicity, gender, and religion. May be decorative or utilitarian. May be used every day or reserved for high ceremonies.

Craftsman: a person who is skilled in a particular craft.

Tissue paper: Thin, translucent paper used for wrapping or for protecting delicate articles and is also used to create different crafts such as papel picado and paper flowers.

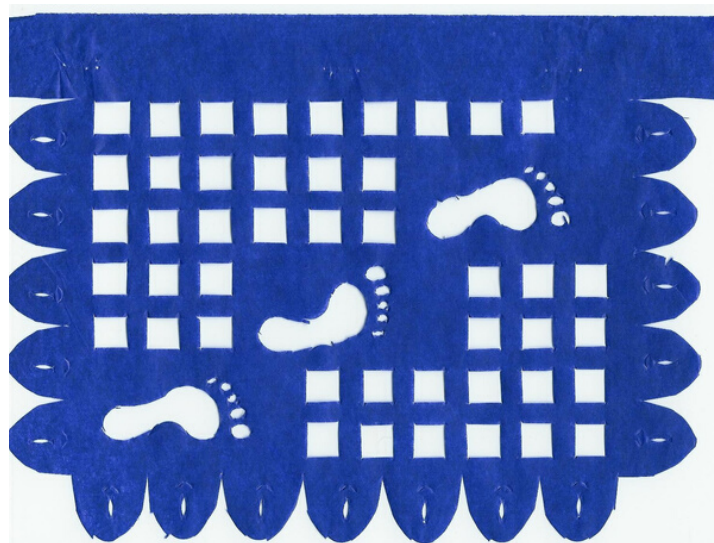
Paper-cutting: is the art of paper designs. The art has evolved uniquely all over the world to adapt to different cultural styles.

Workshop: a room or building in which manufacturing or handicrafts are carried on.

Amate: from Nahuatl language: āmatl, is a type of bark paper made from fig or mulberry bark. This paper has been manufactured in Mexico since the precontact times.

Pattern: a repeated decorated design use a guide to transfer a design into other pieces.

Chisel: a long-bladed hand tool with a beveled cutting edge and a plain handle that is struck with a hammer or mallet, used to cut or shape materials.



Las Huellas de los inmigrantes Desconocidos - Christopher Gibson

Papel Picado

Papel Picado literally means “punched” or “perforated” paper. This traditional cut paper folk art is found throughout Mexico and the former colonies of Spain, as well as in the folk traditions of many other countries.

In Mexico the art has reached the pinnacle of expression. *Papel picado* can be found at every major holiday in the form of brightly colored cut tissue paper banners strung under the portals of homes and across the narrow streets of colonial villages. Banners of *papel picado* are charming announcements bearing messages on topics both sacred and profane. They are found at all celebrations such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. They are also present at all national holidays such as the Day of the Dead, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christmas, and Independence Day.

The materials of *papel picado* are ephemeral. *Papel picado* banners will disintegrate in less than a month if left out in the sun, wind, and rain. Therefore, few historic examples of this folk art exist.

The Mexican art of paper-cutting is a marvelous synthesis of European, Asian, and Pre-Columbian artistic traditions. For 500 years the arts of paper-making and paper-cutting were confined to China. Historical writings name Ts'ai Lun, a Chinese court official, as the inventor of paper in AD 105. Paper-making and cutting made its way to Japan around 610 and Central Asia by 750. The Moors, who occupied Spain from 714 to 1492, traded with faraway China. The Moors introduced paper-making and paper-cutting to the Iberian Peninsula, establishing a paper-making mill in 1150. In observance of the religious law against graven images Islamic paper-cutting was primarily based on geometric and calligraphic expressions of scripture.



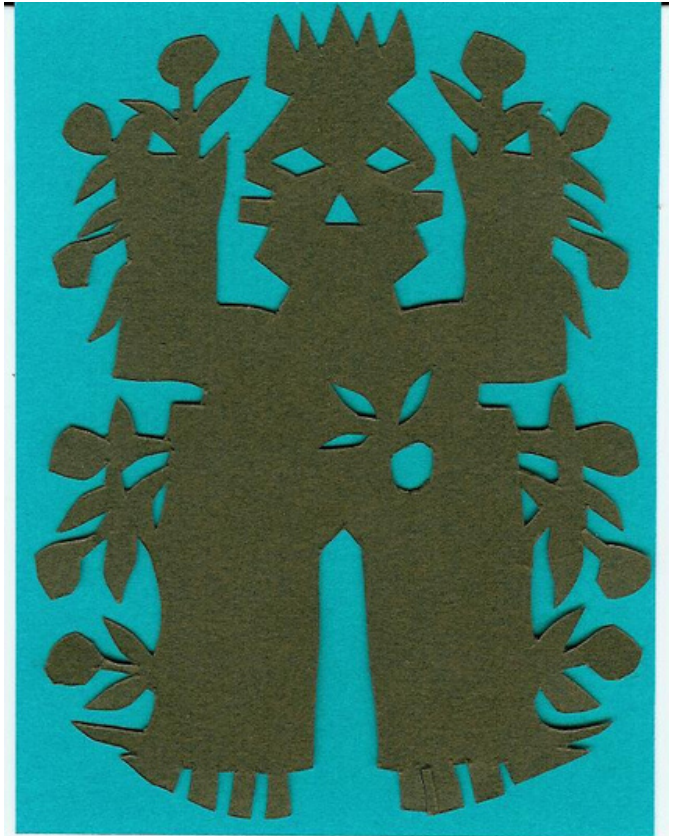
Calavera Catrina – Catalina Delgado-Trunk



Papel picado banners – Christopher Gibson

In the centuries that followed the flowering of Islamic culture in Spain, both paper-making and paper-cutting spread to the rest of Europe. In Germany it became known as *scherschnitte*, in Poland as *wycinanki*, and in France as *silhouettes*.

When the Spanish arrived in Mexico there was already a tradition of paper making called *amatl* in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. The Native peoples of Mexico produced a type of paper by mashing the pulp of the bark from fig and mulberry trees between rocks. Once dry, the paper was cut with knives made from obsidian. The paper cuts made from *amatl* were primarily of a ceremonial nature and included images of the numerous Aztec gods and goddesses, a practice that was discouraged by their Christian conquerors. Among the Spanish, the word *amatl* became *amate*. Today *amate* continues to be used in Mexico, where one can occasionally find copies of codices and books, as well as reproductions of the ancient deities, made from the paper.



Dios de las Frutas - Catalina Delgado-Trunk

The Spanish introduced their culture, language, religion, tools, and designs to Mexico, all of which had an impact on the production of papel picado. Additional cultural exchanges between the Americas and Asia occurred during the sixteenth century. The galleons of Manila traveled the routes between China, the Philippines, and Acapulco, Mexico, with their exotic cargos of silk textiles and leather trunks. Among the precious trade goods was a very fine paper called *papel de China* (Chinese paper) that was used to wrap the fragile porcelains which made their way as far north as the Española Valley in what is now New Mexico. This paper, which oftentimes bore the stenciled designs for ceramics or embroideries, was used for various types of crafts including papel picado banners. Although the methods and tools have not changed much, papel picado continues to evolve as a living folk tradition in Mexico.

Much of the papel picado available in today's folk art market comes from the village of San Salvador Huixcolotla, Puebla, which lies southeast of Mexico City. The tradition of paper-cutting is preserved in the *talleres*, small family workshops of two rival artisans' families, the Vivancos and the Rojas, who maintain a spirit of fierce competition and pride in the art.



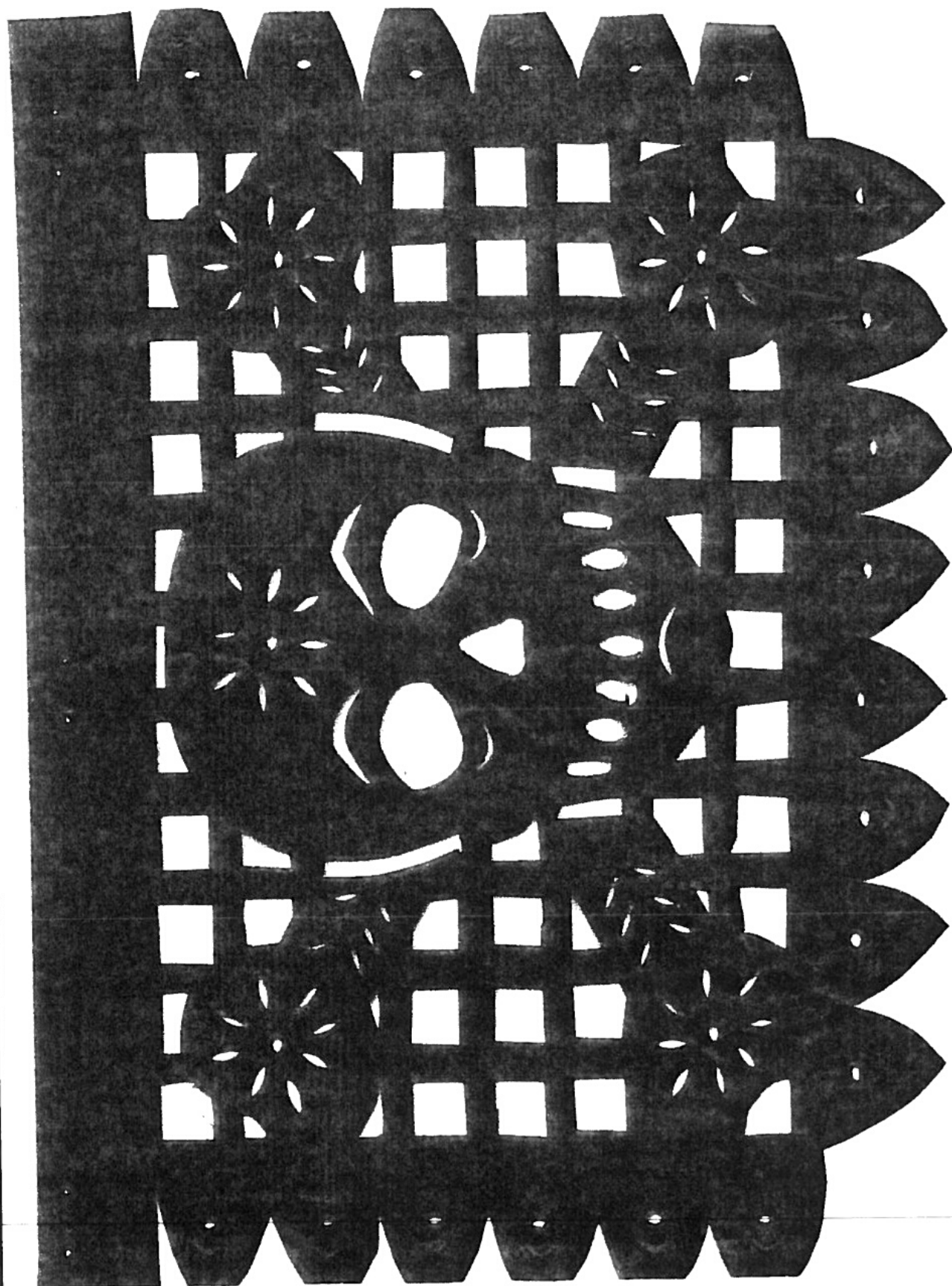
Margaret Sosa at Self-Help Graphics

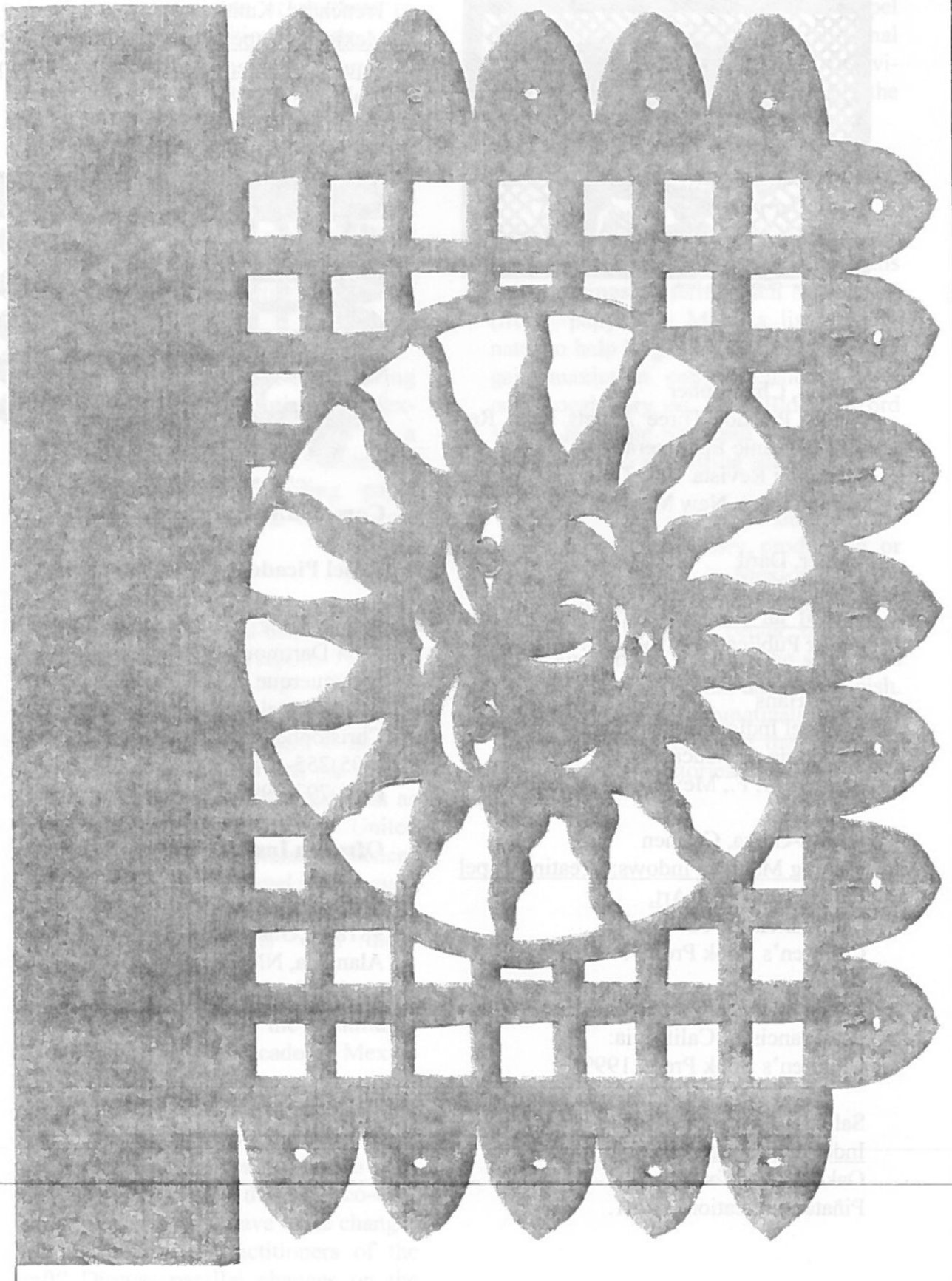
The traditional process of making papel picado banners begins by drawing a design that becomes the *patrón* or pattern. The pattern is then placed over multiple layers of tissue paper that rest on a thick layer of lead. The artisan then cuts through multiple layers of paper using a mallet to pound finely sharpened chisels of varying sizes and shapes through the paper and into the sheet of lead. The negative spaces must be removed from the design in a manner which allows the image to hang together after cutting. From design to the finished papel picado, the process of transforming sheets of tissue can take 30 or more hours.

Like much of the traditional folk art of Mexico, the papel picado craft is dying out as village artisans abandon the labor-intensive process to find better paying jobs in urban centers.

In the United States, there has been a revival in paper-cutting arts during the last two decades, primarily within Chicano art circles. A few contemporary artists working in the United States have developed techniques of cutting one-of-a-kind papel picado masterpieces using an artist knife and archival grade paper. Simpler forms can be easily prepared at home or in the classroom using tissue paper and scissors.

Pattern - Making papel picado using an art knife





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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Papel Picado Artists/Instructors

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www.calaca-arts.com
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Ofrenda Installation

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KID'S BOOKS

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