she valued personally and sought to catalyze socially and politically. In some instances, she renders such relations explicit. *manflowers* has a clear partner in *moonflowers*, which shares the former's palette, composition, text, and even photograph's source—an adjacent page in *LIFE*—in addition to its meditation on the unrelenting cycle and cost of war.[16] Dialogue drives the diptychs *only you and i* and *god is alive*: with text running across the prints ("the mo-ment…"; "magic i-s afo-ot"), meaning is made by a coming together.[17] In *road signs (two parts)*, the cautionary yellow of the first part's disorienting street signs is answered by the green(light) of the second part's solitary "entrance only." Read in tandem these serigraphs acknowledge the uncertainty that shrouds any navigation of the contemporary world—especially at personal and historical crossroads—while signaling the urgency of continuing regardless. Though the lines from Whitman's "Song of Myself" in the second print initially posit that forward motion as solitary, they ultimately speak of collective action: "If you tire, give me both burdens, […] And in due time you shall repay the same service to me, For after we start we never lie by again." As Kent's series models, singly and together we go on.

16 In lieu of a photograph from Vietnam, *moonflowers* features one of the first photographs taken from the moon's surface. Because that image was captured by the Soviet Union but intercepted and first released by an observatory in England, *moonflowers* asks to be read in the context of the Cold War and space race. Both photographs appeared in the February 11, 1966 issue of LIFE.

17 It is also worth observing the imprecision of that union. Across the chasm letters bleed or expand, change color or saturation, come just shy of exact alignment. While surely not Kent's intention, a contemporary viewer might be tempted to see in such moments allegories of the communications misfires attending a white woman's use of Chavez's profile or Parks's photograph or the slogan "Black is beautiful" (*if i*). Such a topic merits further reflection.

HEROES AND SHEROES | corita art center

A set of *heroes and sheroes*

Katherine Markoski

"It's an all-enveloping thing to be constantly aware of all that's going on around you," remarked Corita Kent in 1972, adding, "This absorbing is delight or pain or a mixture of both."[1] Just such absorption, in all its complexities, is at the crux of her twenty-nine serigraph series from 1969 known as *heroes and sheroes*. Frequently combining photographs drawn from the media with various texts, these prints intervene directly into their tumultuous historical moment—addressing civil rights, the antiwar movement, poverty, and more—through meaningful juxtapositions of form, color, and language. As each work stages striking visual exchanges designed to raise consciousness and foster engagement, the series operates similarly. Together, its prints map some of the period's most pressing issues, polyphonously signaling their historical coincidence and intersections as they also convey the simultaneous delight and pain—as well as the intensity and even urgency—of contemporary awareness.[2]

1 Corita Kent, "Making Contact with Corita Kent (1972)," *Visual Persuasion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 79.

2 This text's readings of individual works are informed by and build upon related entries in the essential *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). See esp. pp. 210, 260-64, 282-84, 292.

When Kent initiated this series, change was seemingly everywhere afoot. Made immediately following her 1968 departure from the Catholic Church after over three decades as a nun in the Hollywood-based order of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and amidst tremendous social and political upheaval, these prints also mark a significant shift in her practice. During the mid-1960s, while teaching art at Immaculate Heart College and emerging as a nationally-known printmaker, Kent routinely organized her compositions around language sourced from advertising, street signs, and popular culture. Using a vocabulary resonant with pop art—which had an early presence in Los Angeles—and in the spirit of ongoing Vatican II deliberations around the updating of Catholicism for a modern world, such works subvert what she called "crass realism, crass materialism" by infusing familiar language with spiritual and humanistic meaning.[3] While the modern world remained resolutely at play in her set of *heroes and sheroes*, Kent's previous focus on language was joined by an engagement with photographic images as her attention turned from commodity culture to current events. This change can be partly explained by her new working relationship with printer Harry Hambly and his ability to produce photo-based silkscreens, an impossibility in the college's workshop. But it also

3 For an overview of Kent's practice, see Julie Ault, *Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita* (London: Four Corners Books, 2007). On Kent and pop art, see Susan Dackerman, "Corita Kent and the Language of Pop," in *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*, pp. 14–32. For an overview of Vatican II, see John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008). Kent's reference to "crass realism" appears in Rev. Don Ranly, "Sister Corita: Tomatoes and Happy Beatitudes," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 22, 1965, 2.

window seat put down your times." Through heightened awareness, one might learn to give a damn.

chavez foregrounds what can follow. The force of ongoing work towards economic justice is pictured by the way the steady gaze of labor leader Cesar Chavez appears to push the composition's text-filled yellow block aside. Not only that text—describing an "epic" class struggle—but also the wine-red washing the activist's photograph conjure a strike Chavez and the recently founded National Farm Workers Association joined against grape growers in the mid-1960s.[14] This allusion to wine is perhaps equally one to (eucharistic) suffering's opening onto renewal; Chavez's work, like Kent's, was informed by his faith. Chavez had been a supporter of Robert Kennedy's 1968 presidential bid and commended by King, who in 1966 wrote, "Our separate struggles are really one – a struggle for freedom, for dignity, for humanity."[15] Kent's series materializes something of this constellation of figures and ideals, its prints' highly-keyed colors and bold compositions bouncing off each other in keeping with the moment's energy and volatility.

Before leaving the order, Kent had thrived in the college's highly collaborative screenprint workshop. Newly alone in Boston, it is as though she lodged in her series the exchanges

14 Chavez, with Dolores Huerta, founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. For a compelling first-hand account of this strike see, John Gregory Dunne, *Delano: The Story of the California Grape Strike* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967).

15 King telegram to Chavez, September 19, 1966; cited in Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition & the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), p. 40.

on pain, the injured soldier, the institution of slavery. Indeed, the *Brookes*' appearance links the violent American repression of Vietnamese liberation to that of Black Americans domestically. Notably, broadsides featuring this image of the ship were critical to effective abolitionist campaigns in England; and it is precisely such consciousness-raising that Kent's serigraphs have as an aim.[12]

In other works, Kent took civil rights and racial injustice as primary subjects. *the cry that will be heard* reproduces the March 8, 1968 cover of *LIFE*, which featured a photograph of a sobbing five-year-old named Ellen Fontenelle taken by Gordon Parks; the issue included reporting on African Americans living in poverty and the previous summer's rebellions born of racism.[13] By rendering the cover in chiaroscuro Kent obscures Fontenelle, exposing the possibility of her cry, too, being overshadowed. Perpendicular to the cover in bright blue capitals is the query, "why not give a damn about your fellow man." Impossible to miss against its fluorescent pink background, the question's positioning nevertheless suggests viewers—implicitly white—must reorient themselves to it. A more active looking, like that demanded by the chiaroscuro or the print's imagined rotation, is likewise advised by lyrics from the band Spanky and Our Gang: "Take a

12 On the image of the *Brookes*, see Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

13 For an orientation to the summer of 1967, see, e.g., *The Harvest of American Racism: The Political Meaning of Violence in the Summer of 1967*, ed. Robert Shellow with a foreword by Michael C. Dawson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018). Related prints include *if i* and *king's dream*.

seems Kent's freedom from the restraints of the Church, especially its traditionalist wing, allowed her to articulate her progressivism more directly.[4] Later asked whether she was on the front lines of sixties protest movements, Kent responded, "I couldn't march and be in the public in that way," noting she instead had to "bring it into the work."[5] And in 1969 she did just that.

Where Kent's work of the mid-1960s attended to the everyday, her *heroes and sheroes* prints register that the ordinary had become anything but. This reality is stated—or shouted—in *american sampler*. Retaining an exclusive reliance on text, Kent replaces her earlier topsy-turvy linguistic compositions with rubber-stamped red, white, and blue capitals that present as banner headlines. Furthering this allusion are the print's dimensions: like many others in the series, *american sampler* is roughly the size of a folded newspaper or broadsheet.[6] Rhythmically threading together words torn from such sources—assassination; Vietnam; violence—in the colors of the American flag, she posits their boundedness to one another and the nation's identity. At the same time, she encourages new readings of these topics: the centrality of "SIN" is highlighted within the first "ASSASINATION;" the "I am 1A" (IAMIA) carefully planted after the first "VIETNAM" invites empathy for Americans

4 See, e.g., Kristen Gaylord, "Catholic Art and Activism in Postwar Los Angeles," in *Conflict, Identity, and Protest in American Art*, ed. Miguel de Baca and Makeda Best (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 102–103. Kent was a frequent target of the Archbishop of Los Angeles; by decade's end, many of the sisters in Kent's order were granted dispensation from their vows owing to conflict with the Church. For a history of the order, see, e.g., Mark Stephen Massa, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 75–102.

5 Kent, interview by Bernard Galm, "Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait, Corita Kent," transcript, Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977.

6 It is worth noting the unprecedented presence and importance of the underground press during the 1960s. It is as though here Kent was contributing her voice to the cacophony of papers trying to offer a more honest understanding of the nation. On the underground press, see, e.g., John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

facing combat while the "I'm" (IM) following the second does the same for the Vietnamese people—the extent of the fourth line's "VIOLENCE" thereby elucidated. The print likewise issues a call to action. "AMERICAN" twice spins out into a chant-like "I can I can" and the closing queries "WHYWHYNOT" quickly dismiss the possibility of indifference. Long-drawn to her chosen medium for its accessibility, Kent disseminates familiar information otherwise, prompting at once a recognition of horrors and assertion of belief.[7]

That same duality informs her engagement with other issues broadcast by her sampler. In *it can be said of them* Kent arranges photographs of a sculpture of Christ and the recently assassinated John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in a checkerboard-like grid.[8] By granting the figures equal visual weight, Kent aligns the modern murders with the martyrdom of Christ. The grid also highlights the decade's (humanity's) steady rhythm of tragedy—the squares summon paging through a news magazine—as its juxtapositions of piercing orange and pink spaces set into relief the specificity of each man and loss.[9] Yet Kent locates meaning in tragedy: she visualizes the momentum—the central text's wind, perhaps—generated by her composition's figures and their ideals; her

7 Historically, needlework samplers showcased women's literacy, and Kent's *sampler* indeed instantiates a particular sort of contemporary literacy.

8 President Kennedy was killed on November 22, 1963. Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968. Senator Kennedy was shot on June 5, 1968 and died the next day.

9 That specificity was elaborated elsewhere in the series through works like *i'm glad i can feel pain*, *love your brother*, *pieta*, and *if i*.

print a catalyst for mourning and movement toward a more just world alike.[10]

Contemporary American violence was not confined to the nation but extended to Vietnam. Jesuit priest and activist Daniel Berrigan had turned Kent onto the antiwar movement, and a photograph of him with his brother Philip taken on May 17, 1968, dominates *phil and dan*. On that day, the two brothers, with seven others, stole draft records from a Selective Service office in Catonsville, Maryland, and burned them to protest the war.[11] While the print's palette of yellow, orange, and black thematizes that act of fiery destruction, the scene itself presents as a tranquil ritual, like those familiar within the Church. Engagement, Kent suggests, can contain both. Widening her lens, Kent probes connections between the conflict abroad and policy at home in *news of the week*. A *Newsweek* cover announcing a story on the Viet Cong appears in red; it sits atop an excerpt from Walt Whitman's 1892 "Song of Myself" and reproductions of an eighteenth-century diagram of the slave ship *Brookes* and a *LIFE* magazine cover featuring American soldiers in Vietnam, all against green. The complementary colors flag the boundedness of the Viet Cong and Americans as the former's struggle is underpinned by American penchants for suffering—Whitman

10 Attributed to E.B. White, this text on President Kennedy was published in *The New Yorker* following his death. In addition to echoing a Christian triptych, *it can be said of them* adopts and adapts a compositional format recently deployed by Andy Warhol in his *Death and Disaster* series. It bears mentioning that 1968 also saw the attempted assassination of Warhol himself.

11 For more on this event, see, e.g., Shawn Francis Peters, *The Catonsville Nine: A Story of Faith and Resistance in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).