Eloísa Cartonera Cooperative Promotes Literary Culture As It Combats Social Exclusion

Founded in 2003, the Eloísa Cartonera work cooperative is located in the La Boca neighborhood of Buenos Aires and publishes low-cost, avant-garde works by writers from throughout Latin America who, in turn, support the press by donating their unpublished material. The collective’s books have covers made of cardboard, which is gathered by urban “pickers” or cardboard collectors, called “cartoneros,” and hand painted with tempera. Gathering and reselling cardboard has long been a way for cartoneros to eke out a modest living. Since Eloísa Cartonera was created, one of its basic tenets has been to pay honest value for its cardboard, which has helped generate a modest rise and better stabilization of pricing.

Thus, the process of producing, circulating and consuming uniquely designed books provides a meeting point for two sectors who would otherwise rarely meet, writers and “cartoneros,” while simultaneously fulfilling two objectives: promoting literary culture and combating social exclusion.

The visit by Eloísa Cartonera was part of the MSU libraries’ series colloquia and was co-sponsored by the Center for Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities (CISAH), the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS.)

Professor Diaz-Muñoz says, “Eloísa Cartonera’s visit to MSU was an excellent opportunity for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty to meet the members of a successful collective that is doing innovative work bringing together literary production and movements for social justice in Latin America.”