BY DAVID FUTCH

Carol A. Wells hopes her work offsets everyone's. If not offered, at least give people a chance to get to know each other at an affordable price, she says. But enough to get many to sit up and take notice of her posters.

Wells runs the non-profit Center for the Study of Political Graphics, a treasure trove of 85,000 political posters that includes rare lithography caricatures of 19th-century French politicians by satirist Honoré Daumier, all of it housed in a forgettable Culver City building squeezed between a car wash and a Christian bookstore. There’s no sign, no window display.

Documenting the world’s anger is “the point” of the thousands of political posters that long-time activist Wells, who founded the center in 1986, has amassed. “We have white supremacist posters,” she says. “We have Angela Davis posters. We’re the only place with more Black Panther posters than the FBI.”

Wells’ endeavor might be seen as yet another Los Angeles collection of fringe memorabilia — except for the fact that these posters are key elements of political and cultural debate in many European, South American and Central American countries. There, museums exhibit them as an aspect of activist art, and, especially in the Third World, posters are used to get messages across in communities where the illiterate and very poor.

Wells, who is the only executive director the center has had in its 35 years of operation, has lived in L.A. since she was 11. She earned a master’s in Medieval art from UCLA, and has a calm air for someone who personally protested during nearly every major national fast-pace since the Summer of Love in 1967.

When Wells was in Nicaragua 35 years ago, she says, 96 percent of its people were illiterate. The instantaneous messages communicated via poster imagery were used to educate villagers about domestic violence and crucial health issues such as basic sanitation techniques. She returned home, Nicaragua posters in hand, and curated an exhibit of them at UCLA, ultimately touring with her show in the United States for nine years.

“I wanted to contradict what Ronald Reagan was saying,” she recalls. “Reagan kept repeating that the Nicaraguan people were ‘godless communists’ when, in fact, their posters were about their dreams and aspirations.”

People who attended her shows talked about the power of poster art to “provoke, educate and agitate” were happy to “empty their shelves” of the imagery they had collected, and now between 5,000 and 7,000 posters arrive at the center each year.

Protest posters of every kind are preserved in the center’s archives, along with thousands of bumper stickers and political buttons. Online, at political- graphics.org, the center features a poster of the week, such as one recognizing the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X. It features his photograph and the words, “I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing … but I don’t think it will be based on the colour of the skin.” (Colour because the poster was printed in London.)

A more recent print, posted Feb. 15, depicted President George W. Bush pulling off a war mask, revealing a death head underneath. Below Bush, President Obama is pulling on his own war mask — after asking Congress to authorize military force against the Islamic state.

Another poster comments upon the mass murders of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo. The design is a stark depiction of three pencils — the first is intact and perfectly sharpened, labeled “yesterday”; the second is snapped in half and labeled “today”; the third is snapped in half and labeled “tomorrow” and has been sharpened to a fine point — ready to carry on.

The center preserves its poster’s flat belly, 456 special drawers that measure two inches tall, two to four feet wide and several feet long. While important posters of the last half-century are on the walls, the center is not a gallery. Unless somebody is doing research, there’s no access to the physical prints. However, the public has been granted extensive access over the years and most significant posters have been digitized thus far, and anyone can make an appointment to use one of the center’s five computers to view them.

Many posters also are online, and the center has two poster exhibits coming up — a show on the theme of justice set for May 1 to 10 at 3741 S. La Brea Ave., and a second show, still lacking a date, titled “No Human Being Is Illegal,” at Mercado La Paloma near USC. The Victoria & Albert Museum in London has set a ’60s counterculture show for 2023, and the center will be a key contributor.

Wells clarifies, out with an eye to collecting a sea of posters. She says they piled up over her sense of solidarity, “I had two or three thousand under my bed and in a half,” she tells L.A. Weekly, “I didn’t see it as art. They were posters.” When we started the center, political posters were never considered as an art form.

She believes posters are wrongly seen as a stepchild of art, and she wants them to be taken seriously. She realized the power of posters as political art while in Nicaragua in 1981, when President Ronald Reagan was secretly funding the Contras but Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas. She remembers watching the poor terrified rally behind political posters extolling the Sandinistas, a memory that has fueled her collecting.

She has opposed the Vietnam War, the 1983 invasion of Grenada, the war in Nicaragua, the 2002 invasion of Iraq, the 2003 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2004 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2005 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2006 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2007 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2008 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2009 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2010 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2011 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2012 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2013 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2014 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2015 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2016 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2017 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2018 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2019 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2020 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2021 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2022 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2023 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2024 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2025 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2026 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2027 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2028 invasion of Afghanistan, the 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