

(Santiago Piedrafita)

Latin Loner

BY COLIN BERRY

All his life, Santiago Piedrafita has ricocheted among diverse cultures: Uruguay-born and Brazil-raised, he studied industrial design at ESDI, the Rio academy founded by Tomas Maldonado and Max Bill. After coming to the U.S. in 1991 for graduate work at Pratt, he was hired by 2x4, Pentagram, IDEO, MoMA, Design/Writing/Research, and eventually the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where he worked alongside Andrew Blauvelt and Laurie Haycock Makela. Since 2000, he has taught at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD).

Piedrafita's bright palette reflects his tropical roots, but his broader aesthetic draws equally from classical and contemporary sources. The results can be clean and subdued—such as his handsome Walker catalogs—or energetic and noisy, as in the posters he creates for his students. "I'm definitely a case study," he says. "I come from a long tradition of modernist design. I straddle different camps, depending on the project."

In the past, Piedrafita's clients have included the AIGA, American Center for Design, and Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art; a recent 600-page catalog raisonné for Robert Motherwell is a massive, elegant document of that artist's oeuvre. Recently, with his students' help, he created new signage for MCAD.

"I made a conscious choice to work in the cultural sector," he says. That is fairly new ground for many designers. But, he adds, "I was lucky enough to work with people who were able to break that ceiling." In 2004, MCAD named him department chair, tilting the balance between his classroom and studio responsibilities. "It's been a job and a half," he admits. "My professional work has shrunk, and I have a feeling it's going to pick up again, but right now I'm trying to integrate the two." If the arc of Piedrafita's personal history is any gauge, that shouldn't be hard. ✨

Occupation: Graphic designer/educator -----
Age: 40 -----
Base: Minneapolis -----
Should be more famous because: His portfolio represents the best of global design's cross-pollination. -----
Isn't more famous because: He's been busy gaining experience and direction. -----
Google mentions: 184 -----



Piedrafita designed the Lesson-in-a-Poster series to promote the Minneapolis design scene.