The Eduardo Lozano Latin American Library Collection
The First Thirty Years

Eduardo Lozano: Book Collector Extraordinaire

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This month [May 1997], Pitt officially named its 340,000-volume treasure trove of Latin American books and documents the "Eduardo Lozano Latin American Library Collection," after the man who almost single-handedly has assembled the collection over the last 30 years.

His colleagues admit the naming was largely a formality.

"Internationally, it's never been known as the Pitt Latin American Studies collection. It's always been known as the Lozano collection," said Mitchell A. Seligson, who is Daniel H. Wallace Professor of Political Science and a former director (1986 to 1992) of the University's Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS).

During a May 2 celebration of Lozano's career and the naming of the collection, co-workers praised Lozano's ingenuity in acquiring first-rate materials—dirt-cheap, in many cases.

Anthropology professor Robert D. Drennan, who was CLAS interim director from 1992 to 1993, described the challenges of acquiring library materials south of the border: erratic book distribution, orders that never get filled; "exchange agreements" that seem to flow north-to-south only; publishing houses that shut down for weeks or even months when staff go on vacation; convoluted shipping arrangements (for years, Lozano routed Mexican materials to Pittsburgh via Peru because it was more efficient than mailing directly), and political complications (although the U.S. government embargo against Cuba has never prohibited Pitt from buying library materials from that country, Cuba itself refused—until recently—to accept payment in yanqui dollars, so Lozano had to make purchases through a Canadian account).

Carmelo Mesa-Lago, CLAS director from 1974 to 1986 and now a Distinguished Service...
Professor of Economics and Latin American Studies, likened Lozano’s achievements to Jesus’ miracle of the loaves and fishes.

Vice Provost for Research George Klinzing remembered accompanying Lozano on one of the librarian’s legendary book-buying trips to South America. “When we arrived at the University of Mendoza [in Lozano’s native Argentina], the faculty and staff there greeted Eduardo as a conquering hero,” Klinzing said.

Seligson recalled a trip to Chile. “After we checked into our hotel, Eduardo just disappeared. I didn’t see him again until it was time to fly home. He immediately went off to shop for books.

“It’s true,” Seligson confirmed, “he [Lozano] does carry tape and string and twine, and packages books on the spot in those countries.”

The praise reached a crescendo with emotional tributes from Pitt doctoral student Giovanni Reyes (who called Lozano “a noble man”) and University Library System Director Rush Miller, who said: “I’m reminded that a rich man is rich not because he accumulates riches but because he accumulates rich accomplishments. And Eduardo Lozano is a rich man, a rich man in character, a rich man in accomplishment. He’s a serious person of great integrity and he makes a difference in the lives of everyone in this room and at this university.”

As Lozano sat listening, he occasionally raised one of his long, slim hands to hide his face in modesty. When colleagues remarked on the Mad Hatter nature of Hispanic publishing and the improbability of creating an internationally renowned Latin American collection in Pittsburgh, of all places, Lozano tossed back his mane of silver hair in laughter. But gradually, he was sinking down in his seat. By the end of the event, only the top of Lozano’s head was visible from behind.

Eventually, ULS Director Miller coaxed Lozano to the stage of the Frick Fine Arts auditorium to accept a “named chair”—a Pitt chair with a brass plate on the back, inscribed with Lozano’s name. Lozano beamed, but shyly sought to hide his slight figure behind the larger Miller. He finally stepped to the forefront to pose for photos with a plaque that now hangs outside his Hillman Library office, proclaiming the Eduardo Lozano collection.

After thanking CLAS faculty for advising him on materials to buy to further their research, Lozano said: “I am so thankful for the people in the library who understood that we had to go ahead with a project that was, in some ways, crazy.”

Like some other crazy-sounding initiatives that ultimately raised the University’s academic standing, the creation of a Pitt Latin American studies library originated in the mind of Edward Litchfield, Pitt chancellor from 1956 to 1965.

As part of his grand plan to elevate Pitt from a “streetcar college” to the equal of an elite school like the University of Chicago, Litchfield determined that Pitt would emphasize Latin American studies—“first, because the competition was easier.
Chinese, Russian and European studies were already dominated by other universities. Also, Litchfield saw trade and investment opportunities as potential links between Pittsburgh and Latin America," recalled Cole Blasier, professor emeritus of political science, whom Litchfield recruited as CLAS’s founding director in 1964.

Within a year Litchfield would resign, after suffering a heart attack and coming under fire for the University’s great fiscal crisis of the mid-1960s. But thanks to a Ford Foundation grant and other support, Blasier forged ahead with building CLAS. Like Litchfield, Blasier reasoned that a strong center would require a strong library, which would need a first-rate librarian.

He wrote to Lozano, whom he had never met, asking if he was interested in the job. At that time, Lozano was directing two libraries in Argentina, at the State University of San Juan and at the prestigious National University of Cuyo, also in San Juan. He was well-known among Latin American studies scholars.

Lozano did not reply to Blasier. "I was very dubious about coming to Pittsburgh," Lozano said in a recent interview. "Pittsburgh at that time was famous internationally only for its industry and its pollution. It was not a nice city, apparently." Also, Pittsburgh’s Hispanic population was (and remains) minuscule.

Months later, Blasier telephoned Lozano from Chile—for one thing, to confirm that Lozano spoke fluent English. (In fact, Lozano speaks English, Spanish, Portuguese and French, the principal languages of South and Central America. He also speaks Italian.) "Eventually, Cole said to me, 'Well, are you coming or not?'" Lozano recalled.

Why did Lozano accept?

"Those were bad times in Argentina," Lozano stated, with an emphatic shoulder-shrug. "One year before, there had been a coup d'etat and the military had taken power. The cultural situation was very bad because it was—how can I say?—very closed in terms of the right to express thoughts freely."

The government was cutting funding to liberal universities such as Cuyo.

"I took a leave of absence to come to Pitt for one year only. I figured that, in that time, I could establish a basic Latin American studies collection and train someone else to continue as the permanent librarian. Then I would see whether the situation in Argentina had improved."

But a year later, in 1968, Argentina was in even worse shape. And, in the meantime, Lozano had been pleasantly surprised by the absence of industrial blight in Pittsburgh and by the Pitt administration's support for building the Latin American collection. Lozano resigned from his job in Argentina. His wife, Lillian, who had stayed behind there, moved to Pittsburgh.

In 1979, the U.S. Department of Education designated CLAS as a national resource center, a status it has maintained ever since. A key element in the designation is the quality of a center’s library.

Today, Pitt’s Latin American collection is internationally renowned for its resources on Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Cuba. Scholars from those countries come to Pitt to do research. The U.S. Latin American collections that outrank Pitt’s—including those at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Texas and the Library of Congress—enjoyed at least a century’s headstart and more generous funding. "For the first
year I was here, my acquisitions budget was $2,500,” Lozano said. “That same year, the acquisitions budget for the Latin American collection at [the University of] Texas was about $250,000.”

Lozano refuses to reveal his current budget.

Regardless of the size of his purse, Lozano has always gotten a lot of bang for Pitt’s bucks, acquisitions-wise. He attributes this to his distinctive, hands-on strategy:

- To keep up on the latest research in Latin American studies, Lozano talks with faculty and students and sits in on CLAS lectures. “Eduardo has attended nearly every lecture organized by CLAS over the past 30 years,” said center director Billie DeWalt. “As most of us have come to realize, he probably knows as much or more about our disciplines than we do.” To recognize that diligence, Lozano’s colleagues awarded him an honorary certificate in Latin American studies.
- Lozano orders specific books directly from Latin American publishers and dealers, negotiating mano-a-mano and insisting on the local price. While he places some orders by telephone and computer from Hillman Library, Lozano does the bulk of his shopping in person. Every year, he spends two months in Latin America. “It is still rare for librarians from the United States to visit Latin America to buy books,” he said. “They usually make blanket orders through book dealers in those countries, who do the actual shopping.

“Then you see, these dealers want to sell you whatever they can get cheap. The dealers who sell to the United States, they think Americans have lots of money, so they overcharge. They assume that nobody in the United States knows the prices of books down there.”

That’s true of many U.S. librarians, because Latin American book prices are hard to come by, Lozano explained. “Even some of the big [Latin American] publishers don’t produce catalogues or advertise on the World Wide Web, the way American publishers do. To even find out what is being published, I have to spend much of my time doing things like reading book reviews in journals.”

Lozano acknowledges that his system is labor-intensive. “Most American libraries do not use my system because it is so time-consuming. I have to maintain hundreds of contacts with dealers, pay thousands of separate invoices and spend two months traveling. Fortunately, in this library, I have been able to convince the administration that, expensive or not, this is the way to go. In the long run, it is not only more efficient, but cheaper.”

The one downside to Lozano’s method is that it requires him to make his shopping trips during June, July and August, to accommodate Pitt’s fiscal year. “During our summer up here, it is winter in the southern hemisphere, of course. So I have not experienced a real summer in 30 years!” Lozano said, laughing.

When he began stocking the new Latin American collection here, Lozano sometimes bought up whole private libraries. From the late-1960s through the mid-1980s, prices ranged from cheap to ridiculously cheap. “The American dollar was so strong in most of Latin America, you could buy very important, new books for maybe 10 cents each,” he remembered.

But in his native country, the U.S. dollar at one point gained too much strength. “I was in Argentina during the worst period of hyperinflation in 1986 to 1987, when it was almost impossible to buy anything. Nobody was waiting for the next day, even for later in the same day, for the next devaluation. Nobody would sell you anything.”

Lozano said he sometimes has felt guilty, scoring bargains born of economic disaster. “But then I think, if that’s the official exchange rate, you have to use that rate. If it is beneficial for you, what can you do? The one thing I never did was exchange money on the black market, where you could get incredible rates, much better than the official ones.”

Besides, economic reforms in recent years have brought parity between most Latin American currencies and the U.S. dollar, Lozano noted. “Today, the people in South and Central America look at your dollars and say, [disdainfully] ‘What is that?’”

Selecting books is another growing challenge for Lozano. “I can’t buy collections anymore because most people selling collections don’t want to divide them up, and most of what’s in the collection, we already have. The worst problem we have now is that we have to check 100 books to buy three that we don’t already have. I suppose that is the penalty for having a good collection.”

Perhaps the most compelling reason for creating a Latin American collection in Pittsburgh (at least to U.S. government funding sources) was the Cuban revolution, with its perceived menace of infecting the Western hemisphere with communism. So it is ironic that Lozano has made book-buying trips to 21 Latin American countries—but never to Cuba.

“We maintain exchange agreements with more than a dozen Cuban universities, research centers and national libraries. We have very close ties, and our collection of Cuban materials is very good,” Lozano pointed out. And yet, Pitt bought those materials through book dealers in Uruguay,
Argentina and elsewhere. “I know it looks funny, but it has always been easier than dealing directly with Cuba,” Lozano said.

Lozano compares his work to architecture, or composing a fugue. “You are creating a structure, not just piling one thing on top of another thing,” he emphasized.

Like the Medieval artists and scholars he deeply admires, Lozano sees no firm divisions between the work he gets paid to do and his other passions: his poetry and fiction writing, his painting, drawing and ceramics, his marriage of 41 years and his friendships.

“Reality, I believe, is one. I think this is reflected in my paintings and drawings. It’s a kind of free drawing with a brush or pen. I may put a monster in a picture with a locomotive, a locomotive with a lady in a window, good animals with bad animals, everything together. Because everything is together in this world. We make these separations because society obligates us to separate and label everything.”

“Probably, for me, music is the most important art because it is so total. When I listen to music that I love, I get the feeling that I do not need anything else. And so, it is curious that I never studied music and have never tried to play an instrument.”

Why not?

“I think,” Lozano confided, “it is probably because I am so attracted to music that I don’t want to touch it. It’s like seeing a woman who is so beautiful that you prefer to remain far from her.” At 72, does Lozano think about retiring in order to devote more time to his other interests?

“No, no, no!” he said, holding up his hands to fend off the question. “I enjoy my work very much. I will tell you something, seriously: I am here not because the University pays me. I am here because I like to be here. You may not believe it, but that is the case. My guess is that I would be in better shape financially if I retired than I am by staying here, working—because of the different tax rates and all that.”

“People say to me, ‘Well, if you retired, you could paint more.’ I have time to paint! I paint all of the time at home. I don’t need more time for that.

“And besides,” he added, smiling and taking in Hillman Library with a relaxed sweep of his arms, “here, I am surrounded by books. When I go home, there are books all around. So this is my home, too.

“Who would want to retire from his home?”

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When he’s not acquiring new material for Pitt’s Latin American collection at Hillman Library, Eduardo Lozano often goes back to the drawing board—or to his easel. Lozano’s drawings...and paintings have been exhibited throughout the United States and his native Argentina. He’s had one-person shows in Buenos Aires (in 1961 and 1987) and several other Argentinian cities. Three of his paintings were included in the 1980 exhibit, “Contemporary Andean Art,” at the Frick Fine Arts Museum. His “Pasco Nocturno” (1982) was copied for the cover of the Center for Latin American Studies’ information brochure and copies of his paintings have been used for invitations and note cards by Hillman Library. His works also have been exhibited locally at the Three Rivers Arts Festival (1968 and 1980) and Pitt’s Student Union Gallery (1990).