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Border (II)Logics Embodied

Adriana Gallego, *Divine Impulse* series, 2003 & 2004; M. Jenea Sanchez, *Untitled 1-2 (Body Series)*, 2010; Claudio Dicochea, *de la Jacqueline y el Cesar, la Gloria*, 2010; three works by Annie Lopez: *I Allowed Other People, My Mother, My Mexican Nana*, 2011; Marisa Boulosa, *Born Unknown/Death Unknown*, 2011

Embodied and corporeal border arts productively impact studies of difference and hegemony. That is, race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and nationality (for example) are socially constructed differences that are lived everyday in the borderlands. When artforms examine various formations of borders, boundaries, and divides in Arizona and Sonora, they offer deeper understandings about the fight for recognition, agency, and autonomy.

This section emphasizes the importance of queries. Border arts and embodiment contemplate the significance of difference and its localized realities. Many of these artworks offer opportunities for critical insights about the interface of borders including topographic, human, legal, educational, medical, and psychological. Take for example Claudio Dicochea: his focus on racialized human bodies offers an opportunity to critically re-examine whiteness and its institutionalization vis-à-vis casta paintings.

Materiality is an important characteristic of the art grouped in Border (II)Logics Embodied. Artists select materials based on fine art training, economy, availability, and intentionality. Materiality could be the label: new media, oil painting, or photography. Materiality however, is also where photography meets corn paper. Or, where high art and history paintings intersect with popular culture. Materiality is a lively strategy used by artists and is key for ruminating on social, political, and historical conditions of embodiment.

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Appropriations, or is it?

Tony Ortega, *The Apparition*, 2011; Carlos Ensinas, *Cleaning Ladies*, 2007

Is it true the history of art is the history of appropriation? That is, is art-making an exercise in using and borrowing iconographies and cultural modalities to construct new and changing arts? Is anything original? Appropriations, or is it? is a method recognizable in borderlands art that attempts to rupture this one-sided, simplified understanding of acts of appropriation, borrowing, and sharing.

The re-use of images often for non-sanctioned purposes is an act of self-declaration, a manifesto of sorts. In this sense, the uses of appropriations in Arizona and Sonora border arts are revolutionary acts. They include: the representation of sacred images for cultural sustainability or as a critique of the limits of the nation-state, and constructions of motifs that reference Native pasts to contest languages and mindsets of conquest. Many of these artforms ultimately strive toward de-colonization. De-colonization is a progressive artistic effort to make audible and legible forms of thinking and being that deny fiscal, political, educational, and personal independence.

In different ways, this group of artworks grapples with the difficulty of thinking and creating outside prescribed systems. Yet, they offer important treatises about survival and knowledge under oppressive regimes extant in the Arizona and Sonora borderlands.

Art, Politics, and Activism

Paco Velez, *Treason with a Twist of Lime*, 2011; Mel Dominguez, *Baja Arizona*, 2011; Nicolas Lampert, *Caution Migrant Workers*, 2010; Paul Turounet, *Estamos Buscando A - We're Looking For*, 2004; Luis Alex Levy, *Gateways*, 2011; Rossitza Todorova, et. al., *SB 1070 Portfolio*, 2010 & 2011

All art is political and to think otherwise disregards lessons derived from border art histories about aesthetics, subjectivities, and representations. Even the premise of this exhibition—a visual and cultural study of borders in Arizona and Sonora—is strategic.

Notably, one strong undercurrent in these works is the creation of a statewide culture of fear. Fabricated narratives have made life dangerous on both sides of the border. Federal governments play a major role in nurturing violence in the borderlands and some of the art in this exhibition is critical of the U.S. government. Capitalism needs poverty and the art in this section exposes fundamental problems with the free market, and its intersections with undocumented labor and free trade treaties. This form of border art critiques ideologies of whiteness that continue to lend credence to heteronormalization, patriarchy, and hyper-racializations of so-called non-white others.

The art in this section reflects a very local form of politics with human consequences in an international cross border realm. This art speaks to broken political promises but it also speaks to the importance of community activism and organizing throughout Arizona and Sonora.

THE BORDER PROJECT

Soundscapes, Landscapes, and Lifescapes



Gallery Guide to *The Border Project: Soundscapes, Landscapes and Lifescapes*

University of Arizona Museum of Art
November 17, 2011 – March 11, 2012

by John-Michael Warner, Ph.D. student in Art History and co-curator of the exhibition



1 Local Legacies and Foundational Border Arts Histories

Taller Yonke, *Paseo de Humanidad*, 2004; Taller Yonke, *Border Dynamics*, 2003; Alfred Quiroz, *Corazoncito*, 2004; six works by Louis Carlos Bernal: *Pope Pius XII*, 1977; *Mother of the Year Award*, 1978; *Untitled (Movie Marquee)*, 1979; *Sr. Ernesto Villa*, 1977; *Quinceañera*, 1981; *Virgen de Guadalupe*, 1978

Few border art histories acknowledge the rich legacy of cultural production in the Arizona and Sonora borderlands. Despite its understudied status, the history of artistic production associated with the Sonoran desert has played a prominent role in examining the spaces and places surrounding the U.S. built border fence.

One way to understand border art is through its geopolitical construction—that is, visual works such as altars, memorials, and artworks that are installed on the border fence. Artists and community members make these works and they examine the dynamics of geography and the nation-state and its intersection with lived experience.

An important Sonoran collective that directly engaged with the U.S./Mexico border is Taller Yonke. Founded by Guadalupe Serrano and Alberto Morackis in the mid-1990s in Nogales, Sonora, el Colectivo is an artist based and community driven organization. Many of Taller Yonke's projects were installed on the U.S. built border fence that separates Nogales, Sonora from Nogales, Arizona. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed into law and approved by the governments of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, Taller Yonke's public artworks called attention to the governmental and economic conditions of life on the border. Significantly, Taller Yonke's large-scale sculptural installations explicitly use the architecture of the border fence.

Historically, local border arts respond to unique borderlands conditions that are shaped by state and federal governments, globalized economic practices, and everyday *fronterizo* realities. Past the geographic and architectural border site there are other important regional artistic efforts that continue to offer creative interventions and forge creative and cultural communities—for example, Tucson-based artists' cooperative Raices Taller. Local borderlands artists such as photographer Louis Carlos Bernal helped create an analysis of the peopled and environmental conditions associated with the borderlands. Each of the Arizona and Sonora creative legacies contribute to an art history of boundaries.

A history of art and visual culture for this exhibition begins with geo-political works by Taller Yonke and Alfred Quiroz as a recognition of forms of artistic production that continue to shape cultural institutions and scholarly debates today. *The Border Project* includes works both inside and outside the museum to honor and affirm one of border art's most important principles developed by installing art on the border fence: to de-center authority.

2 Geo-Political (Re-)Imaginings

Nicolas Lambert, *Imagine No Borders*, 2010-present; Scott Hopkins, *Looking Across the Border*, 2008; Scott Hopkins, *Pinata On the Border*, 2008; Julie Anand and Damon Sauer, *Border Crossing*, 2008; Daniel Levick, *Border Patrol and Cave Dwellings*, 2011; Fausto Fernandez, *Demographic Fabric of America*, 2009; Alan Huerta, *International Border Horse Race*, 2002; Alan Huerta, *International Fiesta of Naco*, 2004; M. Jenea Sanchez, *Historias en la Camioneta*, 2010; three works by Melanie Yazzie: *Agua*, *Tres Passing*, *Borrando*, all 2011

One way of conceptualizing border arts is through the notion of geopolitics. Broadly, the art historical discourse of geopolitics engages with art, geography, governments, laws, and treaties. Typically, the works acknowledge agendas and strategies associated with marking and claiming land. Pushing geopolitics further, some border artists have imagined and re-imagined the geographic, cartographic, and organic landscapes shared by Arizona and Sonora. This interpretation of border art builds on local legacies and foundational border art histories.

Many of the artists in Geo-Political (Re-)Imaginings knowingly or unconsciously help to develop an understanding of border arts as a critical, discursive formation situated beyond the U.S. built fence. The works grouped with Geo-political (Re-)Imaginings often emphasize technologies of oppression and invasion and modes of surveillance by governments and corporations in the everyday lives of *fronterizos*. Geo-Political (Re-)Imaginings also helps to paint a picture of the border fence as a decoy. That is, these works posit that by limiting our focus to the domain of the border fence, those who built it ultimately profit.

All of the works in this section were created as art and the artworks hold the landscape as an object of study. When contemporary art uses land and constructs terrestrial representations, it rethinks and re-conceptualizes the politics of nation-building, scrutinizes the allegories of nationalism, and helps to identify aggressive penetrations by corporations into daily life. Thereby, these works construct a more nuanced understanding of life in the borderlands that is not fixed in time or space but remains responsive to the Sonoran desert landscape and its local communities.

3 Plants, Animals, and Food: The Sonoran Desert, A Borderline Environment

Lara Shipley, *Coming and Going* series, 2011; Martha Riva Palacio Obón, *Butterflies' Anatomy II*, 2011; Juane Quick-To-See Smith, *SPAM*, 1995; Gabriela Munoz, *Interstitial Omphalos*, 2011

Another understanding of regional border arts acknowledges the role of flora, fauna, and culinary cuisines in sustaining the rich cultural and natural environments that compose the American Southwest and Northern Mexico. This interpretation of border arts is not necessarily centered around a national divide but it is influenced by a thousand years of cultural meetings in this region. These artforms depart from the aesthetic occupation of the border and reference plants, animals, the fragile desert landscape, and the foods that enrich and in many ways define borderline environments. These border arts are a response to cultural formations characteristic of borderlands.

These border arts creatively construct environmental histories that recognize interactions between people and the Sonoran desert. Because these works focus on culture that can be understood as common—everyday and everywhere—they invert high art hierarchies and social-cultural orders. In addition to acknowledging shared cultures, some of these works respond to cultural conflicts and violence perpetuated against the natural world.

4 (Re-)Imagined Landscapes

Lee Friedlander, *Sonora*, 1993; Graciela Iturbide, *Mujer Angel*, 1980; Niki de St. Phalle, *Dreaming Under a Cactus Tree*, 1977; Niki de St. Phalle, *Desert Bride*, 2001; Mark Klett, *Palm at the site of Japanese internment camp, Posten*, 1985

Landscapes play a long and storied part in the history of art. At first glance, landscapes may appear to represent a so-called natural environment. However, landscape paintings often are ideological and allegorical. Since World War II, the North American West has been an important site for contemporary artists to unpack and rethink the landscape. Land arts, earthworks, landscape photography, and performance arts engage spatial topographies both cartographic and otherwise. Contemporary landscapes negotiate the importance of locational identity and specificity, and complicate how landscape studies construct a portrait of national formation.

What does it mean to map the body as a landscape? And similarly, what does it mean to use the body as symbol in the landscape? In this snapshot of landscape studies and land use, contemporary art emphasizes its role not as an illustration but rather as an interpretation of human geographies formed into border arts.

Many of the artists in the section offer a surprising contribution to border art histories. Here, an unlikely group of artworks engages in an experimental dialogue about geographies. Lee Friedlander is hiding in the borderlands waiting to be seen and heard. Few know that Niki de St. Phalle lived in Carefree, AZ and that she considered the Southwest important for articulating a form of feminist art. Mark Klett's artistic efforts in the region are well known. Yet, in borderlands contexts, his work exposes history as theory rather than recitation of fact or actuality. Klett complicates the theories of history by giving legibility to the limitations of what knowledge can produce about Arizona. Graciela Iturbide's representation of the Sonoran landscape is expansive and breathtaking with a boombox and female body of color front and center.