

Thinking and Becoming

By Ángel Rafael Vázquez-Concepción

“Thinking is that which we already know we have not yet begun to do.”
Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 1967

Working with artists and students is a solemn commitment to thinking – thinking about objects, processes, and even about thinking itself. It can be thrilling, but also exhausting, and always requires a certain degree of risk.

In the art space we think, symphilosophize, conceptualize, name, and take apart objects and subjects. We relate to thought in myriad forms and thus engage one another, face-to-face, in the most authentic of instances, or perhaps in remote and mysterious ways. Maybe somewhere in between.

In teaching, the process is identical. Working to create authors and inquirers is also a solemn commitment to thinking. And as mentors, we impress thinking strategies upon students. In many ways, “students” and the “teacher” are both public and curator. In the best moments, they fuse their thinking together temporarily—they connect on a deeply personal level. They deliberate and contest, and they also share a lot of insights and reflections—they play.

Most importantly, students and teachers recognize that the thinking they do together is inspiring, meaningful, and even necessary. Our learning partnership is built on the possibility of allying teaching and learning. This, in turn, becomes a vast network of thinking and thinkers in a lively site of exchanges which we call the schoolhouse.

In the age of technology, characterized by crass thoughtlessness and a fundamental failure to remember, to think, and to think on moral gravity, has become the most

formidable form of resistance. I draw the meaning of gravity here from philosopher Simone Weil, who describes it as the effects of the gap between or the confluence of human beings.

We must prompt ourselves, and each other, to think again. Like Derrida implies in the quote above, we must get started by doing what we know we must do. We must elicit thinking in every quarter, in every situation, in every stage. Calculative thinking, yes, but more importantly poetic forms of thought which can lead to actual places where we can all exist with a certain degree of dignity. Each one of us has skills in reading and writing which are necessary (vital) to accomplish this goal.

As homo sapiens, we are a learning animal, a born collector of things and concepts, a reader and writer of patterns. These qualities define our species. Most people would not risk their lives for the freedom to read and write, to think and speak our mind, to raise our hand, but that is precisely how we forfeit our ability to resist. We must not abdicate from the real responsibilities that come with living in a democracy, from our duty to think. To be democratic is to reflect upon what we think and ought to do, individually and collectively. If thinking, and its ripples across writing and reading publics die, freedom dies.

Untitled (uncontained)

By Jackie Valle

“The actual state or experience of exile is like a dream, condensed and tightly wound. When the exilic subject, occupying a space that is not “home,” produces writing or performance after exile, that production . . . unravels a lifeworld of singular cohabitation and dual temporality.”¹

A body indents itself into a shoreline; bunches of cut crimson flowers bleed out of its lines. The silhouette and flowers are arrested in constant movement between ocean and sand, between appearing and being disappeared by the oncoming sea tide. The cut flowers—more fraught with existence than the body’s impression—are joined together by a forlorn-ness that points toward (im)measurable scale, boundaries, and matter. The flowers indelibly mark the corporeal and are also haunted by the disappearance of that very body. The figure imbricates itself in the meeting of form lost and (re)affirmed, being neither here nor there, neither one nor another. The work of the image moves within a spectrum between the familiar and unfamiliar. Appearing without a finite or singular understanding of time and place, this uncontained figure is a site wherein origin, being, and body softly press up against one another—endlessly collapsing and unfolding from one instantiation to another.

The image, though referenced often in contemporary art history, will remain nameless here in order to move us away from its mythification and toward the heart of this matter. It performs the invisible demands of absent particulars, revealing

to one the facticity of something unseen and unknown. In its resistance to being named, the image cannot be understood by dominant conventions of sight, representation, and words. The figure works in a romantic insistence on loss and retrieval, decentering the marks, (de)lineations, psychogeographies, and bounds imposed upon it. The fact of this body leaves behind a residue and in its trail uncovers the great inadequacies, potentialities, and myths of name, time, place, and origin.

The liminal figure—an uncontained and (dis)appearing body—is part of an artistic practice of working toward something, someone, or somebody always lost in articulation, shifting from one to another, and always already in transformation. This space can be understood as a site of meaning making or meaning itself—where form, representation, and reader meet at the same break. Here, a resolution of meaning does not always and may never arrive in the actual time and space of signification. This break is a place where all are implicated and destabilized—representation, form, and words—moving between and against the lineations and approaching an understanding of (im)possibility.



Opening Night Reception
Friday, February 15, 2019
7:00 - 9:00 PM



Performances by XUXA SANTAMARIA
DJ Sessy Papi Chula
Cafecito y Cubilete by Amy Vázquez
Thursday, March 7, 2019
7:00 - 9:00 PM

¹Humanizando la Deportación Archive of University of California Davis with sponsorship from University of California Mexico Initiative and University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI). Videos produced by: Aida Lizalde 1. Muñoz, José Esteban. “No Es Fácil: Notes on the Negotiation of Cubanidad and Exilic Memory in Carmelita Tropicana’s “Milk of Amnesia”. TDR, 1995.

Generous support for Southern Exposure is provided by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Crescent Porter Hale Foundation, the David Cunningham Memorial Bequest, Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Nicholson Family Foundation, the the San Francisco Arts Commission Grant Program, the Violet World Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Zellerbach Family Foundation, and Southern Exposure’s members and donors.

tallest part of the arch

By Marcela Pardo Ariza

The keystone is the final stone placed during the construction of an arch. This indispensable piece—both the tallest and the farthest from the base—holds all of the stones together, locking the arch into a structurally sound configuration. Similarly, our social keystones are those who dwell in the in-between spaces, who bear weight and hold together our social structure. The social keystone facilitates an unlikely translation; it provokes a new sound; it proposes a distinct imaginary. It gives me hope. The tallest part of the arch is resilient, witty, poetically political.

Through writing, photography, video, ceramics, and music, *The Tallest Part of the Arch* is an ode to the uppermost point of the social arch. The arch is molded by the subjects that are not pure but lavishly mixed, plurally hybrid,

luxuriously aligned with one another—those who have migrated, hold multiple identities, assimilate strategically and forcefully. Those who are undefinable, whose own existence is an extension of solidarity.

Whether putting on makeup while crossing the border, eroticizing historical monuments, humanizing the stories of those who have been forced out of a country, or in the magical inexactitude of translation, stories of migration told through objects, the dichotomy of fresh cut flowers for the dead, or apocalyptic fashion of survival, the artists and writers of this exhibition use their role as keystones to remind us of the essential interdependence of all the stones and call on us to build more thoughtful, empathetic, and collaborative arches together.

tallest part of the arch

02.15 - 03.30

Curated by Marcela Pardo Ariza
Southern Exposure Curatorial Council Member



MISS TOXICA

By Juliana Delgado Lopera

The Camp Fire on November 8, 2018 was the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California history to date. Smoke from the fire engulfed the Bay Area for weeks.

The sky is not a sky but a thick sancocho soup of doom. Hazy like someone ashed a cigarette inside your nostrils. This is the new reality. Here’s where we’re supposed to breathe, live, fuck. What we’re breathing: dead trees, dead houses, dead people, government negligence, capitalism. The endemic sadness of waking up without air. You can see the smoke but you can’t touch it. At the bus stop I put my hand out into the air; I see the glimmering particles dancing in front of me as if laughing at my stupidity. In my own desperation I push the air out, far from my nose so I can get some delicious oxygen that I once took for granted, but these are stubborn little gaseous bitches.

Where’s the Virgen del Oxigeno, I ask out-loud, when you need one?

There’s no way around this. No Virgen to pray to, no protest, no hope. My skin is covered with a layer of death I try scrubbing off over and over with no success. A film of shit has landed over San Francisco indefinitely. The city sets up “relief” public places. “Relief” is the new breathing normal now, the best our lungs get. I imagine the techie bros capitalizing on this—setting up an app to sell you clean air, the city giving them tax breaks for their “contribution to the community.” I imagine what VIP air must feel like. Is air going to become a line-item in a family budget now? Rent, food, utilities, air. Air arriving in a tank at my house with some cute techie design *AIRNOW is FOR AIRVERYONE!* A white girl giving thumbs up as she breathes clean air.

We adapt quickly, too.

In the bus we collectively establish a new horrid fashion trend called The Breathing Mask. It is white it is gray it is black and, sometimes, it is baby blue. Quickly, the trend takes on a life of its own and everyone is texting, posting on social media about it:

Bitch, where you got your breathing mask from? Is it a N95? You gotta wear the ones with the respirator, girl. Bitch, this community place is giving them away for free. Bitch, change yours every eight hours, this air don’t play. Bitch, I’m rhinestoning this ugly shit. Bitch, do I look cute or what?

When the sancocho soup of doom reaches hazardous levels, I run inside. Close all windows, all doors.

We pass time.

We wait. For days, we wait.

Time stretches differently now that we’ve upset the normal time routine. Time stretches like it does when catastrophes happen. A lulling, a waiting, an opening. Time moves in circles, the world outside eerily quiet. We stay inside and fuck. Pass the time fucking. Pass the apocalypse with an orgasm. We fuck because we’re being killed faster than we thought. We fuck to reach another consciousness, to forget, to connect, to breathe a lover’s scent, a lover’s cum. To breathe.

As we’re making tea for our lungs, R tells me “toxic” is the word of the year. Toxic wins the prize. Toxic’s taken over, she’s here to stay. Toxic is the word-queen. Long live queen toxic.

MISS TOXIC TO YOU, BITCH!

Al Otro Lado

By Jovanna Venegas

The past sixty years of the border’s history can be told through my mother’s daily makeup ritual. She started doing her makeup as she was introduced into the labor force in 1960s Tijuana. She grew up with ten other sisters that were all close in age. Once they were teenagers, my grandfather would take them all to work—some worked in department stores, restaurants and a few in factories. My mother was an accountant’s assistant at the Pepsi factory. They would all do their makeup together in the car ride to their destination. Closer to San Diego than the rest of Mexico, Tijuana has always been in an abusive and co-dependent relationship with its parasitic neighbor, that has violently intensified over time.

Tijuana’s economy and demographics constantly adjust to the shifts in US policy. In the 1950s the city had a population of 65,364. Due in large part to World War II and the ensuing Bracero Program—which saw the influx of millions of guest workers from Mexico into North American farmlands—the population jumped to 165,690 by the 1960s. The city was forced into rapid urbanization and, disconnected from the rest of Mexico, it adapted to this surplus in labor though service sector jobs driven by North American tourism. In an attempt to leave this relationship, the city promoted industrial growth and thus likely set the foundation for the future maquiladora program, which only married us to the abuser.

During the late 1980s through the end of the 90s my family and I lived on the Mexican side. My father had his photography studio there and my siblings and I were all sent to catholic school. My mother, on the other hand, along with 50,000 people, would cross the border daily to go to work. She calls this period antes de las torres, that is, the pre-9/11 period when it would take you an average of thirty to sixty minutes to cross—sixty when it was bad. Today, if you are going to work in the morning, it takes about three hours and the numbers have risen to 150,000 daily commuters. She used to work as a notary with accounting firms, and sometimes in real estate. In order to save time in the morning, while she crossed the border for work, she would do her makeup, as she had learned to do with her sisters in the car. Depending on the level of detail and complexity of her makeup on a given day, her colleagues could determine how long the line had been that day; *“Hoy te ves muy arregladita,”* they would tell her.

In her lifetime, she has seen the border shift from a fluid and quasi porous space—you would cross the border to do your laundry (as they had better washing machines)—to one that is brutally militarized. But those of us that are able to, will continue to cross, because the border, cruzar al otro lado, is a part of our everyday life and it is also our right. And though my mother now lives on the US side, when she occasionally crosses, she reapplies her lipstick and curls her eyelashes, and looks as pretty as always.

Artists

Susana Eslava Sáenz
Jamil Hellu
Humanizando la Deportación Archive*
Javier Ocampo
Maria Paz
Purin Phanichphant
Cristina Victor

Writers

Jackie Valle
Juliana Delgado Lopera
Ángel Rafael Vázquez-Concepción
Jovanna Venegas

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 3030 20th Street @ Alabama
San Francisco, California
soex.org



tallest part of the
arch
02.15 ~ 03.30

SOUTHERN
EXPOSURE

Te Amo
Javier Ocampo