This exhibition began much earlier, perhaps even with the mythical founding of Rome by the digging of a furrow or pomerium around the space where the city would later be located. Although there are various competing narratives about this moment, the pomerium is believed to have been a line plowed into the ground by Romulus, but is sometimes also referred to as a wall. It marked the periphery of Rome and identified those dwelling within the line as citizens, while those living in the wilderness, beyond Romulus’ action, were suddenly set outside the limits of the area in which the law acted and therefore were beyond the ruler’s protection. According to legend, Romulus and Remus fought over the exact location of this mystical border and agreed that the final site would be decided through augury. After the priest staged his rites, however, the twins had differing interpretations of the signs. Anxious to win, entrepreneurial Romulus simply dug his furrow first. Remus, very angry over his brother’s trickery, jumped over the crevice and broke the line’s protective spell. This was considered a very bad omen: The pomerium delimited a physical territory but more importantly, it also marked the boundary of an ordered political space where agreements, written laws, and unspoken social contracts operated. By crossing the line of the pomerium Remus broke through the limits of control and invited chaos in—he challenged the laws of citizens living in this new space and became an “other,” a foreigner in his own land. For this offense, he was put to death.

Border Alchemies, Fiamma Montezemolo’s first solo exhibition, reminds me of this story. As the title expresses, the exhibition focuses on borders, which are the political boundaries of nation states that are imposed on geography, on people, and places, and whose origins are certainly related to the myth of Rome’s origin. But the title also evokes the myth, the ritual, and the magic by which national borders acquire real political dimensions—the alchemical transmutation of territory into nation—as well as the more intangible aura of borders that is tied to their liminal condition as sites where oppositional identities come in contact attracting and repelling each other.

Montezemolo understands the power of borders well, having spent six years as a cultural anthropologist in Tijuana, Mexico, studying its cultural producers. Rife with clichés and social constructions, over-signified to the point of auto-exoticism, the Tijuana/San Diego region is also a place where one constantly becomes the other by continuously passing from one side of the border to another. This has led anthropologists and sociologists to identify a hybrid border denizen that continually negotiates between bi-national identities while belonging fully to neither. A place of passage, Tijuana allows for flexible identities and sometimes gifts this possibility to those visitors and foreigners that, like Montezemolo, make that city however briefly their home. The city’s liminal character gives permission to become another by choice, electing to change and shape-shift one’s identity, and to question the options and possibility offered by birth and breeding.
The piece works multiple angles in the use of composition. The artist uses multiple colors and forms to create a sense of movement and energy. The shapes and colors intermingle to create a dynamic and engaging piece. The artist's use of composition and color creates a sense of depth and dimension, making the piece feel three-dimensional. The artist's use of composition and color allows the viewer to see the piece in a new way, creating a sense of wonder and amazement.

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