

CONTACT ZONE

CO-CURATED BY
BIANCA ABDI-BORAGI
KATHERINE ADAMS
ANNA MIKAELA EKSTRAND

THE IMMIGRANT ARTIST BIENNIAL 2023

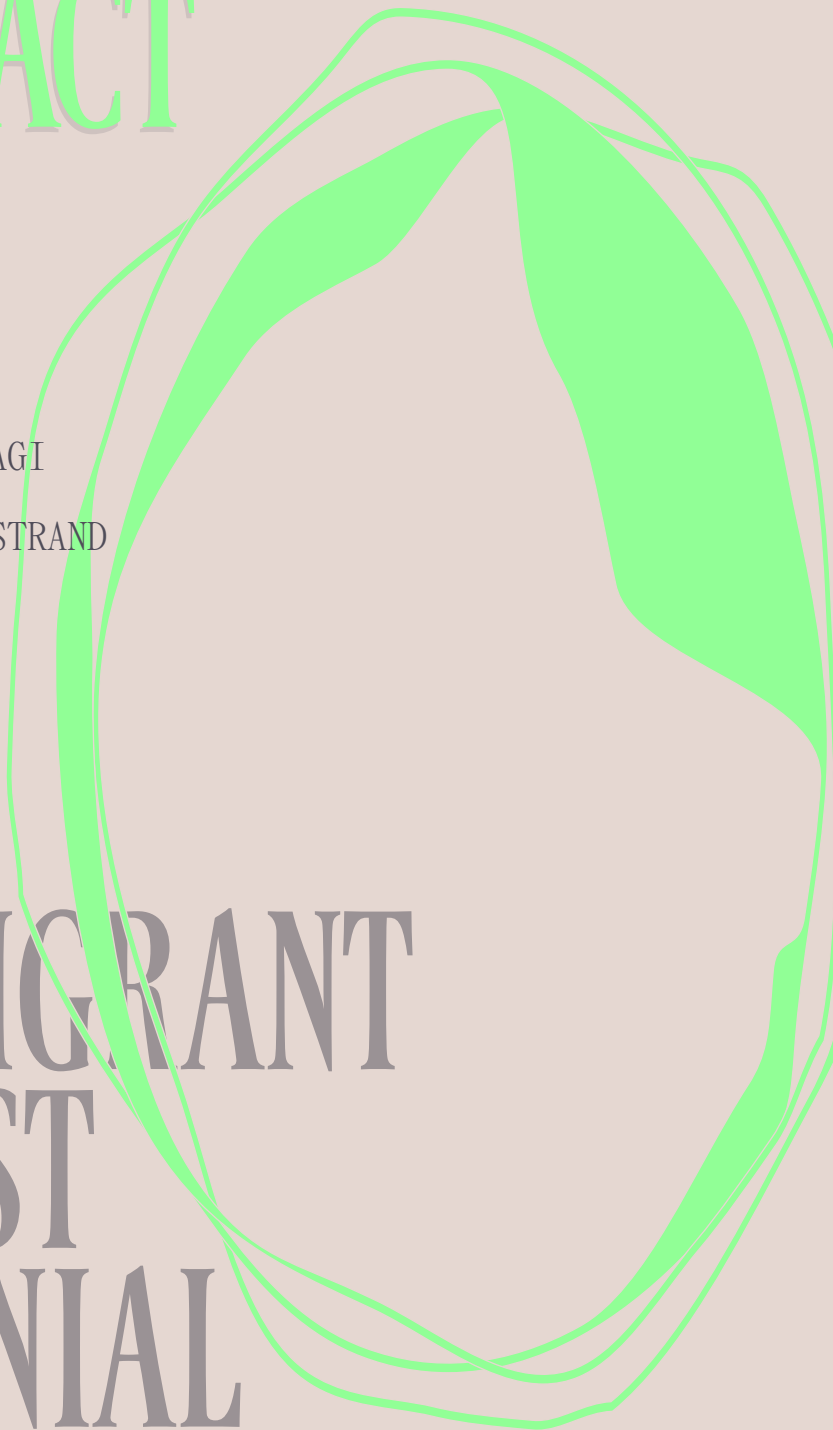


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CONTACT ZONE

OVERVIEW

A stage where cultures clash and merge, *Contact Zone* presents more than fifty artists from over thirty-five countries across nine venues in New York City and New Jersey. Centering U.S. and international immigrant and exiled artists the programming explores how storytelling, embodied memory, and projections of diasporic futures can be strategies for navigating conflict and straddling different political terrains. With an aim to voice immigrant experiences to build solidarity, the biennial will present Contact Zones (exhibitions), Field Work (panels), and Arena (performances and screenings) in addition to a Field Guide (catalog). It is co-curated by Bianca Abdi-Boragi, Katherine Adams, and Anna Mikaela Ekstrand.

As a first, *Contact Zone* will host a roundtable on undocumented and DACA-recipient artists at Brooklyn Museum. Presciently, a panel on Ukrainian artists and the ongoing war will be held at EFA Project Space.

TIAB is funded through its Patron Circle, grants, individual donations, and host partners.

FOREWORD

In 2023, The Immigrant Artist Biennial is as relevant, if not more urgent, as ever. Taking some time to decompress, heal and rebuild after 2020, I invited three curators to collectively co-curate the second iteration, broadening the notion of an immigrant through incorporating exiled and nomadic artists, displaced by ongoing wars and global conflicts. TIAB 2023: *Contact Zone* highlights the need for compassion, humanity and acceptance, and proposes a platform, where complex relationships to place, body, trauma, home, identity, and belonging can develop and co-exist.

Exploring the intersections of mediums, genres, ideas, cultures and languages, the biennial reinvig-

orates the conversation about humane integration and communication, signaling a common need to establish a mutual contact zone and coexist peacefully in the world. The ever so necessary need for community is reevaluated and poignantly rebuilt in these times of world health crisis, climate catastrophes, and wars. Artists of many backgrounds pursue new forms and avenues of experimentation, dialogue, and profound exchange—, in the face of dislocation and adversity, whilst seeking connection and society.

TIAB 2023's robust programming offers a multiplicity of spaces for contemplation and optimism, whilst paying close attention to challenges and unique perspectives of immigrant artists and their audiences. As the war in my native Ukraine rages on, I am especially inspired, uplifted, and re-energized by the curatorial team's unrelenting passion and the selected artists' critically engaged propositions within the conceptual realm of The Immigrant Artist Biennial.

Katya Grokhovsky
Founding Artistic Director
The Immigrant Artist Biennial



PART I

SUPPORTING THE CONTACT ZONE FROM THE CURATORS

BIANCA ABDI-BORAGI

KATHERINE ADAMS

ANNA MIKAELA EKSTRAND

Selected independently by our founding artistic director, we were all involved with The Immigrant Artist Biennial (TIAB) 2020: *Here, Together!*. Bianca Abdi-Boragi as an exhibiting artist, Katherine Adams as exhibitions manager, and Anna Mikaela Ekstrand as co-curator of *Mother Tongue*—although, like with many smaller organizations, both Adams and Ekstrand had many responsibilities beyond their dedicated roles working on public programs, public relations, and fundraising. With a small and mostly volunteer-run organization, the power of action lies in taking initiative and following through. With prior understanding of the project's facets, we approached the early curatorial process through reading circles and studio visits as a way to let artists guide us to build out the concepts of the previous biennial while preserving its activist and artist-driven ethos.

Whereas the O1-visa—and, more broadly, procuring visas in the U.S.—was a focal point of the biennial's programming in 2020, *Contact Zone* spotlights undocumented artists, many of whom have less direct contact with the immigration system. We also wanted to widen our engagement of immigrant experiences to reflect second-generation,

non-U.S. based immigrant artists, and—due to the Russo-Ukrainian war—artists in exile. Ukrainian artist Maria Kulikovska and curator Valeria Schiller, both hailing from Crimea, fled Kyiv, where they lived during the full-scale invasion. Over the past year, Kulikovska has moved from residency to residency with her baby, while Schiller has established herself in Berlin. They are processing the war in real time. Our roundtable “Ukraine, Making Art in Times of War” and an essay in this catalog by Schiller serve as platforms for their grievances, hopes, and emotions. Argentinian artist Marcelo Brodsky fled Argentina and lived in exile in Italy and Spain for some years after his brother disappeared at the age of twenty-two, killed by the military regime that was in power between 1976-1983. Much of Brodsky’s work has centered on uprisings, migrants, and memorializing genocides through archival research and editing photographs with paint. These artists share perspectives on victimhood, agency, the body, relationships to statehood, and personal and communal rebellion. U.S. Pakistani-diaspora artist Sa’dia Raman, and Erika DeFreitas, born to a Guyanese mother and Trinidadian father in Canada, are two of our second-generation immigrants who explore memory and transculturation. Dominique Duroseau was born in the United States and is a U.S. citizen but grew up in Haiti. In her work, Duroseau investigates blackness, race, and being the “other” through both racial and cultural lenses. These artists relate to the term ‘immigrant’ without having worked their way through the immigration system.

As the scope of our sense of “immigrant” broadened for this second edition of the biennial, our team was often engaged in questions of where and how this designation functioned in our work. Ultimately, our curatorial work follows a legalistic definition of this term—fundamentally, “immigrant” as we use it implies a certain actual or possible confrontation with the borders and boundaries of the nation-state, be this in the United States or elsewhere. Even as we played within and critiqued the limits of this legal architecture, we became aware of the

other dimensions at play in the formalism underlying this version of immigration—ideas of what it means to settle *permanently* as opposed to temporarily, to *stay* as opposed to remain nomadic, to arrive from somewhere *foreign* to somewhere local, to be recognized or unrecognized by the state. Naturally, as curators who each engage critical studies from other fields, we discussed problems such as the issue of settler colonialism and the history of forced migration of Africans to the Americas under slavery. If the legal immigrant or their family is a recent arrival, for example, non-indigenous settler communities are just as foreign to the lands we find ourselves on as new Americans. Our focus on the former, formal sense of immigration is one that centers the experience of being potentially cast out of the country in which one lives—in reference, crucially, to a supposedly *more original* place; in which the state confronts oneself or one’s family as a foreign element, or locates one’s reality in reference to an external coordinate. Here, “immigrant” reflects a lived encounter with the legal and governmental architectures that map territorial access onto the body and which wield the power to force you (in that awful epithet) “back where you came from.” Part of what *Contact Zone* asks is: back where? Migration shapes one’s experience of the “homeland,” just as it charts new relationships to place wherever one immigrates. After leaving, one perhaps never comes entirely back to the same place. Likewise, arrival reconstitutes one’s new site.

Our engagement with the idea of a “contact zone” came out of our shared desire for a way to think about place as affected by migration in this way—as shaped by processes that are partly formal and legal in nature, but whose lived experiences are indelibly marked by a diasporic relationship to territory, identity, and history. While we use the “contact zone” idea in many ways throughout our exhibitions and programs, we directly engage the paradigm anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt forged when she coined this term in 1991. For Pratt, the “contact zone” is more than a place where different cultures meet (although it is also this). It is fundamentally connected to an idea of “autoethnography” in

which groups and individuals create self-representations that critically engage with existing narratives of themselves, forging new histories and weaving together different accounts of place to create a trans-cultural territory through which they can persist and survive.¹ Hence *Contact Zone*'s engagement with forms of fabulation and incantation (at Wendy's Subway); surreal or magical realist renderings of place (at Alchemy Gallery); hybrid bodies that merge with the environment (at NARS Foundation); multi-cultural upbringing (Accent Sisters); and the problem of carrying the weight of a distant politic in the present (at EFA Project Space); among other projects touching on the theme.

In the course of planning this project, we have been delighted to see attention to immigration paralleled in highly established arts projects. It was recently announced that curator Adriano Pedrosa's 2024 Venice Biennial *Foreigners Everywhere* will feature artists who are "foreigners, immigrants, expatriates, diasporic, *émigrés*, exiled, and refugees."² Notably, this increased engagement with artistic inquiries into immigration opens pathways to advocacy for the well-being of immigrants.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS: INSITE AND "GLOBAL EXHIBITIONS"

The Immigrant Artist Biennial straddles a few contentious terrains that have rapidly changed in organization and reception within the arts industrial complex. These are, first, "global exhibitions"—projects showing work by non-local artists that has been made specifically for certain sites according to geographic location and, sometimes, local context. Second, what Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung calls "geographic specification-ing:"³ including certain artists solely based on their origin. And, lastly, the biennial model format. For our thinking, the emergence

of exhibitions by non-local artists with work made for certain sites is exemplified by curatorial projects in the 1990s and early 2000s such as INSITE (1992-present). INSITE was motivated by overt political considerations—the development of economic growth between Tijuana and San Diego, and an aim to develop new, site-responsive public art—as well as by an investigation into multiple curatorial formats ranging from exhibitions and biennials to open-ended research. The Immigrant Artist Biennial shares a similar origin—one combining political motivations and open-ended curatorial investigations.

While TIAB was founded as a personal rebellion against the U.S. immigration system, and in support of immigrants, INSITE was founded by artist Ernest Silva and gallerist Mark Quint to strengthen economic and cultural relationships between Mexico and the United States. At first, it accomplished this by creating cultural ties between Tijuana and San Diego and bringing American artists to Mexico; the first two editions in 1992 and 1994 were formatted as a loose assemblage of parallel exhibitions held at institutions in these two cities. It was not until its third edition in 1997 that INSITE abandoned this institutional network model to become independent and curatorially driven, pushing its participating artists to engage further with the border as a site.⁴ Curators and artists were invited for residency-like research trips to explore the sites together, allowing work to develop over time. In this way, curators helped artists respond to their surroundings.

Behind the scenes, INSITE executive directors Carmen Cuenca and Michael Krichman worked on fundraising, bringing patrons from Mexico and the United States closer together and allowing the project to transcend art and extend into the development of business.⁵ Andrea Fraser's performance *Inaugural Speech*, which mirrored the format of

1 See: Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

2 See "Biennale Arte 2024: Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere," June 22, 2023, accessed online at: <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/biennale-arte-2024-stranieri-ovunque-foreignerseverywhere>.

3 Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung. "Dis-othering as Method: Leh Zo, A Me Ke Nde Za" in *Geographies of Imagination* (Berlin: S A V V Y Contemporary – The Laboratory of Form Ideas, 2018), 3.

4 See: Anna Mikaela Ekstrand and Julius Lehmann. "INSITE San Diego–Tijuana and Mexico City, 1992–Present" in *Assuming Asymmetries. Conversations on Curating Public Art in the 1980s and 1990s* (London: Sternberg Press, 2022).

5 Ekstrand and Lehmann. "Pushing Boundaries. A Conversation with Carmen Cuenca and Michael Krichman," in *Ibid*, 319–327.

an inaugural speech to critique its institution, was shown at *inSITE97* and outlined some of the ways in which the organization operated as a vehicle to further collaboration between sponsoring organizations and participants, for economic gain.⁶ In 1994, NAFTA went into effect, eliminating tariffs and turning the United States, Mexico, and Canada into the world's second-largest trading bloc after Europe. Following NAFTA's emergence, increased militarization of the border and more vigilant policies from the U.S. government were put into effect to deter migrants from entering. The development of NAFTA and the increased surveillance on the border formed a clear demarcation between migrant workers and commerce—a tension between human labor and capital. *INSITE* is a prime example of how “global exhibitions” have had beneficiaries beyond the art world, creating stronger connections between Mexico and the United States but also criticizing U.S. border politics.

Indeed, *INSITE* was negatively impacted by the tightening of border control that took place during the 1990s due to the increased surveillance and power allocated to local law enforcement under presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Later, in 2003, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) was founded to curtail cross-border crime and migration, leading to violent and invasive measures. The curators of *INSITE*'s editions in the 2000s no longer expected audiences to visit works on both sides of the border; instead, they envisioned that visitors would happen across whoever works crossed their paths. During this time, Javier Téllez worked locally with collaborators for over three years to realize his work “Flew Over the Void (Bala perdida)” for “*INSITE_05*,” a partnership with a group of psychiatric patients. The work took shape as a town fair crowned by a human cannonball, David Smith, being shot over the border. The artwork parodied the border zone across which movement had become increasingly difficult.

We do not currently know what the next iteration of The Immigrant Artist Biennial will look like nor when it will take place. *Contact Zone*

6 Ekstrand. “Damn, I Should Have Done a Commencement Speech: A Conversation with Andrea Fraser,” in *Ibid*, 328–336.

runs three years after *Here, Together!*, straying from the every-other-year biennial timeframe. It remains a “global exhibition” that—instead of focusing on “geographic specification-ing”—focuses, like *INSITE*, on responsiveness. In the case of *TIAB*, artists work with “global” themes around migration and its emotional and societal effects—but also its potential causes. The climate crisis is emerging as a major cause for migration. Swedish artist Linnéa Gad's sculptures *Shoals* (in Nolan Park on Governors Island) engage with the life cycle of lime and oyster rehabilitation in the Hudson estuary. As Scandinavia is home to million-year-old lime quarries, Gad's research links her two homes. Illustrating the realities of curating immigrant artists, Gad was not able to attend her installation as she delayed her return to New York while waiting for her O-1 visa to be processed by the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm. We expect that, as in this iteration, future *TIAB* curators will continue to respond to the political environment while highlighting the realities of what it is like to live as an immigrant artist: the effects of the immigration system, how immigrants enter and form new communities, and how immigrant artists relate to their “home” culture.

Pratt's thinking on “contact zones” focused on language, communication, and culture, attempting to create a more sophisticated anthropological idea of ‘community,’⁷ she delves into many of the topics that the curators and organizers of *INSITE* attempt to de-tangle, observe, or engage with. These include asymmetries in power, heterogeneity, and transculturation. We believe that “asymmetry of power” emerges as an important term from the 1990s and that its resurfacing is relevant today as we ponder what heterogeneity, transculturation, and more contemporary terms such as representation, diversity, and inclusion (to benefit

7 Pratt launched the term at her keynote address at the Responsibilities for Literacy conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1990—two years before *INSITE* was founded.

marginalized groups) can look like in a neo-liberal art world in constant negotiation with capital.

TIAB BEYOND EXHIBITION: PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Given the political agenda of TIAB to support immigrant artists, public relations is one of the most straightforward ways in which we support our artists beyond just exhibiting their work. Specifically, TIAB facilitates the attainment of press placements that artists can use to verify their “extraordinary ability or achievement” to the U.S. immigration system. Most of TIAB’s featured artists are O-1 visa holders—the visa for “Individuals with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement” which requires exhibitions, references, press to prove eligibility, and (most commonly) a lawyer to process the application. TIAB’s inaugural 2020 biennial, *Here, Together!* focused deeply on the O-1 visa through a panel and legal clinic with the Center for Art Law. One panelist was Arden Sherman, co-curator of “The Extraordinary,” an exhibition generated from an open call for artists holding or applying for an O-1 visa. Exhibitions such as “The Extraordinary” and TIAB make visible the economics and labor behind procuring an O-1 visa. Our explicit acknowledgement of the situations created by visa processes allows us to approach artists with an understanding of the emotional and financial hardship of being entangled with the U.S. immigration system. Although *Contact Zone* highlights undocumented artists—through our roundtable “Undocumented Artists: The Politics of Visibility” with Ana Armengod, Raul De Lara, Christopher “Unpezverde” Núñez, and American Immigration Council representative Annie J. Wang at Brooklyn Museum (moderated by dani lo machado)—the shadow of the O1-visa looms and our press efforts to support artists in their applications are significant.

Our roundtable at Brooklyn Museum will mark the first conversation that is free and open to the public about undocumented artists at a major New York museum. According to a report issued by New York City’s mayor’s office—Bill de Blasio—the city was home to 560,000 undocumented people with a 70% working rate in 2018. However due to

the necessity for undocumented people to stay hidden from the system, the number of irregular immigrants living and working in New York City was certainly larger. Furthermore, research consistently shows that undocumented workers are exploited in the workforce, sometimes working under dangerous circumstances and more often than not with less pay than legal residents. In addition, undocumented women suffer higher rates of domestic violence—if they go to authorities they risk detection and deportation—and, as Columbian indigenous artist Coralina Rodriguez Meyer uncovers in her solo-presentation at Artists Alliance/Cuchifritos, undocumented women do not have access to adequate maternal care. Although many of them pay income tax, undocumented individuals have fewer rights than the rest of the population and are therefore more vulnerable to exploitation, sickness, and violence.

Advocacy for undocumented people and artists mostly takes place around the U.S. and Mexico border. However, undocumented populations are integral parts of all U.S. society in all states. In 2015, Tania Bruguera was appointed the first artist-in-residence at the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) with the aim to support undocumented residents in navigating idNYC, a municipal identification card program.¹¹ Although not solely focused on undocumented populations, this residency built-upon and collaborated with Bruguera’s project Immigrant Movement International (IM International) at Queens Museum in cooperation with Creative Time in 2011 which provided educational, health, and legal services to immigrants.¹²

No amnesty programs exist to create legal pathways to adjusted status for irregular immigrants in the U.S. The DACA program provides legal status but does not lead to citizenship and is often in legal jeopardy as policy makers and politicians attempt to cancel it, as the

11 Claire Voon. “Tania Bruguera Will Help NYC Provide Services to Undocumented Workers,” Hyperallergic, July 14, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/222043/tania-bruguera-will-help-nyc-provide-services-to-undocumented-workers/>.

12 See: Immigrant Movement International (IM International)’s website <http://immigrant-movement.us/>.

Trump administration tried to in 2017.¹³ Raul De Lara, who is a recipient, will speak about the insecurities of living on this program at Brooklyn Museum. Passed by the house in 2021, the Build Back Better Act includes temporary protections and work permits for certain undocumented immigrants, and the opportunity to apply for adjustment to lawful status for some who have lived and worked in the U.S. for more than eleven years.¹⁴ Based on the continued resistance to DACA, and immigration reform's potential to be whittled down or completely removed, the future for legal pathways to adjusted status for undocumented immigrants is still bleak.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Listening to immigrant artists and their varied experiences has been a guiding principle in our curatorial work. (And having an artist-curator on our team, Abdi-Boragi, further facilitates a deeper approach to artists and their work conditions.) Considering TIAB's artists as "immigrant artists" is contextualizing their practice through the lens of their work and living conditions. "Immigrant artists" come from all over the world and stem from all social classes. We acknowledge that the processes immigrant artists move through—marginalities, cultural inheritances, and individual and shared experiences—do not necessarily wholly define them as individuals but rather are conditions they navigate. Observing these conditions helps create humility, humanity, and a richer understanding of the world, while building community.

¹³ "What is DACA and Who Are the DREAMers?" ADL, September 9, 2022, https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/what-daca-and-who-are-dreamers?gclid=Cj0KCQjwgNanBh-DUARIsAAelcAvngdyojsJfyqPOSaiGxf47HzZQLbw6L7CrDzz_Rr32LaxhlWlaNggaAmihEALw_wcB.

¹⁴ Jens Manuel Krogstad and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Key facts about U.S. immigration policies and Biden's proposed changes," Pew Research Center, January 11, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/11/key-facts-about-u-s-immigration-policies-and-bidens-proposed-changes/>.



PART II

CRIMEAN PERSPECTIVES: CAPTIVE OF THE CONTEXT

VALERIA SCHILLER

"The human body becomes political, even without its consent". Ukrainian artist Maria Kulikovska has said. Unapologetic in her frankness, Kulikovska works with a semi-activist attitude that unsettles the administrative apparatus and its representatives. Her practice is deeply intertwined with contextual pressure, whether governmental or social. Unwillingly, after leaving Crimea in 2014 she was considered an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) by the Ukrainian state. The historical fate of many of her works unleashes this complicated political context in which consent is bypassed—similar to people who contend with displacement.

In 2010, Kulikovska started to work on *The Army of Clones* — 20 plaster sculpture-casts, molded from her own naked body. From 2012, this piece was on view in the garden of the Foundation IZOLYATSIA in Donetsk, an industrial city in the east of Ukraine, in the exhibition "Gender in IZOLYATSIA: Seams of Patriarchy and Identity Tailoring," curated by Olena Chervonik. After the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2014, the occupation of the territory by the so-called Donetsk People's Republic began. The pro-Russian terrorist group took over

IZOLYATSIA's building and made it into a prison, a place for torture. On the 9th of June 2014, the sculptures from *The Army of Clones* were shot, possibly used as targets in an act of loathing and disgust towards the object of Ukrainian culture. The pro-Russian officer who gave the decree to demolish Kulikovska's works later called this action, speaking in the Russian media, 'destroying the degenerative art'.

After that incident Kulikovska recreated her own naked body in sculptures many times, using different materials for casting: plaster, wax, or soap. By placing these works under the open sky, the artist lets the natural forces such as wind and rain change them, modifying them until they are completely destroyed by the environment. However, in 2014 the environment appeared to be too political and the destruction far too literal.

I often think about the body and about how much of history—and, together with that, pain—it keeps in itself. In *The Immigrant Artist Biennial 2023: Contact Zone* water colors from three of Kulikovska's biographical series made between 2014-2022 are on view. Through body parts, they chart Kulikovska's anxieties and observations. I see, in this method of dissociation from the body that Kulikovska is applying, an attempt to purify—to rejuvenate the body, to leave at least some part of the trauma behind, to let this trauma live separately and be destroyed by more or less the same context that brought it to existence.

In 2020 Kulikovska was creating a palimpsest-like series of drawings placing watercolor flowers, genitals, and naked bodies over bureaucratic documents and passport scans. In the *Constitution of the President-ess of the Crimea*, the artist tells about the long process of answering personal questions while filling out applications for visas, attempting to romanticize it. This work addresses questions about values and, at the same time, it talks about an interference in personal boundaries by the indif-



Maria Kulikovska, Grouped by series from right to left, *my beautiful. Wife?*, 2014, *Saga about pregnant me and my pregnant husband*, 2021, and *888*, 2018. Water colors on medical records and architectural paper. Photographed by Julia Gillard. Courtesy of EFA Project Space and The Immigrant Artist Biennial.



Maria Kulikovska,
Constitution of the President-ess of the Crimea, 2020

ferent bureaucratic machine. In 2019, a year before creating the series, in the interview to Ukrainian digital broadcasting station Hromadske, Kulikovska noted: “It’s unpleasant when they [Ukrainian Authorities] say: you have a Crimean registration, so you are not a resident of Ukraine.”

Kulikovska, like myself and another TIAB 2023: *Contact Zone* artist Kathie Halfin, was born in southern Ukraine on the Crimean peninsula, a crucial territory for the consciousness of post-Soviet citizens. The resting place for several generations of the Russian monarch dynasty, it was perceived as a paradise resort during Soviet times—due in part to its partly sub-tropical environment along the southern coast. Here, the famous negotiations after the Second World War took place, and this is the place where the Kyiv Rus was baptized—right on a shore covered



President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and General Secretary Joseph Stalin at the Yalta Conference, held 4–11 February 1945, was the World War II meeting of the heads of government of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union to discuss the postwar reorganization of Germany and Europe. Yalta, Crimea, Soviet Union.

with the ruins of Ancient Greek civilization. In 2014, a Crimean referendum occurred—unrecognized by international law. *De jure*, the peninsula stayed as a part of Ukrainian territory but, *de facto*, is under Russian authority to this day.

An absolute majority of Crimean citizens have remained there since the annexation and have applied for a Russian passport, either willingly or imperatively. All of my friends and classmates, for example, have stayed there. My grandmothers, two uncles, and a cousin stayed as well. We might never see each other again. Now, it is physically impossible to get to Crimea through the official Ukrainian checkpoint—because of the literal warzone on the mainland all around Crimea, and throughout Russia. It is illegal according to international law, because setting up processes to cross the border would affirm the *de facto* ownership of the peninsula by Russia. On top of that, it might be personally dangerous for anyone active in the pro-Ukrainian field.

Being born in the periphery sometimes entails a continuous process of proving your political views or your inner sense of belonging. Being born in Crimea and living in Ukraine after the annexation, I was sometimes perceived as a suspicious element. Several acts of discrimination caused me to be ashamed and fearful of mentioning my hometown. This lasted for around five years after moving to Kyiv. I did not share publicly where I was from, to avoid being asked about it during conversation. This is something that I imagine all of us, displaced citizens, sometimes feel.

I cannot count how many examples of displaced public figures talking openly about their homelands I had to see and hear until I understood that being from a problematic territory on the periphery is not shameful.

I often wonder if there is a chance to get a break from the body and the history that it holds—to imagine that no past has happened. It would be more pleasant to live without this baggage, and to be free to create without connection to its previous experience. Eventually, to break free you have to dive into your own context, to let yourself be captivated by it, to dissolve in it and become its official representative—perhaps, that is the solution.



Crimea occupied by Germany one year before the deportation of Crimean Tatars by the USSR. Photos made by Wehrmacht photographer Herbert List in 1943



PART III

CONTACT ZONE AS TRAVELING IDEA MARY LOUISE PRATT

Contact zone first appeared in an essay “Arts of the Contact Zone,” which I wrote over thirty years ago. It began as a keynote for a conference on literacy co-organized by the Modern Language Association and the afl-cio. So it was first taken up by writing teachers and began appearing in Freshman Composition classes all over the United States.¹ For the next twenty years or so, every fall, I would receive emails from students in these classes. “Dear Mrs. Pratt,” they always began (their heads were still in high school), “I read your paper about the contact zone, and I was just wondering, what did you mean?” Or “Do you think my church might be a contact zone?” Or “Can a family be a contact zone?” These emails come rarely now, perhaps because readers doubt that the author of something written so long ago could still be in possession of her faculties—or more likely because the idea of the contact zone is less of a mystery to readers today.

I answered those emails religiously. They offered me an opportunity to show first-term college students that their curiosity was a good

¹ “Arts of the Contact Zone” first appeared in 1992 in *Profession*, a journal of the Modern Language Association. It has been reprinted dozens of times in essay collections, handbooks, textbooks, and course readers.

thing, their intellectual development mattered, and they should take ideas seriously. I never set down “what I meant,” of course, But I tried to encourage each writer down some productive path. Yes, churches and families absolutely can be contact zones, but the point was not whether they were or not; it was what insights emerged from thinking about them that way. That point remains the key: what kinds of creativity, thought, and insight does the contact zone, as a space, call for and enable? And what objects and practices does the contact zone, as a concept, bring into view? The Immigrant Artist Biennial offers a fascinating range of responses to both of those questions.

The contact zone was born out of an act of reimagining, driven by historical and ethical imperatives. The original aim was to shift the study of empire from the European imperial center to the sites of imperial encounter, in effect to decenter Europe and recenter the study of empire and colonialism on the so-called “imperial frontier” where imperial encounters took place and imperial relations, in all their complexity and violence took shape. This initial focus quickly expanded into a broader shift in perspective: instead of studying cultures, nations, or communities as internally coherent bounded wholes often defined around a center, what can be learned by studying them at their borders, where they interact and entangle with other communities, nations, and cultures? And what can be learned by studying their internal fractures and divides—by geography, gender, and race? Communities as contact zones. This was an invitation to reimagine histories, but also, and perhaps above all, an instrument to address the present.

In the 1980s and 90s, the breathtaking expansion of global capitalism (or neoliberalism as it is often called) gave rise to new forms of mobility at a planetary scale. People, objects, and information began to circulate with an unprecedented range and speed. Contact zone began erupting into view everywhere, all the time, big and small, momentary and long-lasting. Virtually every human collectivity on earth felt the effects of global migration. People leaving and sending things back. People arriving and bringing things with them—languages, religions,

art forms, political aspirations, histories. The idea of communities or nations as homogeneous, cohesive wholes became more and more exotic, less and less able to match up with the world. Borders and cities became strategic spaces where patterns of mobility and their geopolitical consequences had to be worked out. Contact zone helped define such spaces as objects of study and reflection and as spaces of action and invention. I am in awe of the range of creative knowledge-making work that contact zone has enabled. The Immigrant Art Biennial is a vivid, memorable example.

Contact zone imagines a space, but it operates as a concept in the sense proposed by Australian feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz in her 2011 book, *Becoming Undone*. In a chapter subtitled “Dreams for New Knowledges”² Grosz introduces her theory of the concept, building on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s claim that “all concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning, and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges.”³ Concepts, Grosz elaborates, “emerge, have value and function only through the impact of problems generated from outside.”⁴ Concepts, however, are not solutions to problems. Rather, they enable the search for solutions. They do this by opening up imaginations, by enabling the imagining of new possibilities, of alternatives to the present. They do this, Grosz says, by “transforming the givenness of chaos, the pressing problem, into various forms of order, into possibilities for being otherwise.” Contact zone arose in connection with the chaos of imperialism and the pressing problem of decolonization. It expanded its reach in connection with the chaos of neoliberal globalization and the pressing problems of displacement, inequality, and diversity.

In the new millennium, I have marveled at the range of contexts in which people have drawn on contact zone to address pressing problems of co-existence in and across difference, the problem of how to

2 Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 74–88.

3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York and London: Verso, 1994), 16.

4 Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 80.

justly and fruitfully co-habit spaces where histories of violence, subjugation, genocide still vibrate. In 2015 a research group in France adopted the concept to think about possible futures for a French society both regionally diverse and transformed by immigration. They were trying to decolonize France. In 2016 a high school teacher from Patagonia wrote me to say teachers there had organized their annual conference around the contact zone in an effort to create a new curriculum that addressed the demographic makeup of their region, especially its indigenous and immigrant components. They were working on a Spanish translation of the essay. In 2017 a history and anthropology institute in Germany held a conference called *Contact Zones and Border Regions*, focused on the area where Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia meet and overlap. They asked me to write a preface to their volume. In China in 2018, a group used the contact zone to frame a historical study of European minorities in China. That same year, a research center on Reconciliation and Coexistence in Contact Zones, sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Education and the Korean Research Foundation, was founded in Seoul. The Immigrant Artist Biennial, adds to these examples of groups utilizing contact zone as a point of departure to structure new thought around migration.

We need concepts, Grosz says, to “think our way in a world of forces that we do not control.” This is all the more true because the solutions to our pressing problems, she continues, inevitably lie “beyond the horizon of the given real.”⁵ This point is critical. The reality that the problem solvers are living is the reality created by the problem they are trying to solve. They themselves have been formed by that reality. As activists, thinkers, and artists, we are all required to work toward futures that lie beyond our own horizons, even those we can imagine. At the same time, Grosz emphasizes, that concepts are completely worldly. They are anchored in real events, experiences, and materialities. In this sense are not abstract. The changes they enable will also be real events, experiences, and materialities. For Grosz, these worldly,

problem-related, and future-generating dimensions of concepts make them “indispensable to movements seeking radical change,” theory, she says, “is one means by which we invent radical and unforeseen futures,”⁶ as so many of the artists in the Biennial are doing.

Contact zone began another new journey in the 2010s when environmental geographers called on the concept to help them think about multispecies interaction and “more-than-human” encounters. The geographers asked, Can contact zone usefully help us reimagine the rigid, hierarchical boundaries between the human and the not human? Can it help illuminate the “pressing problem” of human-caused environmental breakdown and mass extinction (including our own)? Can it facilitate imagining the radically different “possibilities of being otherwise” that climate change demands?

Contact zones, I noted, operate as a concept, imagining a space—or creates one on a canvas, on a page or a stage, in a classroom. More accurately, it imagines a historically configured time-space in which certain conditions have come about – what literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin called a “chronotope.” New chronotopes, Bakhtin observed, call forth new meanings, and give rise to new stories in which a society can imagine and examine itself. Bakhtin studied novels. But many of the artworks in The Immigrant Artist Biennial 2023: *Contact Zone* are chronotopic in this way. Indeed, the project as a whole feeds into a new version of the chronotope we call “New York.”

Ideas travel. They fly out of the hands of their creators, who do not own them and should not want to, and land in new places. As I have learned with contact zone, it is impossible to predict where or when an idea will land and bloom, or what they will do. It has been the gift of a lifetime to watch contact zone travel and bloom, as it so richly did in TIAB 2023: *Contact Zone*.

THE IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN MIGRANT

GEE WESLEY

In the United States, the figure of the African migrant is ubiquitous in journalism, mass media, and public culture. Images abound of asylum seekers huddled in camps, languishing under makeshift shelters, or crowded atop threadbare rafts. In recent years, these portrayals have come to stand in for the status of international immigration at large. For immigrant rights advocates in the United States, these “cruel images” of suffering migrants illustrate the vital need for coordinated municipal and state policies responsive to the consequences and root causes of economic, environmental, and conflict-related migration.¹ Ironically, by rendering the migrant as a grievable subject, these portrayals aim to restore the deferred dignity of the displaced by galvanizing public support for housing policies, travel authorization, and political representation. For opponents of immigration, these same images embody a looming threat. Where progressive observers see vulnerable populations in need of humanitarian intervention, their conservative counterparts envisage invading hordes, threatening to at best siphon the resources of the state, and at worst rupture the ethnocultural fabric of the nation.

1 Oraib Toukan, “Cruel Images,” e-flux Journal #96, January 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/96/245037/cruel-images/>.

While these readings of immigration appear to stem from diametrically opposing ideologies, they derive their potency from a shared political imaginary premised on the logic of risk and rescue.

In both accounts, the immigrant’s survival and political destiny hinges on the actions of the West and global north, either through its hospitality and benevolence or alternatively its pragmatic refusal to offer aid. Both ideologies reduce the *person* of the immigrant to an abstract figure and marshall that *figure* to achieve a political end. Thus, inherent to these perspectives is an epistemological violence in which the immigrant is doubly displaced—supplanted not only from their homeland but similarly eclipsed as the central protagonist in the narrative of their own experience. Cast in their place is the inhabitant of the welcoming (or rejecting) host country, who performs as the arbiter, agent, or hero in a cruel morality play transpiring along a north-south axis. On one side, the wealthy nations of the global north; on the other, the disadvantaged and stateless denizens of the south, relentlessly petitioning the bounteous West for resources, acceptance, and stay. The North makes while the South takes.

Yet, the reality is far more complicated. According to data from the United Nations, the vast majority of Africans find refuge and build new lives within the continent, with emigration to Europe or North America accounting for less than 15 percent of African migration. Similar research from the Brookings Institution notes that 79 percent of sub-Saharan African migrants move within the same region, with less than 22 percent emigrating outside of the continent.^{2,3} While the dominant public image of migration is one of displaced Africans defiantly crossing the Mediterranean in search of new lives in the European states, the lived experience of global African immigration is not one of Ethiopians

2 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Trends in International Migration*, 2015 (December 2015), https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/files/documents/2020/Jan/un_2015_fact-sheet4.pdf.

3 Eyerusalem Siba et al., “Foresight Africa Viewpoint – Understanding the Patterns and Causes of African Migration: Some Facts,” *Brookings*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/foresight-africa-viewpoint-understanding-the-patterns-and-causes-of-african-migration-some-facts/>.



Keli Safia Maksud. *They Try Their Tongues*, 2022. Light, sound and sculptural installation. Photographed by Mike Hall. Courtesy of the artist.

in Belgium, or Ivorians in France, but, rather Tanzanians in Zimbabwe, Congolese in South Africa, and Rwandans in Uganda. Since its independence from France in 1960, Cameroon has had three different national anthems—in *They Try Their Tongues* (2022) Keli Safia Maksud includes five-minute sound excerpts and their lyrics embroidered on paper from each one. Sonically, the work considers transitions of political power and freedom as a constant struggle; national anthems were modeled after European archetypes and changed as political power shifted. Importantly the work reflects a larger Pan-African movement—to unite and liberate African countries—that developed after World War II, The thread in some is falling apart suggesting the need for renewal. At the same time, light illuminates the rhizomatic lines through the paper, creating a visual noise. These realities of intra-Africa migration reframe the state of global African migration away from the hierarchical relationship characterized by US media and political discourses, towards one defined by south-to-south solidarity, intracontinental partnership, and regional integration policies. In short, they make clear that all geopolitics are local.

In many respects, the over-representation of the northward refugee in US culture is neither incidental nor apolitical. Images of the north-bound African migrant, immigrant, and or refugee proliferate not only to depict a reality shared by many asylum seekers, these representations conjure a cultural imaginary that in turn shapes social policy, often rooted in scarcity, xenophobia, and paternalism. Embedded in these portrayals is a question of visibility that is equally a question regarding the ways that emergency is defined. As an African immigrant raised in the United States, I learned at an early age how such images of conflict, strife, political dysfunction, and delays in the distribution, while not inaccurate to the experiences of so many immigrants, situate such persons within a framework of crisis and belatedness. Through the eventual logic of the crisis, Western legacies of colonialism and imperialism are bracketed off and replaced by a presentist dramatic narrative of rising action, falling action, and resolution. Similarly, the long shad-

ow of US military expansionism, economic intervention, and political interference is dehistoricized in favor of a humanitarian epic that moralizes and naturalizes forms of human suffering that result from specific histories and ongoing policies of domination and extraction.

One of the questions I have for work addressing the experience of immigration is how one captures the quotidian ongoingness that defines diasporic belonging, dislocation, and collective loss. Many artists have succeeded, Neema Githere's research work surrounding the term Afropresentism exists within this juncture of personal and political. In her workshop, Githere explores digital culture through a black diasporic lens, often in collaboration with her grandfather—making visible this important ancestral or familial knowledge. I was an infant when my family arrived in the United States as refugees, fleeing Liberia's First Civil War. Unable to return to the nation of my birth, my knowledge of Liberia came through fragments: the folktales of my father, the tastes of my mother's cooking, and half-heard phone conversations between



Neema Githere. *Hidden Hands Incantation AI*, 2023. AI-generated image. Courtesy of the artist.

my parents and relatives then unknown to me. These “family people,” as my parents called them, were other survivors. Fellow Liberians displaced internally and scattered across the globe. The conflict that displaced my family would ravage Liberia for fourteen years, yet the afterlives and prehistories of the conflict reverberate across the past, present, and future. I’m interested in how art can convey the ambivalences and ambiguities of everyday life that have marked my own experience of immigration as well as construct vocabularies that defy the eventual logic of the crisis for a model that conveys the durational and quotidian. I’m fascinated by the capacity of artists to trace our lives in ways that express the persistent dispossession, extraction, and conflict that spur mass migration, yet without occluding the human actors in those stories.

The Immigrant Artist Biennial is a project that conveys the urgencies of immigration and the utter mundanity and banality of what survival so often looks like. At its best, contemporary art is a crucial space where the images, sensations, and imaginaries of immigrant experiences can be reconstructed and rescripted. It is a field in which to interrogate and reconsider visual and narrative paradigms that not only inform our understanding of immigration in the United States but limit the horizon of political imagination.

Milk teeth 乳牙

JIAOYANG LI

TRANSLATED BY KATE COSTELLO

Milk teeth must be tossed on the roof or hidden under the bed— a Chinese superstition

In the oral X-ray,

My gums: soles of the feet upturned in fear
My teeth, sixteen toes without nails, side by side, waiting to be wiped
away by the daylight

Three years.
My dentist is the person that knows me best
Her purple latex gloves enter my mouth three times a month
She is an international intern, a student in the NYU college of dentistry
She says all that stands between me and completing the required
credits for the semester
are six wisdom teeth

Her professor is professing, her professor is professing
“Open wide, I’ll massage your jaw first”
The dental intern is interning, the dental intern is saying to me.
“Open wide, I’ll massage your jaw first”

fear on the clinic bed, preparing for twilight

in the twilight
for the ninth time, my teeth are bloodgrapes falling from my
mouth blood
grapes are monks may the black night be still as a pavilion

Dreaming of your teeth falling out means you are going to lose
something you love
(a Chinese superstition)

a crane loses its claw, a claw-machine loses its doll mountain, but
after a stern
talking to, it’s a gentle mother oyster,
you let it take you inside its aragonite formation.

The dental intern seems very angry:

——

You have to learn how to brush your teeth. Up and down, not
side to side
Your top and bottom incisors don’t touch at all
Do you push your tongue against your teeth?
The tongue is the most powerful muscle in the body——so don’t kiss

too hard. The gaps in your teeth ———
 are the result of a congenital defect, two missing baby teeth
 a congenital defect, two missing baby teeth
 they escaped from my dental intern's twilight dream

Last month, Laurie Anderson was on our Zoom
 She used AI to turn herself into Lou Reed, and then Confucius
 She/ he said: *People always ask me to be myself, no.*
I don't want to be myself, I want to be anybody or nobody. She/ he said:

"How do you/ How do you understand the future/ understand
 the future"

The future, slightly smaller than my bloodmonks, my temple, my fallen-
 down teeth.

I don't believe in marriage, but I've become a New York-state licensed
 marriage officiant,
 everyday interrogating stars and caste, scapes and tyranny I can't
 understand

I hate those stones idling away their time and the air around them
 hate the unrelenting white and questions with no answers:

"Where are you,

what are you doing now?"

My good little cat she has trampled on everything is able to
 collected night

terrors crumpled

bedsheets tax forms tooth photos

Yesterday's flowerpot abandoned letters

Last year, my grandfather was sick again, he's so old he doesn't have
 teeth, or shackles

his mouth is a gleaming well, overflowing with time
 on the phone, he says to my cat

good little cat, who dies first, you or me?

Then in the overripe sleep before sleep turns into the teeth of stars
 softer than joyful grapes

And I, still carrying my indomitable American dream
made in china

another reason my future might be fake

As long as America lets me stay in the country like a normal American
 the first thing I want to do is instantly immediately right away leave
 As long as we promise and invite, summer will instantly lose interest in
 tracing the bottom of the beer bottle the grass carp doesn't know that
 eating broad beans will turn it into *crispy fish*

I can't change the speed of the purple latex gloves
 cannot change loved ones, Octobrists, the travelers on the street,
 emissaries or serfs. In this shellworld we take turns acting the sick

person, dental intern and professor

I follow the teachings and commit useful tooth-related
information to memory
teeth are brushed up and down
the tongue is the body's most powerful muscle

don't cast away the mother tongue in the negative
don't cast away the frequency
don't cast away guerilla kisses

Teeth have their own map, I must destroy their map.
fallen
flying above the roof;
escaping before they've grown,
sneaking across the surface under the bed

乳牙，须抛掷于屋顶或藏匿于床底-----一种中国迷信。

在口腔X光底片里，

我的牙床：一只因恐惧而倒立行走的脚掌
我的牙，16只没有指甲的脚趾，并排着，等待被日光抹去

三年。
我最亲近的人是我的牙医
她的紫色橡胶手套会在一个月内三次伸进我的嘴
她是世界的见习牙医，纽约大学牙科诊所系的学生
她说，离这学期要修满学分的距离，还有六颗智齿

“张嘴，我先给你做下下颚按摩”
她的教授在教学，她的教授在对我说
“张嘴，我先给你做下下颚按摩”
见习牙医在见习，见习医生在对我说。

恐惧在病床练习昏黄

在昏黄的梦里，
我的牙齿曾九次找到成为血葡萄并从我的嘴里掉落的方式 血葡萄是僧
徒，让黑夜也静止为一个亭子

梦见牙齿掉落，意味着，你将失去心爱之物（一种中国迷信）

如吊车失去一个抓手，抓娃娃机失去它堆积如小山的面目 但有些苛
责，是温柔的母贝，
你任它把你放进它的霰石结构。

见习医生好像对我很生气：

——

我需要教你刷牙。刷牙是上下运动不是左右运动的

你的门牙上下牙看起来完全没有接触

你是不是喜欢用舌头顶你的牙齿。

舌头上的肌肉是人类全身最有力的肌肉——所以亲吻别太用力。牙齿之间有缝——

是因为你先天性缺失两颗牙齿

我先天缺失的两颗牙齿

在我见习昏黄的梦里逃离

上个月，Laurie Anderson 出现在我们的Zoom

她用AI软件将自己变声为Lou Reed，又变装为孔子

她/他说：People always ask me to be myself, no.

I don't want to be myself, I want to be anybody or nobody. 她/他问：

“你们/你们，怎么理解未来/怎么理解未来”。

未来，它略小于我的血僧人，我的寺庙，我掉落的牙齿。

不相信婚姻，我却成为了纽约州持证婚礼牧师，

日日向星辰与种姓拷问，我不能理解的花茎与暴政

我讨厌 无所事事的石头和他们周围的空气，

讨厌亘古不变的空白和不为答案的问题：

“你在哪，

你在干什么？”。

我的好小猫 她在践踏一切她能够得着的 夜晚的收藏 噩梦 皱巴

巴的床单 税务表格 牙齿的照片

昨天的花盆 废弃的信件

去年，我的外公又病了，他老的没有牙齿，也没有镣铐了 他的嘴像一口发光的井，盛满了时间

老外公在电话那头对我的猫说，

好小猫，你说是你先死还是我先死呀？

后来在睡眠熟透了 在睡眠成为星辰的牙齿之前 它比欢愉的葡萄更加柔软

而我，仍然随身携 我坚韧不拔的美国梦

made in china

大概这是为什么 我的未来可能是假的一个原因

只要美国能够让我像个正常美国人一样留在美国

我要做的第一件事是 立即迅速马上离开美国

只要我们允诺和邀请，夏天便立马失去追溯啤酒瓶底的兴致 草鱼唔知吃

了蚕豆以后可以变成脆皖鱼

我也不能改变紫色橡胶手套的速度

不能改变爱人、十月党人，街上的游行，使者和役者。我们在贝壳世界中轮流扮演病人、见习牙医和大学教授

我遵从教训要谨记有关牙齿的有用信息：

牙齿是上上下下方向刷的

舌头是人身上最有力的肌肉

不要摒弃负片中的母语

不要摒弃频率

不要摒弃游击的吻

牙齿有它的地图，我定要销毁它地图。

掉落的

会飞行在屋顶的上方；

还没有长出来就逃走的，

潜行在地表的床底

还有一颗没有名字的，它在星辰的前额练习涌动

还有一颗没有名字的，它在星辰的前额练习涌动

BORDERS BEYOND BORDERS

XUEZHU JENNY WANG

“We may find others in these walks, we may walk alone sometimes. Sometimes, we wonder if we will ever find that place [...] Being refugees, migrants, strangers. Remaining foreigners.”¹

— Sara Wiederkehr González, 2017

What is migration, other than moving from one place to another? Perhaps it is rupture and symbiosis. It's time spent waiting. It's your Google Translate search history, the journal entry you wrote on an intercontinental flight, and all the text messages you sent to your family, which you wish could have been said face to face. It's a disruption of continuity and oftentimes a solitary process. In a migratory state of becoming, we search for resonance, clarity, and the words from those who have come before us.

In her 2013 article, “The Location of Memory: Migration and Transnational Cultural Memory as Challenges for Art History,” University of Copenhagen professor Ann Ring Peterson observes that

¹ Sara Wiederkehr González, “Migration, Political Art and Digitalization,” in *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces*, ed. Urte Undine Frömming, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 211–26.

since the turn of the century, a burgeoning cohort of non-Western artists has been integrated into the international art market and exhibition circuit. Many grew up in their home countries, received art education in Western academies, and launched their international careers in Western cultural hubs.² A decade later, while this increasingly commonplace path has almost knowingly doubled down on a narrative that disproportionately gravitates towards the cultural legitimacy of select metropolitan, resource-dense “centers,” it has also contributed to the gradual dissolution of national/nationalistic categories, styles, and aesthetics in contemporary art in most parts of the world. Amid a flourishing scene of international art fairs, residencies, and exchange programs, the theme of migration has found its way into so many works—as conceptual underpinning, preexisting condition, or byproduct—that attempt to address any kind of universal experience.

In September 2023, I joined The Immigrant Artist Biennial as the writer-in-residence for its second edition, *Contact Zone*. The experience later became the point of departure for IMPULSE Magazine, an online publication covering art, culture, and immigrant rights from an anthropological point of view. Looking back at *Contact Zone* now, it becomes ever more evident that TIAB offered a timely and somewhat prophetic response to the now-heated immigration discourse, which has come to represent a major point of contention and index that approximately delineates ideological divide. As a channel through which immigrant creatives tell their stories and have their stories told, the biennial successfully and provocatively set the stage for the migrant reality and one’s sense of place to be artfully uttered, understood, and complicated. In an unannounced way, TIAB and my subsequent work at IMPULSE Magazine posed a core inquiry: How does the written word construct meaning at the intersection of art and migration?

2 Ann Ring Petersen, “The Location of Memory: Migration and Transnational Cultural Memory as Challenges for Art History,” *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 4, no. 2 (2013): 121–137.

On December 9th, 2023, queer Indigenous artist Emilio Rojas performed “Open Wound: A Gloria” at EFA Project Space on the occasion of TIAB’s central exhibition, *Conflictual Distance*. Clenching in his mouth Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1987 book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Rojas received a tattoo of the US-Mexico border on his back, confronting the audience with unsettling, muffled pain.³ A semi-autobiographical text, *Borderlands* considers identity hybridity and oppression in the context of geographic and social borders, some articulated in invisible ways. Resonating with the Chicana theorist’s musings decades after the book’s conception, Rojas had chosen the title “Open Wound” to reference Anzaldúa’s metaphor of the US-Mexico border as “una herida abierta.”

Italo-Tunisian comic artist Takoua Ben Mohamed’s book, *My Best Friend Is a Fascist (Il mio migliore amico è fascista)*, traces an unlikely friendship between the author’s younger self and a self-proclaimed nazi-fascist high school student, who continued to justify his xenophobia by singling the author out as an “exception.” In an interview with IMPULSE journalist Gabriele Di Donfrancesco, Ben Mohamed shared that after the book’s publication, many school girls reached out to her, mentioning that they had a similar experience. One girl said, “He thinks that all foreigners are bad, but that I am different.”⁴ Certain experiences, at once seen as singular or even odd, may be identified as part of a larger pattern that underpins the xenophobia and micro-aggressions routinely faced by immigrants. As examples of words by those navigating issues of border and belonging, Anzaldúa’s and Ben Mohamed’s texts give expression to the constant negotiations that take

3 Xuezhong Jenny Wang, “The Immigrant Artist Biennial 2023 Relocates Regional Tensions,” *Cultbytes*, December 26, 2023, <https://cultbytes.com/the-immigrant-artist-biennial-conflictual-distance/>.

4 Gabriele Di Donfrancesco, “Takoua Ben Mohamed Confronts Anti-Muslim Prejudice in Rome Through Comics,” *IMPULSE Magazine*, November 14, 2024, <https://impulsemagazine.com/symposium/takoua-ben-mohamed-confronts-anti-muslim-prejudice-in-rome-through-comics>.



Still from Emilio Rojas performing *Open Wounds, A Gloria*, 2023. Photographed by Charlie Fischetti. Courtesy of The Immigrant Artist Biennial and EFA Project Space.



Excerpt from Takoua Ben Mohamed. *Il mio migliore amico è fascista*, 2021. Courtesy of Rizzoli.

place around the immigrant identity, affording a kind of lucidity that transcends time and place.

This July, I interviewed the New York-based theater director Yibin Wang for IMPULSE. He shared that being away from China—where his aging family members reside—weighs heavily on him because it feels as though he left them behind. Under the Instagram post for this interview, Berlin-based director José Dario Innella (Username: @josedarioinnella) commented:

“You hit the nail in the head, I have to say. To come back home (wherever home is) and see the pass[age] of time reflected in the people you love has to be the toughest part of being an immigrant ... on both ends: [S]eeing the elderly fade away is tough, and se[e]ing the young grow up and become their own people (and the surprises that can bring) can be tough too. Even in the 21st century, with distances shrinking as they had, there’s just so much you can do through a screen. But as a friend told me 30 years ago, ‘eventually a stage becomes your home, and each cast becomes your family.’ I think that’s why so many actors and directors keep working for as long as they can. One doesn’t want to give up that family too.”⁵

The heartfelt, personal response gave me pause. As words narrated by immigrant artists propagate through the borderless cyberspace, they reify the human dimension of migration, which concerns time, kinship, longing, and hope.

The textual encounters at TIAB extended beyond the affective, the interpretive, and the personal. Working with immigrant creatives closely, I became familiar with the O-1 “extraordinary talent” visa that many foreign-born artists are pursuing to stay in the US. Among the myriad

5 Comment by username @josedarioinnella on Instagram post, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9zwKy7xKIs/?igsh=MXBlczgzMjltOG82cA==>.

stringent requirements is the submission of press evidence—proof of the applicant’s cultural relevancy through other people’s writings, such as reviews or features in accredited publications. The requirement strikes me as a bureaucratic, procedural solicitation of social capital, with published text as proof. The written word, oftentimes examined and evaluated based on its venue of distribution rather than content, serves as a form of socio-legal currency that marks the creative work’s permanence.

In his essay “Border as Method,” art historian Alexander Alberro contends with the paradox of migration within a society whose resource distribution is dictated by neoliberal capitalism. Citing Étienne Balibar’s discretion between “those who circulate capital” and “those whom capital circulates,”⁶ Alberro observes that while modernity has propagated less expensive ways to travel, advanced telecommunication technologies, and encouraged the vision of “comfortable mobility” to prompt cultural betterment, this utopian imagination benefits only the select few. Despite globalist optimism, countries have also become increasingly aware of the security and defense of borders, effectively “draw[ing] up no-go buffer zones and construct[ing] armored boundaries to restrict cross-border migration.”⁷ Migration, it appears, carries two simultaneous metaphors: one of fluidity, openness, and change, versus the other of potential danger, identity negation, and clandestine suspicion. Immigrants experience varying levels of bureaucratic obstacles or discrimination depending on their countries of origin, skin color, and socio-economic condition. Borders, therefore, articulate a kind of divide that is not merely geographic but rather historical, strategic, and economic. They are rendered porous in times when “cheap” labor is needed and become severe in times of declined economic prosperity. Under these circumstances, foreign nationals allowed into the country are expected to contribute economically, by means of substantial in-

6 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002).

7 Alexander Alberro “Border as Method,” in *Motion: Migrations. Proceedings of the 35th World Congress of Art History*, ed. Claudia Mattos Avolesse (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Comitê Internacional d’Histoire de l’Art, 2023), 137-153.

vestment, introduction of socio-cultural capital, and consumption (e.g., tourism, education, etc.).

Along the lines of proving cultural eligibility and relevancy, TIAB and its media partners such as Cultbytes and Art Spiel offer a way to help artists work within this transactional framework by platforming those in need of professional support and providing them with a plethora of opportunities ranging from press coverage and panel discussions to exhibitions. Writing about and publicizing immigrant artists' work with the knowledge of this legal backdrop has imbued the TIAB writing residency with an added layer of meaning and solidarity.

Written words *by*, *about*, and *for* immigrants move and enliven. They shed light on the reality of immigrant creatives as individual humans and foster communities beyond geographic and ethnic differences. In James Warner Duquette's interview with Reiko Fueting, a celebrated composer and professor who grew up in East Germany, Fueting paraphrases philosopher Vilém Flusser's argument that "the identity of a culture can be found in its immigrants, as their mere presence will affect this culture to create awareness and assess its conditions."⁸ Crossing paths with immigrant artists in every cultural space, big or small, I've started to think that perhaps seeing art through this migratory lens—one that recognizes the world as it is now as fundamentally a result of migration—enables us to write a history proper to our time, unrestrained by arbitrary borders or the imposition of nationalist sensibilities. Perhaps normalizing migration, representing the migrant experience as a constant in a society that strives towards interconnect- edness, and celebrating immigrant artists not as ex-outsiders but as an integral part of every nation, state, or culture is the only way to gener- ate a truthful portrayal of our reality.

don't be afraid, it's
only crickets chirping

JIAOYANG LI

TRANSLATED BY KATE COSTELLO

listen:

the metronome resolutely masks the escape plan
our concealed names
long to reunite in the darkening night like lanterns

passing through scrawny neighborhoods
who in the filthy little tavern
sleeps sound as a superb baby in the bath?

a firefighting siren arrests worthless you
data-cup of hallucination
outperforms in P/E ratio valuation
take the coat off your mother language, stroll
in the depression, cry madly on the brink of muteness
the life that should belong to you

glow in the dark butterflies of foreign languages
escape from the paper palaces of childhood

stoneblind staring down the gale
higher than the bedroom ceiling deafblind snarling at smoked
mackerel, canned lamprey bones
smell of the storage room lingers in the sky, in this
smoldering sky, what has been emptied out
and what has been squandered?

some no longer cheerily accept flowers. some no longer
produce fish-hook buckets of tears some figure-
skate. some executed by high-
lighter. we will never maintain our grace
we convince each other.

will tonight's shards of mature heart
be piled into a staircase to be stumbled on by the porcelain villain?
will tonight's great open doors
retore vision to the thief in the fountain of despair?

people on patrol, people in the glass box, also you, and me
do we exist as occasional pawns?

in material desire, substance expels us
arms outstretched a sick bird shakes the wood, wood of nothingness
the greatest most desolate void we've touched

is there a difference between today and tomorrow and memorial day?
drenched-through news wearies the evangelist
shattered screens have no history or pedigree.

this fear and beauty strangled into an indefinite spindle
twists hallucination's kite in the hand until it cracks

but the kite flies downwards
only when manhole cover disappears is the well established
so we confidently erase names, extinguish desires.

in the tranquil sewer,
our unfamiliar snow has never seemed so clean.

breath of the black night boundlessly expands
don't be afraid, it's only crickets chirping
the night road sky the metronome-beat of my heart.

离奇的总是彬彬有礼

听：

节拍器正坚定地掩饰着跑路的计划
我们隐去的姓名
也渴望在暗下去的夜中如灯笼重逢

穿过清瘦的街区
是谁又不动声色地在肮脏的小酒馆
里睡成盆浴中出众的婴儿。

消防警笛声逮捕了一无是处的你
杯中幻觉的数据
在市盈率中表现优异。
脱去大衣的母语，在洼地
散步，在哑火的边缘疾呼：
本该属于你的生活，
如外语的夜光蝴蝶
从童年的纸宫殿里出逃

一个瞎子紧盯着比卧室天花板
更高的风暴 一个聋子对着熏鲭
鱼、七鳃鳗的罐装骨骼怒吼 贮藏
室的气味还在空中，在这阴
燃的空中，是什么被虚置，又
是什么被浪费了？

有人不再欣然接受花朵。有人不再
生产装鱼钩的泪盆 有人在花样滑
冰。有人在高光中被执行光的
绞刑。我们永远也不能保持优雅，说
服彼此。

今夜成熟的心碎，
会被堆成阁楼爬梯上跌跤的陶瓷小人吗？
今晚敞开的大门，
会在绝望雕刻的喷泉中恢复小偷的视线吗？

巡夜的人、玻璃匣子里的人，还有你，和我，
是否还存在着偶然的典当关系。

在物欲中我们早已被物质开除
张开双臂如病鸟撼木，乌有之木
是我们触碰到的面积最大的空旷孤寂

纪念日是今天和明天有区别吗？
浑身湿透的新闻让来路涣散的传教者都疲惫了
破裂的屏幕没有历史和谱系。

这恐怖的和美好的已自缢为一个不确定的纺锤
把幻觉的风筝在手中捻得啪啪作响

可这风筝是往低处飞的：
井盖消失后，井才会成立，
于是我们信手删除姓名，熄灭心愿。

在静谧的下水道里，
我们陌生的雪好似从未如此清洁。

黑夜如呼吸在无限扩大，
别怕，只是蠕蠕在叫，
夜路上的天空，是我可以替代节拍器去掉帧的心脏。

WITH THANKS

With Thanks

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ARTISTS

Golnar Adili, Keren Anavy, Selva Aparicio, Ana Armengod, Felipe Baeza, Sanie Bokharie, Marcelo Brodsky, Chiarina Chen, Pritika Chowdhry, Erika DeFreitas, Ala Dehghan, Magdalena Dukiewicz, Dominique Duroseau, Mia Enell, Carlos Franco, Linnéa Gad, Neema Githere, Kathie Halfin, Maya Hayuk, Bonam Kim, Maria Kulikovska, Raul de Lara, Young Joo Lee, Umber Majeed, Anina Major, Keli Safia Maksud, Jamie Martinez, Joiri Minaya, Anna Ting Möller, Nicholas Oh & Ayoung Justine Yu, Jonathan Ojekunle, Mila Panic, Jovencio de la Paz, Yali Romagoza, Sa'dia Rehman, Coralina Rodriguez-Meyer, Emilio Rojas, Leila Seyedzadeh, Tariku Shiferaw, Lilian Shtereva, Alexander Si, Francesco Simeti, Nida Sinnokrot, Juna Skënderi, Slinko, Nyugen Smith, Christopher Unpezverde Núñez, Rafael Yaluff, and Masha Vlasova.

CONTACT ZONES

Shoals, Two Sculptures in Nolan Park with Billion Oyster Project on Governors Island
September 9 - November 19, 2023
Santuarios Gestion Desmadres at Artist Alliance
September 22 - November 18, 2023
Enmeshed, Dreams of Water at NARS Foundation
October 6 - November 1, 2023
Parasites and Vessels at Accent Sisters
October 21 - November 19, 2023
Conflictual Distance at EFA Project Space
November 16, 2023 - January 6, 2024
Excavated Selves: Becoming Magic Bodies at Alchemy Gallery
November 30, 2023 - January 14, 2024

FIELD WORK

Online Roundtable “Ukraine, Making Art in Times of War” at EFA Project Space
Roundtable “Undocumented Artists: The Politics of Visibility” at Brooklyn Museum
Performative Lecture “Oysters as Eyes” at Billion Oyster Project on Governors Island
In-Person Workshop “Heal Me Through Your Nightmare” at Wendy’s Subway
Online Workshop “Afropresentism: Ancestry and Incantation” at Wendy’s Subway
Artists’ Talk “Entre/Encore” at NARS Foundation

ARENA

Emilio Rojas: “Open Wound: A Gloria” (performance) at EFA Project Space
Kathie Halfin: “A Memory Altar” (performance) at NARS Foundation

