Migrant Madonna

Curated by
Joyce Dallal & Naima White

Featured Artists
Artisans Beyond Borders
Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez
Doris Bittar
Christina Fernandez
Mark Steven Greenfield
Lahib Jaddo
MamaDotta
Michele Jaquis
Nadia Shihab
Ralph E. Villalobos

April 21, 2022 - May 14, 2022
SoLA Contemporary is pleased to present *Migrant Madonna*, a mixed media group show curated by the mother-daughter collective MamaDotta (Joyce Dallal & Naima White). The exhibition brings together two collectives and eight artists who engage and transform the Icon of the Madonna to reflect contemporary economic and social issues, commemorate and celebrate their family culture and history, and amplify the voices and experiences of migrant women today. In California, approximately 50% of the child population has at least one immigrant parent. The migrant experience and the narratives of diasporic people shape the culture of our state and our city. *Migrant Madonna* activates SoLA’s mission by making visible the lives of migrant people, issuing a call for empathy, humanity, and action.

The Diasporic framework of this exhibition articulates the reverence of the Madonna through cultural lenses of Latin and Black America, Central Europe, Iraq, Lebanon, and contemporary and historical migrant journeys, including that of The Virgin Mary. These dynamic artists present a rendition of Mary for the everyday, for times of war and violence, and as resistance to conquest. Their practices engage personal and family archives, material culture, loss and dislocation, translation, and iconicity. Literally and figuratively, Artisans Beyond Borders, Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez, Doris Bittar, Christina Fernandez, Mark Steven Greenfield, Lahib Jaddo, MamaDotta, Michele Jaquis, Nadia Shihab, and Ralph Villalobos interpret the Madonna by reflecting the time and place of the artisan who crafted her.

Joyce Dallal and Naima White of MamaDotta say, “as curators, we seek to affirm the connection between the lives of migrant women today and the migration story of the Madonna, and reveal the varied ways artists appropriate her image to comment on their own era, history, and experience.”
The idea was conceived while researching our first piece made as a collective. Our investigation unearthed many interpretations of the Madonna reflecting the time and place of the artisan who crafted her, as well as the historical timeline and chronicle of the Madonna’s migration story.

Contemporary Madonnas continue to struggle at our border within the context of our former administration’s policy of family separation and we continue to witness scenes around the world of families fleeing poverty, war and violence.

–Joyce Dallal & Naima White (MamaDotta)
MamaDotta is a collaboration of mother and daughter Joyce Dallal and Naima White formed in 2017. Each of us have a distinct artistic practice separate from the collaborative: Joyce works primarily in installation and public art, focusing on themes of collective and personal history, migration, memory, and the evolution of contemporary cultural identity. Naima describes her work as an exploration of texture and pattern concentrated on organic shape and color that result in both abstracted atmospheric pieces as well as figurative. As MamaDotta we combine these interests and approaches to create work informed by our experiences as women and as mothers.

Migrant Madonna is our first curatorial endeavor. In researching the first piece we made together, our investigation unearthed many interpretations of the Madonna image reflecting the time and place of the artisan who crafted her. These multiple permutations prompted us to use the Madonna as an organizing principle for this exhibition.
Madonna Combine (2017), the inaugural piece of MamaDotta, was inspired by the birth of Naima’s daughter (Joyce’s first granddaughter) Zadah Enheduanna Dallal Gannon-O’Gara. As her name exemplifies, names can signify and embody multiple things: family history, the place and time one is born in, and the dreams of the parents.

Naima was named after her great-grandmother who immigrated to the United States from Iraq. She in turn, named her daughter in honor of her grandmother. Zadah’s middle name, Enheduanna, is after a bronze-age Sumerian poet and priestess in the temple of Inanna, goddess of love and fertility. Gannon-O’Gara is the hyphenated result of two Irish surnames from her father’s parents.

The migration of these families, from east and west and converging in the United States, resulted in the birth of this child. The piece references ancient fertility figures and Irish and Coptic Madonnas, and juxtaposes historic painting techniques with contemporary media. The use of mobile devices describes the experience of mothering from a distance; at that time the artists were living on opposite sides of the country and this was their only mode of communication.
Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez is a visual, multimedia artist born and raised in La Paz- Bolivia, currently lives and works in Arizona, U.S. Carolina’s practice addresses concerns of displacement, privatization of land, exploitation on natural resources, environmental issues, and the invisible-exploited labor that supplies global trade. In a range of installations and objects that interweave fabrics, oral storytelling, ceramics, and video—uses hand making processes and materials drawn between ancestral and contemporary crafts.

Aranibar-Fernandez’s recent work has been exhibited at the National Museum of Art in Bolivia, in the border fence of MX/US. in New York, Qatar, and in Nepal. Received an M.F.A from Virginia Commonwealth University and a B.F.A from the Kansas City Art Institute. The 2020-2021 Race, Arts and Democracy Fellow at CSRD at ASU. Invited to be the 2019 – 2020 Binational Arts resident in Arizona (US) and Sonora (MX). The 2018-2019 Projecting All Voices Fellowship at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University. Recipient of the 2016-2017 Fellowship at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar.
My artistic practice, installations, objects and performances are informed by research into the histories of resource extraction and the oppressive labor systems that have fueled the ideologies of colonization and capitalism, from slavery to mass incarceration.

“I source materials forged through conflict.”

My work focuses on pre-contact and postcolonial histories in the Americas against the backdrop of the larger global webs of extraction and exploitation, exchange and power. Using primary sources, historical texts and contemporary mapping tools, my artistic practice re-presents traces of capital flows through maritime trade routes to connect the constitutive violence of

Installation “TRENZAS” Cotton Fabric, Copper Powder, Coca Leaves, Mylar Blankets, and Photos
exploitation across the globe. I track the ways that precious metals, cash crops, and raw materials move across bodies of water from the perspectives of the enslaved, Indigenous and racialized bodies forced to move them. I source materials forged through conflict, which include copper, crude oil and cash crops. These materials form the base and material for all of my work.

I currently live and work in Arizona, where I focus my practice on visible and invisible borders, and the displacement of bodies across land and water as a result of the exploitation of resources and labor that corporate capitalism continues to profit from. My work centers oral histories, ancestral ways of knowledge and healing, and often offers participatory experiences for the viewer.

Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez, “TRENZAS” Cotton Fabric, Copper Powder, Coca Leaves, Mylar Blankets, and Photos
Christina Fernandez is a Chicana photographer who is widely known for staged, black and white self-portraits, as well as her poetic, formally composed, color street scenes. For Fernandez, the body and urban space are not dichotomous concerns, but indeed part of a continuous investigation about what it means to inhabit and move through the city. Through work that spans decades, Fernandez compels us to reconsider history, the border, and the real lives that cross and inhabit them.

Fernandez’s projects have been featured in major exhibitions including Home—So Different, So Appealing (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement (LACMA, 2008), Flight Patterns (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2000), and InSite (San Diego and Tijuana, 1997). Her work has also been exhibited at The Getty Center, Los Angeles; Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Bronx Museum, New York; El Paso Museum of Art, Texas; Palm Springs Art Museum; Self Help Graphics, Los Angeles; and the Mexican Museum, San Francisco, among elsewhere.

She earned her BA at UCLA in 1989, and her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts in 1996. She is an associate professor at Cerritos College. Christina Fernandez: Multiple Exposures, a thirty year survey of her work, opens at the UCR/California Museum of Photography this fall, and is the first major mono-graphic museum exhibition of her work. Christina Fernandez: Under the Sun will feature her installation work as part of an artist intervention into the collection at the Benton Museum of Art in August of 2022.
“Fernandez compels us to reconsider history, the border, and the real lives that cross and inhabit them.”

*Maria’s Great Expedition* (1995-1996), This seven element photo series depicts re-enactments of Maria Gonzales’ (my maternal great grandmother) life with myself as her. Bilingual text about her life and its social/political context is presented as text on information panels as in a museum installation. This installation posits Maria’s migration, from Mexico through the southwest, from Michoacán, MX to San Diego, California as an “Expedition.”
Doris Bittar is an international interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans painting, photography, installation, relief sculpture, performance, video, sound, writing, and art curation. Bittar researches and uses pattern transformed to become carriers of migratory memory or cultural DNA where pattern motifs explore shared heritages.

Lebanese Linen is a series of paintings that brought personal intimacy into my repertoire of themes. Images culled from archival family photos show a loving family on the precipice of radical changes before the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1992). Personal reflections on patterns from European and Arabic aesthetics inspired from my mother's home are integrated with family photos of the early 1960s. These elements provided a dreamlike and airy field to learn and explore a deeper insight of my family. The era recalls a time in the late 1950s to 1960's before we immigrated to New York from Beirut. It was a time of promise and bright colored stripes. The lives of women and shared domestic spaces seem to predict the future. The Folding Linens paintings, Araby and Arabesque focus on my parents during their courtship. My mother, at the top of the triangle of siblings is holding and directing how the linens will be folded. To our left, my father is holding a baby cousin to show off his capability as a future father.

"...pattern transformed to become carriers of migratory memory or cultural DNA. "
Doris Bittar “Folding Linens Arabesque” Oil on Linen, 34” x 68”
“Folding Linens Araby” Oil on Linen, 34 x 68 in.
Lahib Jaddo is an Iraqi-born artist based in Texas who has worked across the mediums of painting and sculpture for over three decades. Lahib was born in Baghdad in 1955 to Turkmani parents from Kirkuk and Tel-Afar. The first of five siblings, she spent her childhood in Iraq until her family was politically exiled in 1965. She spent her formative years in Beirut, Lebanon, where she spoke her mother tongue of Turkish at home, Arabic on the streets, and English and French at school. In 1976, at the height of the Lebanese Civil War, she migrated to the United States, where she continued her studies in Architecture at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York, and started a family. She then moved to Texas where she earned a Master of Architecture and Master of Fine Arts at Texas Tech University. She began her studio practice in 1990 and went on to teach for 20 years in the College of Architecture at Texas Tech University. Jaddo's work initially focused on painting, but gradually shifted to mixed media and sculpture. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally and is the subject of the award-winning feature-length film, Jaddoland.
I come from a small ethnic minority in north Iraq known as the Turkmen. Over my lifetime, much of this community - including my parents, aunts, uncles, elders, siblings and cousins – have dispersed across the globe. Since 1977, I have lived in the United States, where I finished my education, created my family and taught as a professor in Texas for 25 years.

It has occurred to me that when the people of a community are separated from one another, when they can no longer speak their language, or sing their songs together, the threads holding their culture begin to loosen. Against this threat of loss, culture is held tightly within each member of the tribe, guarded and tended, so that it may reappear when conditions permit. I feel that this is one of the basic concepts of survival and that my work emerges out of this desire to remember, preserve and honor the culture that I belong to and that I love.

Remembering the women in my family are at the center of this work. I draw from my memories of their movements, language, and clothing. I tell stories about their lives. Some of these stories reimagine the past, others dream of a future. Through painting, I remember the landscapes that held us. Through sculpture and abstraction, their bodies take on new and inspiring forms. Ultimately, I created these works to give me a sense of peace and inspiration in a world that seems currently difficult.
“Anna” Mixed media, 31 x 14 x 14 in.

“Red” Mixed media, 18 x 10 x 10 in.
A native Angeleno, Mark Steven Greenfield grew up in the Leimert Park area attending Transfiguration Elementary school and frequenting the Leimert Theatre as a child. He studied under Charles White and John Riddle at Otis Art Institute in a program sponsored by the Golden State Life Insurance Company. He went on to receive his Bachelor’s degree in Art Education in 1973 from California State University, Long Beach. To support his ability to make his art, he held various positions as a visual display artist, a park director, a graphic design instructor and a police artist before returning to school, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and drawing from California State University, Los Angeles in 1987. From 1993 through 2010 he was an arts administrator for the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs;

“Kid Dyno-mite”
gold leaf and acrylic on wood panel 18 x 24 in.
first as the director of the Watts Towers Arts Center and the Towers of Simon Rodia and later as the director of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. In 1997 he also joined the faculty at Los Angeles City College where continues to teach courses in Drawing and Design. In 1998 he served as the Head of the U. S. delegation to the World Cup Cultural Festival in Paris, France and in 2002 he was part of the Getty Visiting Scholars program. He has served on the boards of the Downtown Arts Development Association, the Korean American Museum, and The Armory Center for the Arts, served as president of the LA Art Association/Gallery 825 and currently serves on the board of Side Street Projects.

Greenfield’s work has been exhibited extensively throughout the United States most notably at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, the Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art and the California African American Museum.

“Chamber Made” Gold leaf and Acrylic on wood panel, 18 x 24 in.
Internationally he has exhibited in Thailand at the Chiang Mai Art Museum, in Naples, Italy at Art 1307, Villa Donato, the Gang Dong Art Center in Seoul, South Korea and the Blue Roof Museum in Chengdu, PRC. He is represented by the William Turner Gallery in Santa Monica, CA and is affiliated with the Ricco Maresca Gallery in New York. His work, primarily two-dimensional painting and drawing dealing with the complexities of the African American experience ranging from explorations of stereotypes, to African based spiritual practices of the diaspora, to reimagined sacred icons, and abstract interpretations of the meditative practice.

He is currently working on a mosaic mural for the Regional Connector Metro Station at 2\textsuperscript{nd} Street and Broadway, due to open in 2022. He is a recipient of the L.A. Artcore Crystal Award (2006) Los Angeles

“What’s That Funky Smell” Gold leaf and Acrylic on wood panel, 18 x 24 in.
“...dealing with the complexities of the African American experience.”

Artist Laboratory Fellowship Grant (2011), the City of Los Angeles Individual Artist Fellowship (COLA 2012), The California Community Foundation Artist Fellowship (2012) and the Instituto Sacatar Artist Residency in Salvador, Brazil (2013). He was a visiting professor at the California Institute of the Arts in 2013.

“Bad Apples” Gold leaf and Acrylic on wood panel, 18 x 24 in.
Michele Jaquis is an interdisciplinary artist working at the intersections of conceptual art, performance, documentary and social practice. She has held recent solo exhibitions at Cerritos College Arts Gallery (Norwalk, CA), Proxy Gallery (online), and PØST at MiM Gallery (Los Angeles, CA). Her work has also been presented in group exhibitions, performances, social practice events and film/video screenings across the US and abroad, most notably: The Shalom Institute (Malibu, CA), DAC Gallery (Los Angeles), LA Southwest College Gallery (Los Angeles), Five Points Gallery (Torrington, CT), Platt and Borstein Galleries at American Jewish University (Bel Air, CA), ARA Art Center (Seoul, South Korea), Ortega y Gasset Projects (Brooklyn, NY), ReelHeART International Film and Screenplay Festival (Toronto, Canada), Echo Park Film Center (Los Angeles, CA), Brood Film Festival: 21st Century Parenthood in Film, (Exeter, England), Angels Gate Cultural Center (San Pedro, CA), Dallas Video Fest (Dallas, TX), Victoria Independent Film Festival (Sebastapol, Australia) and the Director’s Chair Film Festival (Staten Island, NY).
My great-grandmother came here from Latvia on a fake passport.

Originally made as a protest poster for the May 1, 2006 May Day March for Immigration rights in Hollywood and Downtown LA, Michele added text to this enlarged portrait of her maternal great-grandmother, Pauline Zuckerberg Kahn, standing in front of her apartment in NYC. Years later she discovered that Pauline was actually from Austria, and it was her great-grandfather, Barnet Kahn, who was either from Latvia or Russia, and her other maternal great-grandmother, Ida Casarsky, was the one who came (from Lithuania) to the US on a fake passport.
"Tikkun/Repair" Sweater, 27 x 18 in.

*Tikkun* (תיקון) is Hebrew for amending, fixing, repairing. Here the artist refers to the concept of Tikkun Olam (תיקון עולם), repair the world, and Jewish Social Justice in the face of intergenerational trauma. Paired with one of the embroideries, the two pieces speak to the need to dismantle unjust systems in order to rebuild them.

The remnants of a sweater made by the artist’s great-grandmother, Pauline Zuckerberg Kahn, the yarn of which was used to embroider text into canvas for the series *We Are Here, Together.*
This piece documents the sweater made by Pauline Zuckerberg Kahn and unraveled by her great-granddaughter (the artist) approximately four decades later. The title refers to the estrangement that occurred between some of Pauline's descendants after the death of her daughters, the artist's grandmother and great-aunt.
Nadia Shihab is an artist and filmmaker whose work explores the personal, the relational, and the diasporic. Her first feature-length documentary JADDOLAND was awarded five festival jury awards, including the Independent Spirit "Truer than Fiction" Award in 2020. Her films have screened internationally, including at the Centre Pompidou, Cairo International Film Festival, Walker Art Center, and Berkeley Art Museum. She was raised in Texas by immigrant parents from Iraq and Yemen and is currently an Assistant Professor in the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

*Echolocation* is a mixed media installation that brings together the short film *Echolocation* with the mixed media collages and printed textiles that informed and shaped the film, as well as additional works that speak to the histories and futures embedded within it. Together, the works explore the home as a site of grief, play and transformation.
“Echolocation” still from film, video, 8:37
Ralph Villalobos My work focuses on the American West through the gaze of the Latino experience. Drawing attention to Lovers, Outlaws, Bandits, Heroes, Myths and Legends. Each illustration is a story, capturing moments of strife, violence, triumph, and the fantastic. From figures of worship to revolutionaries armed with revolvers and rifles, I attempt to make sense of the past from the eyes of the present. Through the use of acrylic on wood in place of a canvas, I add a sense of permanence to the work. Wood being an industrial and organic medium, I manipulate, carve, twist, and shape it to match my multilayered subjects and messages. Finishing the pieces by taking a red-hot branding iron and emblazing my signature onto every artwork with fire and smoke.

The art is meant to be interpreted by the viewer in any way they so choose. As an illustrator I seek to tell a story, sometimes ones of love and other times tales of horror. As a kid, I grew up watching westerns on both American television as well as on Spanish networks. So, what comes forth from this is a blending of both worlds. An homage to my parents humble Mexican and Salvadorian ranching roots and my American sense of the romanticized west. In closing, Para Adelante Vaquero! (Onward Cowboy!)
“From the streets of LA to the deserts of New Mexico. The Sacred Queen watches over all her gente, wherever they may roam.”

The Mary of every day. We pray to her, we look for her, and we love her.
“When we gather for prayer, she hears us. When we gather for war, she is with us. Waiting to grant us a final embrace.”

A rendition of Mary for times of war and violence, Protegeme Virgencita.

“Reina Sagrada” Acrylic on wood, 4 x 2 ft
“Tonantzin refers more to our indigenous roots. Focusing on the spiritual connection to our families’ past as a source of healing after the trauma of migration.”

Echoing in a sense our peoples struggle to heal after the Spanish Conquest
Artisans Beyond Borders

In 2004 and years following, residents of the desert south of Tucson began finding beautifully embroidered squares of cloth left on the desert floor. These ‘mantas’ are used to wrap tortillas or other food, and are often handed down through families. They had been discarded by migrants crossing through the unforgiving and militarized landscape.

The project Artisans Beyond Borders was initiated by Valarie Lee James, an artist and Benedictine Oblate, to help the women makers of these textiles while they are trapped in shelters and refugee camps at the border seeking asylum in the United States. The group raises funds to purchase supplies for the women, and then connects them with prospective buyers through an Etsy site, allowing them a source of income and a way of creating beauty while they wait.

https://artisansbeyondborders.org/
“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Dircio from Honduras

“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Osyledes from Cuba
“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Diana from Guerrero, Mexico

“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Wendy from El Salvador
“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Theresa from Mexico

“Untitled” Embroidered Fabric, 17 x 17 in.
by Unknown