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NEW EXHIBITION AT MAD EXPLORES THE COMPLEXITY OF THE US–MEXICO BORDER THROUGH THE INTIMATE MEDIUM OF JEWELRY

La Frontera: Encounters Along the Border
March 1, 2018 – September 23, 2018

NEW YORK, NY (March 1, 2018) – The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) is proud to present *La Frontera: Encounters Along the Border*, an international exhibition of contemporary jewelry that explores the US–Mexico border as a complex landscape of human interaction. Opening today and running through September 23, the exhibition features forty-eight artists from the United States, Latin America, and Europe whose works expose the underlying currents of the border environment within geographic, ecological, political, economic, social, cultural, and ideological contexts.

Spanning 1,989 miles, from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, the US–Mexico *frontera* is the most frequently crossed border in the world, and the border zones are among the fastest-growing regions in both countries. The *frontera*, porous in nature, allows for the exchange of ideas, wealth, and culture; as such, it embodies the deeply rooted interdependence between these two countries. Border citizens share a history, traditions, and livelihoods, and the United States relies on Mexican labor in a variety of industries. Yet Mexican immigration to the US is on the decline, and the prospect of an impenetrable border wall threatens to impact millions of people—transborder citizens on both sides, Mexican families already in the US, and those seeking to cross in pursuit of a better life.

In this critical moment of US history, *La Frontera: Encounters Along the Border* seeks to tell the stories of the people whose lives the border has touched and to build empathy for those who aspire to cross it. The sixty-two pieces on display incorporate a diversity of materials, from metal, fiber, and wood to medical equipment, pieces of green card, and the caps of water bottles, to embody personal interpretations of the border journey.

“*La Frontera* testifies to the power of intimate personal objects within the epic human and natural dramas that unfold daily along the US–Mexico border,” said MAD Assistant Curator Barbara Paris Gifford. “At a time when the personal has become lost in the politics, this exhibition reminds us of our shared humanity, and points to the absurdity of constructing artificial divisions.”

“We are thrilled to bring these artists and this conversation to New York City and highlight a different narrative of the border—some of it told from the Mexican point of view,” added Exhibition Co-Curator Lorena Lazard.

Exhibition Co-Curator Mike Holmes said, “After the exhibition’s first iteration that traveled to four venues in Mexico and the US in 2013-14, we are thrilled to bring *La Frontera* to MAD – updated for the current cultural moment and on view at an institution that champions historical and contemporary craft and makers.”



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Selected Exhibition Highlights:

- *No-Man's Land*, a brooch by **Judy McCaig**, incorporates steel, silver, tombac, Perspex, paint, Herkimer diamond, and taramita to reference the mountainous and arid terrains and the natural dangers involved in crossing the border.
- **Julia Turner's** *Three Days Walking (Mourning Brooch)* is based on warning maps that show the dangers of crossing the border through the desert on foot. The maps depict routes clustered with red dots, each of which represents the location of a death, overlaid with circles indicating the distance on foot from the border. The brooch makes reference to Victorian mourning jewelry, which often contains a remnant of hair from the loved one lost.
- Made with canvas and polyester thread, **Raquel Bessudo's** necklace *La Bestia* references the perilous network of cargo trains that illegally carry immigrants seeking to cross into the US. Immigrants must ride atop the moving trains, facing physical dangers that range from amputation to death if they fall or are pushed.
- Comprising hand jewels and a necklace, **Aline Berdichevsky's** *Lightvessels 2* pays homage to the women of the rural Mexican town La Patrona, who wait for *La Bestia* every afternoon and throw water and food to the immigrants as the train passes through.
- Many migrants are fingerprinted and photographed, and these records can cause them to be deported. As such, the practice of erasing the information enclosed in the fingers is common. In calling attention to these acts of erasure, **Cristina Celis' Dactilar** pendants reflect what people are willing to do to their own bodies for the sake of staying in the US.
- With her brooch *Reconstructed: Framed*, **Demitra Thomloudis** attempts to make sense of the deliberate separation between countries through the lens of jewelry, finding a poetic accord between form, color, and texture as embodied in a singular object of adornment.
- **Kevin Hughes'** untitled necklace, made from detritus of jug handles, references the plastic jugs of water left by aid workers along the border, creating life-saving oases in an otherwise treacherous and defeating desert environment.
- In an ongoing project, **Kristin Beeler** visits the *descansos*, or memorials, commemorating deaths along the highway that runs between Ajo and Tucson, Arizona. At each site, she makes a rosary. Her necklace *Descanso 2, highway 86*, made of iron wire and nylon cord, signifies the humanity and honor of the migrants who have passed.
- **Martha Vargas'** silver necklace *Sueño y Realidad* makes a poetic connection between immigrants and the monarch butterfly migration that begins in March. Though each travel to more hospitable destinations and face natural dangers, butterflies are free to make these journeys unhindered by walls or politics.



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La Frontera was originally organized and curated by Lorena Lazard and Velvet da Vinci Gallery. It premiered at the Museo Franz Mayer in Mexico City in 2013. It then traveled to Velvet da Vinci, San Francisco, California; the Art Gallery at Indiana University Kokomo, Kokomo, Indiana; and the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas.

In light of current events, *La Frontera: Encounters Along the Border* is an updated version co-curated by Mike Holmes and Lorena Lazard with the assistance of MAD's Assistant Curator Barbara Paris Gifford and Assistant Manager of Curatorial Affairs Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy.

This exhibition is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Mike Holmes

Mike Holmes is the owner of Velvet da Vinci gallery in San Francisco, which specializes in art jewelry and craft-based sculpture. Born and raised in California, he received a degree in geography from the University of Alaska and studied jewelry and metalsmithing at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now known as California College of the Arts). Since 1991, Velvet da Vinci has presented more than one hundred exhibitions, including one-person and touring group shows highlighting international developments and political engagement in the field. Works created for the gallery have been acquired by the Museum of Arts and Design; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Holmes has lectured internationally on contemporary jewelry and has served as a guest juror for the American Craft Council and CraftBoston shows, as well as on the Board of Directors of Art Jewelry Forum.

Lorena Lazard

Lorena Lazard is a Mexican artist living and working in Mexico City. Inspired by personal experience, introspection, and memory, through her jewelry Lazard attempts to understand her place in the world and the reasons for her existence. Her one-of-a-kind jewelry has been exhibited in museums, galleries, and art fairs internationally and has been featured in numerous publications and anthologies. In addition to making jewelry and curating, she is the founder of Atelier Lazard, a contemporary jewelry school in Mexico City that has functioned as an important incubator of jewelry artists in the country for over twenty years, and has taught at Centro university in Mexico City since 2017. Lazard represents Mexico on the Connects Council of the Society of North American Goldsmiths.

Barbara Paris Gifford

Barbara Paris Gifford is an Assistant Curator at the Museum of Arts and Design with expertise in contemporary jewelry and adornment. Her past exhibitions include *Counter-Couture: Handmade Fashion in an American Counterculture*, *Lauren Kalman: But if the Crime is Beautiful...*, *Voukos: The Breakthrough Years*, *Ebony Patterson: buried again to carry on growing...*, *Ralph Pucci: The Art of the Mannequin*, among many others. Currently, she is working with Richard Meier and the collectors Lou and Sandy Grotta on an upcoming design exhibition on architecture and the studio craft movement. Gifford has written for many



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publications, including *The Journal of Modern Craft*, and for the catalogues *Voukos: The Breakthrough Years* and *Ralph Pucci: The Art of The Mannequin*. She has a Master of Arts in the history of the decorative arts, design, and culture from the Bard Graduate Center.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design.

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