Opinion

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The Exodus Series

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Received Date: July 01, 2020

Published Date: July 14, 2020

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The Exodus Series is an extension of my Encoded Textiles project, begun five years ago after my return trip from working with Mapuche weavers in my home country of Chile. The project combined QR codes woven into traditional textile designs by Mapuche weavers. When scanned with a smartphone, the woven "QR codes" take the viewer into a filmic world of story, myth and reflection by Mapuche elders, activists and poets. This new Exodus Series expands these technologies and techniques (weaving, filmmaking, oral history) into new terrains by focusing on border

crossings and the Latin American indigenous diaspora of Mayan and Zapotec peoples living in Los Angeles. My work plays on the idea of "borders" by framing the experience of trans-migrants in their own words through film and audio recordings embedded in textile or objects, and portrays the dizzying effects of migratory crossings in the urban global economy of L.A. This new approach to investigative art-making explores the contradictions that come with that crossing, when the hope of the American Dream is met with the dark side of living in its shadows (Figure 1).

Figure 1: La Bestia 2016, textile, laser cutting and barcode, 60" tall x 30" wide, part of the 'Encoded Textiles' series. This piece shows the freight train 'La Bestia' and the migrant communities of Oaxaca and Guatemala traveling on its roof. The migrants would travel on this train for days in the hopes of reaching the USA border. You can find their stories by accessing the barcode.

My goal is to create contemporary hybrid “artifacts” that merge traditional cultural expressions with new technologies in order to highlight the commodification of labor in this trans-migrant context. These weavings propose a new mythology of cultural

innovation while using the data they contain to restore and reinsert the indigenous voices into the local Los Angeles cultural narrative and in global dialogue with Latin American origins (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Raft 2020, textile, laser cutting and barcode, 48" tall x 65" wide, from the 'Encoded Textile' series. This piece depicts a raft crossing the Guatemala and Mexico border used in the process of immigrating to the USA. If you scan the interactive code, it allows you to listen stories of immigrant crossing the border of the Guatemala/ Mexico border.

Just as the art works allow viewers to “de-code” the migrant experience in a participatory role (i.e., by “activating” the coded stories), the series aims to bring together interdisciplinary forms of weaving and digital story-telling to mark and contrast the inter-relationships of traditional art forms with 21st century media. The multi-media aspects of the project stand as testimony

into cultural life through documentary inquiry and observation. The project allowed me to further my work as a mixed media artist and filmmaker, while expanding and deepening the content of indigenous living history through art as a vehicle for public engagement with the pressing issues of our time (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Mayan Girl 2017, textile, laser cutting and barcode, 60" tall x 30" wide. This piece was embroidered by the Mayan people of Lake Atitlan. It depicts a Mayan girl at a crossroads, having to decide between leaving or staying in her village in Guatemala.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.