

apexart

2015-16 Unsolicited Program Proposal by
Miguel Díaz-Barriga and Margaret Dorsey

Fencing In Democracy

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, pundits rejoiced in the dawn of a new era, a world without walls. Instead, walls now permeate our world with 33 nation-states constructing them. Walls now separate Spain from Morocco (in the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla), India from Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia from Yemen, Botswana from Mozambique and the United States from Mexico. These post-Berlin walls share, to varying degrees, the common goals of keeping out asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, terrorists, and smugglers. Many states, including the United States, view border walls as a key element in their wars on terror. These walls are the centerpiece of policies aimed at increased surveillance and militarization and the reconfiguration of rights and citizenship at borders. Their construction is part of border security industry that includes collaborations between the public sector and multinational corporations. Even though border walls are a strategic reaffirmation of state sovereignty, states build them with minimal public input on their necessity as well as location and design. Concrete walls, metal fences, and concertina wire speak to the overwhelming military logic that guides our current approach to borders. More specifically, in the United States, mainstream media, through its reporting and circulation of images, fuels the public's articulation of borders as war zones. Residents of border communities, human rights groups, leaders of Native American tribes, and environmental organizations contest this onslaught of government and corporate domination as well as the mass mediated spectacular. This contestation is a story rarely told and a media imaginary rarely re-imagined.

This bilingual (English and Spanish) group exhibition will bring together work by artists, activists, architects and other public intellectuals who created alternative designs for the US Mexico border wall or fought its construction. The major questions that this exhibition will address include: How can we reassert a more populist notion of sovereignty by reimagining borders and border walls? What is the role of art and architecture in providing a bulwark against the erosion of democracy that border walls materialize?

We envision that this group exhibition on the U.S.-Mexico border wall will invite dialogue about the politics of militarization and the ways in which border walls unite and divide communities globally. The works range from Maurice Sherif's photography with its emphasis on the harshness of the border wall's metal and rendering of the landscape as barren to architect's Jim Brown's architectural plans for a "friendlier" friendship park. Can border walls and international boundaries become eco-zones that produce green energy and sites of binational cooperation, as suggested by the architect Ronald Rael? The exhibition will also feature the work of artists who have located their art on the border wall itself, mainly on the Mexican side. The art of Alfred J. Quiroz, for example, draws attention to the theological and existential aspects of border crossings, including milagros (miracles) and deaths. Film clips from a documentary on Alejandro Santiago's monumental art piece, "2501 Migrants," will speak to the role of art in community building and (re)rendering the politics of Mexican migration to the United States.

Artists

Maurice Sherif, Alfred J. Quiroz, Alejandro Santiago

Architects

Ronald Rael, Jim Brown

Workshops and talks:

Scott Nichol, Artist and Sierra Club Activist

Dan Millis, No More Deaths

Sandra Garnica, Coalición de Derechos Humanos