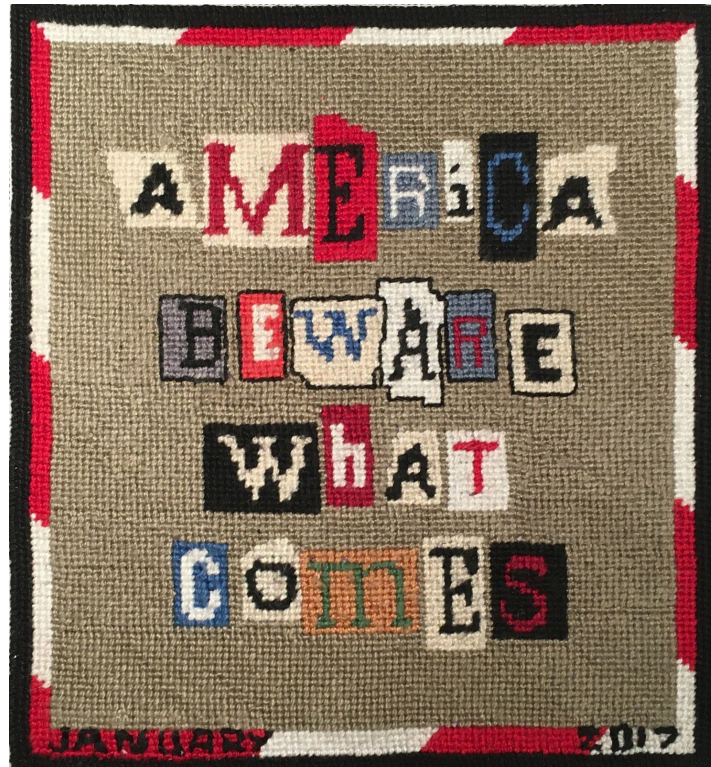


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UPROOT

November 18 – December 31, 2017

Opening Reception: November 18, 6-8pm



Curator: Gabriel de Guzman

Artists:

Ebtisam Abdulaziz, Beverly Acha, Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, Laura Arena, Anthea Behm, Yael Ben-Zion, Justin Blinder, Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels, Michele Brody, Hector Canonge, Cori Champagne, Cecile Chong, Esperanza Cortés, Linda Cunningham, Donald Daedalus, Ana De La Cueva, Alexis Duque, Carla Edwards, Nicky Enright, Jes Fan, Borinquen Gallo, Rebecca Graves, Katya Grokhovsky, Jon Henry, Peter Hoffmeister, Las Hermanas Iglesias, Jang soon Im, Ellie Irons and Anne Percoco (Next Epoch Seed Library), Sara Jimenez, Tahir Karmali, Shaun Leonardo, Monika Malewska, Yasmin Mistry, Guadalupe Maravilla (formally known as Irvin Morazan), Marcus Moore (the Homeless Poet), Rachelle Mozman, Christie Neptune, Quynh Nguyen-Le, Tara Pelletier & Jeff Kurosaki, Kenneth Pietrobono, Sunita Prasad, DaaPo Reo, David Rios Ferreira, Patrice Robinson, Diana Schmertz, Jessica Segall, Jess X. Snow, Sayaka Suzuki, Zhiyuan Yang, Seldon Yuan, Karolina Ziulkoski and Andrea Wolf.

Artists Grapple with Current Political Climate

On November 18th, **Smack Mellon** will present *UPROOT* a group exhibition that includes the work of artists who are urgently engaging with the current state of affairs since the 2016 presidential election. Over the past year, artists have been motivated to use their creative practice as a vehicle for challenging the divisiveness of the present administration. This exhibition presents an array of responses to the political climate, including art objects, installations, videos, performances, and public programs that address pressing themes, such as migration and displacement, systemic racism, creative action, environmental justice, and the influential role of digital media in shaping national politics. Some artists are confronting important topics headlong, producing compelling protest art. Others are expressing their beliefs more subtly, attempting to make sense of complicated issues and uncovering suppressed narratives. If the definition of uproot is to pull up by the roots; to tear away from a native place or environment; to displace, as from a home or country, then these artists' works reflect the desire for a shift or movement toward inclusiveness and finding some common ground. In these troubling, uncertain times, it remains important to turn to artists and creative thinkers for guidance. Their energy and ideas are more crucial than ever.

In this exhibition, activism takes various forms and tactics, including Guadalupe Maravilla's *BOOM! BOOM! WHAMMM! SWOOSH!*, a video of a protest performance that the artist staged shortly after the 2016 election and consisted of conducting the roaring of an all-women motorcycle gang inside the parking garage of the Texas GOP headquarters in downtown Austin. Rebecca Graves turned to needlework to create her protest pieces; her needlepoint piece *January 2017* declares "America, beware what comes." It was started during Trump's inauguration and completed on the bus ride to the Women's March. Shortly after the election, Beverly Acha published a zine, *Love for Love/Hate for Hate: A Glossary of Our Time*, with contributions by a range of creative people, which became an outlet for artists to grapple with the divisive language that has shaped the astonishing political and cultural moment.

A sense of displacement and the trauma of migration is pervasive in many of the artists' works in *UPROOT*. Ana De La Cueva's video and embroidery piece *Maquila* addresses U.S.-Mexico border issues in an upbeat music video synchronized to the rhythms of a commercial sewing machine. Jessica Segall's photographs of a migrant boat and an abandoned baby carriage are part of a larger project that looks at the refugee situation, documenting passages in the southern and northern borders of the United States that circumvent immigration control by providing discreet border crossing for asylum seekers. Katya Grokhovsky has created a temporary habitat in the gallery space, which explores ideas of displacement, longing, immigration, memory and alienation through performance, video and found objects. As an "inhabitant" of the space,

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Grokhovsky will performatively occupy the shelter during scheduled hours throughout the exhibition, inviting visitors to discuss U.S. immigration issues with her.

Several artists are expressing their concerns for the environment, addressing impending the eco-crisis. With torn edges and severed forms, Linda Cunningham's monumental drawing depicts an endangered, centuries-old tree juxtaposed with the dilapidated remains of the 20th century steel and coal industry. A new installation by Borinquen Gallo is made of recycled plastic bags and caution tape, warning us against the current administration's disregard for the environment and pointing to issues of climate change denial, excessive consumption, exploitation of natural resources, and production of toxic material. Cori Champagne's functional clothing is designed for survival in increasingly challenging environments; jackets become utility aprons and camouflage dresses transform into sleeping tents.

Since the 2016 election season, the influential role of media—particularly digital media—in shaping national politics has become increasingly apparent. Monika Malewska's paintings are based on photographs found on Internet news sites, which she then converts into a paint-by-numbers format and paints them with watercolors. The childlike scheme illustrates how shocking and disturbing imagery can be made to seem innocuous or banal. Malewska's paintings show how the ubiquity of media images contributes to the way we become inured to tragedies and how we are often unable or unwilling to see the bigger picture. Other artists are looking at cycles of news media and how present day events relate to the past. Karolina Ziulkoski and Andrea Wolf's *Future Past News* uses an augmented reality experience that exposes disturbing parallels between the present day and 1937 prewar turmoil, hoping to raise awareness of our political choices. Their installation situates visitors in an average living room, circa 1937, in which the TV is on and the news is playing. Using a digital app, a tablet in front of the TV overlays current news imagery with historical newsreel footage from 1937. History seems to be repeating itself, and the artists ask, "why don't we learn from the past?"

Several artists made new work for *UPROOT* that responds to the exhibition theme, as well as to the gallery's unique space. Sara Jimenez created a 24-foot-tall work that stretches from floor-to-ceiling and is composed of scanned and printed photos and images, which are cut into strips, forming vertical tendrils. The images are sourced from 19th century illustrated colonial texts about the Philippines during the period of transition of power from Spain to the U.S. Photos were used to promote ideals of American Empire and the "benevolent assimilation" of the Philippines. Jimenez also used present-day news images, such as photos related to President Duterte's policies, the landscape of the Philippines, and the island nation's current relationship with the U.S. The artist is interested in connections between assimilation and camouflage, as well as the idea of a landscape haunted by trauma, whether from political conflicts or natural disasters. However, the fragmented images prevent the viewer from piecing together a linear narrative. Seldon Yuan's monumental sculpture, a new work made for this exhibition, is a visual

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poem that allows viewers to walk inside, under, and above his text, submerging and emerging in and out of his landscape of words. Playing with language and comprehension, some letters can be read from above, while others are too tall to read and must be discerned from the shape of the perimeter of the letter. By transforming the text into objects, Yuan's work sparks questions such as when does a familiar language become abstract or foreign, when does it lose its function as a communication tool, and when is a foreign language no longer foreign.

The divisive political climate has also spurred artists to find constructive ways of working through critical issues and attempting to move forward. In response to the 2016 election, Diana Schmetz felt compelled to create a piece that is inclusive and stresses the importance of positive social agreements. Her *America's Social Contract* depicts diverse races of people pulling each other up, isolating this action by focusing on hands and arms. These watercolor paintings are also laser cut to form the words of the U.S. Constitution. By using two contrasting techniques, hand- and machine-made, the work reinforces the idea that sensory/emotive understanding is entangled with analytical logic. This union of mind, body, and emotion reveals the ability of human connections to unify the country and portrays a form of collective healing.

Exhibition Programs

OPENING RECEPTION

Saturday, November 18, 6PM - 8PM

4PM - 6PM *Drifting Dreamers: New York* / Workshop with Sayaka Suzuki

7PM *DESGARRO (TEARING)* performance by Hector Canonge: 7PM

8PM - 10PM AFTERPARTY with live set of *ROOTS REGGAE* with DJ Lightbolt (Nicky Enright)

**All events are free and open to the public. Please visit smackmellon.org or follow us on social media @smackmellon for event details and updates*

WORKSHOP

Drifting Dreamers: New York / Sayaka Suzuki

In conversation and collective making, Suzuki brings attention to the emotional resonance around experiences of immigration.

PERFORMANCE

DESGARRO (TEARING) / Hector Canonge

As an interdisciplinary artist, Canonge, presents a performative narrative exploring notions of "Desgarro/e" (the tearing apart) as a form of segregation, displacement, and control.

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AFTERPARTY

The afterparty features a live set of *ROOTS REGGAE* by DJ Lightbolt (Nicky Enright).

PERFORMANCE

Sunday, November 19 & Saturday, December 2, 6, 16, 23, 30

2PM - 5PM on all days

Temporary Habitat / Katya Grokhovsky

An influx DIY ephemeral residence-set will act as a site for visitors to enter and converse with artist Grokhovsky about the current state of immigration in the U.S. Acting as a record keeper of these interactions, the “inhabitant” adds text, sound, and video recordings to the installation that will activate conversations of displacement and process throughout the exhibition.

ARTIST TALK

Sunday, December 3

4PM - 6PM

A Structural Crisis in an Emotional Landscape / Kenneth Pietrobono

In this artist talk, Pietrobono leads a discussion with writers and other creative thinkers to find new ways of addressing current political issues. His project centers around the circulation of the phrase “A Structural Crisis in an Emotional Landscape” in installation and ephemera, a proposal for a list of words that should no longer be used for a period of time, and a campaign to raise funds to pay writers to remove words from their work for a period of time. The goal is to change the language we use in order to break out of echo chambers and understand the emotional reality of our time rather than rearranging assigned labels and hoping for different outcomes.

PERFORMANCE

Sunday, December 3 & 10

1PM - 3PM

Home is Where You Lay Your Head / Laura Arena

For this community engagement project, Arena provides an intimate space, a shelter to share her experiences around identity and home, from the perspective of a mixed race Native American woman. This shelter, inspired by her time at Standing Rock, also references the refugee and migrant crises happening all over the world.

MUSIC PERFORMANCE & WORKSHOP

Thursday, December 7

4PM - 8PM

DUMBO First-Thursday

Hot Temper (band) and Silkscreening Workshop / Jeff Kurosaki and Tara Pelletier

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Motivational, political, punk rock band “Hot Temper” (Kurosaki and Pelletier) will present a performance of songs that express first-hand accounts of oppression and address what it's like to be a person of color and a queer woman living in a time of emboldened racism, sexism and bigotry. Following the performance, the artists will lead a public workshop for visitors to screen-print inspirational T-shirts, flags and posters in the gallery space.

INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE

Saturday, December 9

2PM

Mirror/Echo/Tilt / Shaun Leonardo

For his project *Mirror/Echo/Tilt*, artist Shaun Leonardo works with young people affected by the criminal justice system to create visual, performance-based work that reframes personal narratives, promotes individual agency, and breaks down the myth of the criminal.

SPOKEN WORD PERFORMANCE & DISCUSSION

Saturday, December 9

5PM - 7PM

Marcus Moore, “the Homeless Poet,” and Yael Ben-Zion

In conjunction with Yael Ben-Zion’s photographs, a collaborative project with Marcus Moore, who is a spoken-word artist a.k.a. “The Homeless Poet,” Moore performs a new skit that deals with the effects of the current political climate on homeless people.

SCREENING & DISCUSSION

Wednesday, December 13

6PM - 8PM

Motherland film premiere, directed by Jess X. Snow

Snow presents her new film, a narrative of familial senses, survival, and rooted history set in a distant future where all plant life on Earth has been wiped out.

WORKSHOP

Sunday December 17

1PM - 3PM

Seed Gathering and Storage Walk: Envisioning and Enacting Brooklyn Bridge Park Futures / Next Epoch Seed Library (Ellie Irons & Anne Percoco)

NESL invites participants on a walk to gather seeds in nearby Brooklyn Bridge Park and to reconsider nature with actions that decenter the human experience in favor of other life forms.

CURATOR BIO

Gabriel de Guzman has recently joined Smack Mellon as Curator and Director of Exhibitions. He arrives from Wave Hill, where he was the Curator of Visual Arts, organizing the Sunroom Project Space series for emerging artists, as well as thematic group exhibitions in Glyndor Gallery including *Nature Pops!* (2016) and *Prickly, Tender and Steamy: Artists in the Hothouse* (2014). He curated *Call & Response* (fall 2017), which included new work by 50 alumni artists who have exhibited site-specific, solo projects in Wave Hill's unique space since 2007. As a guest curator, he has also organized recent exhibitions at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, En Foco at Andrew Freedman Home, Carriage Barn Arts Center, the Affordable Art Fair New York, Rush Arts Gallery, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA), and the Bronx Museum's 2013 AIM Biennial.

Before joining Wave Hill's staff in 2010, he was a curatorial assistant at The Jewish Museum, where he coordinated exhibitions on Louise Nevelson, Harry Houdini, Joan Snyder, and Andy Warhol, as well as *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider*. His writings have been published in catalogues for Wave Hill, the Bronx Museum, Dorsky Gallery, the Arsenal Gallery at Central Park, The Jewish Museum, Rush Arts Gallery, NoMAA, Kenise Barnes Fine Art, and the spring 2017 issue of *Nueva Luz: Photographic Journal*. He earned an M.A. in art history from Hunter College, City University of New York, and a B.A. in art history from the University of Virginia.

These exhibitions are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council, New York City Council Member Stephen Levin, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and with generous support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Robert Lehman Foundation, Iorio Charitable Foundation, Select Equity Group Foundation, many individuals and Smack Mellon's Members.

Smack Mellon's programs are also made possible with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and with generous support from The New York Community Trust, The Roy and Niuta Titus Foundation, Jerome Foundation, The Greenwich Collection Ltd, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation Inc., and Exploring The Arts.

Space for Smack Mellon's programs is generously provided by the Walentas family and Two Trees Management.

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