Embodied and corporeal border arts productively impact studies of difference and hegemony. That is, race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and nationality (for example) are socially constructed differences that are lived everyday in the borderlands. When artforms examine various formations of borders, boundaries, and divides in Arizona and Sonora, they offer deeper understandings about the fight for recognition, agency, and autonomy.

This section emphasizes the importance of queries. Border arts and embodiment contemplate the significance of difference and its localized realities. Many of these artworks offer opportunities for critical insights about the interface of borders including topographic, human, legal, educational, medical, and psychological. Take for example Claudio Dicochea: his focus on racialized human bodies offers an opportunity to critically re-examine whiteness and its institutionalization vis-à-vis casta paintings.

Materiality is an important characteristic of the art grouped in Border (Il)Logics Embodied. Artists select materials based on fine art training, economy, availability, and intentionality. Materiality could be the label: new media, oil painting, or photography. Materiality however, is also where photography meets corn paper. Or, where high art and history paintings intersect with popular culture. Materiality is a lively strategy used by artists and is key for ruminating on social, political, and historical conditions of embodiment.

Is it true the history of art is the history of appropriation? That is, is art-making an exercise in using and borrowing iconographies and cultural modalities to construct new and changing arts? Is anything original? Appropriations, or is it? is a method recognizable in borderlands art that attempts to rupture this one-sided, simplifed understanding of acts of appropriation, borrowing, and sharing.

The re-use of images often for non-sanctioned purposes is an act of self-declaration, a manifesto of sorts. In this sense, the uses of appropriations in Arizona and Sonora border arts are revolutionary acts. They include: the representation of sacred images for cultural sustainability or as a critique of the limits of the nation-state, and constructions of motifs that reference Native pasts to contest languages and mindsets of conquest. Many of these artforms ultimately strive toward de-colonization. De-colonization is a progressive artistic effort to make audible and legible forms of thinking and being that deny fiscal, political, educational, and personal independence.

In different ways, this group of artworks grapples with the difficulty of thinking and creating outside prescribed systems. Yet, they offer important treatises about survival and knowledge under oppressive regimes extant in the Arizona and Sonora borderlands.

All art is political and to think otherwise disregards lessons derived from border art histories about aesthetics, subjectivities, and representations. Even the premise of this exhibition—a visual and cultural study of borders in Arizona and Sonora—is strategic.

Notably, one strong undercurrent in these works is the creation of a statewide culture of fear. Fabricated narratives have made life dangerous on both sides of the border. Federal governments play a major role in nurturing violence in the borderlands and some of the art in this exhibition is critical of the U.S. government. Capitalism needs poverty and the art in this section exposes fundamental problems with the free market, and its interactions with undocumented labor and free trade treaties. This form of border art critiques ideologies of whiteness that continue to lend credence to heteronormalization, patriarchy, and hyper-racializations of so-called non-white others.

The art in this section reflects a very local form of politics with human consequences in an international cross border realm. This art breaks to broken political promises but it also speaks to the importance of community activism and organizing throughout Arizona and Sonora.
Historically, local border arts respond to unique borderlands conditions that are shaped by state architecture of the border fence. Yonke’s public artworks called attention to the governmental and economic conditions of life Yonke’s projects were installed on the U.S. built border fence that separates Nogales, Sonora Sonora, el Colectivo is an artist based and community driven organization. Many of Taller Yonke. Founded by Guadalupe Serrano and Alberto Morackis in the mid-1990s in Nogales, An important Sonoran collective that directly engaged with the U.S./Mexico border is Taller nation-state and its intersection with lived experience.

One way to understand border art is through its geopolitical construction—that is, visual works places surrounding the U.S. built border fence. One way to understand border art is through its geopolitical construction—that is, visual works associated with the Sonoran desert has played a prominent role in examining the spaces and places surrounding the U.S. built border fence. One way to understand border art is through its geopolitical construction—that is, visual works

An important Sonoran collective that directly engaged with the U.S./Mexico border is Taller Yonke. Founded by Guadalupe Serrano and Alberto Morackis in the mid-1990s in Nogales, Sonora, el Colectivo is an artist based and community driven organization. Many of Taller Yonke’s projects were installed on the U.S. built border fence that separates Nogales, Sonora from Nogales, Arizona. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed into law and approved by the governments of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, Taller Yonke’s public artworks called attention to the governmental and economic conditions of life on the border. Significantly, Taller Yonke’s large-scale sculptural installations explicitly use the architecture of the border fence. Historically, local border arts respond to unique borderlands conditions that are shaped by state and federal governments, globalized economic practices, and everyday frontier realities. Past the geographic and architectural border site there are other important regional artistic efforts that continue to offer creative interventions and forge creative and cultural communities—for example, Tucson-based artists’ cooperative Raices Taller. Local borderlands artists such as photographer Louis Carlos Bernal helped create an analysis of the peoples and environmental conditions associated with the borderlands. Each of the Arizona and Sonora creative legacies contribute to an art history of boundaries.

A history of art and visual culture for this exhibition begins with geo-political works by Taller Yonke and Alfred Quiroz as a recognition of forms of artistic production that continue to shape cultural institutions and scholarly debates today. The Border Project includes works both inside and outside the museum to honor and afirm one of border art’s most important principles developed by installing art on the border fence to de-center authority. Many of the artists in Geo-Political (Re-)Imaginings knowingly or unconsciously help to develop an understanding of border arts as a critical, discursive formation situated beyond the U.S. built fence. The works grouped with Geo-political (Re-)Imaginings often emphasize technologies of oppression and invasion and modes of surveillance by governments and corporations in the everyday lives of frontizos. Geo-Political (Re-)Imaginings also helps to paint a picture of the border fence as a decoy. That is, these works post that by limiting our focus to the domain of the border fence, those who built it ultimately profit. All of the works in this section were created as art and the artworks hold the landscape as an object of study. When contemporary art uses land and constructs terrestrial representations, it rethinks and re-conceptualizes the politics of nation-building, scrutinizes the allegories of nationalism, and helps to identify aggressive penetrations by corporations into daily life. Thereby, these works construct a more nuanced understanding of life in the borderlands that is not fixed in time or space but remains responsive to the Sonoran desert landscape and its local communities.


Landschips play a long and storied part in the history of art. At first glance, landscapes may appear to represent a so-called natural environment. However, landscape paintings often are ideological and allegorical. Since World War II, the North American West has been an important site for contemporary artists to unpack and rethink the landscape. Land arts, earthworks, landscape photography, and performance arts engage spatial topographies both cartographic and otherwise. Contemporary landscapes negotiate the importance of locational identity and specificity, and complicate how landscape studies construct a portrait of national formation. What does it mean to map the body as a landscape? And similarly, what does it mean to use the body as symbol in the landscape? In this snapshot of landscape studies and land use, contemporary art emphasizes its role not as an illustration but rather as an interpretation of human geographies formed into border arts.

Many of the artists in the section offer a surprising contribution to border art histories. Here, an unlikely group of artworks engages in an experimental dialogue about geographies. Lee Friedlander is hiding in the borderlands waiting to be seen and heard. Few know that Niki de St. Phalle lived in Carehres, AZ and that she considered the Southwest important for articulating a form of feminist art. Mark Klett’s artistic efforts in the region are well known. Yet, in borderlands contexts, his work exposes history as theory rather than recitation of fact or actuality. Klett complicates the theories of history by giving legibility to the limitations of what knowledge can produce about Arizona. Graciela Iturbide’s representation of the Sonoran landscape is expansive and breathtaking with a boombox and female body of color front and center.