

THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY

# THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY

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## INTRODUCTION

By Jacqueline Kok and Piper Ross Ferriter

A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness...If we reflect upon our languages, we find that at best they must be considered only as maps. A word is not the object it represents; and languages exhibit also this peculiar self-reflexiveness, that we can analyse languages by linguistic means. This self-reflexiveness of languages introduces serious complexities...The disregard of these complexities is tragically disastrous in daily life and science.

—Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity* (1933, p.58)

Alfred Korzybski coined the phrase “a map is not the territory” to caution against clinging to languages fundamentally incapable of representing reality. He attests that language can at best only represent objects in the world; the relation between the two is only structurally similar. Never exact. The representation of a thing will always be limited by the fact that, ipso facto, the representation is not, cannot, and will not ever be the thing itself. Korzybski’s observation at first appears to be an inconsequential crack in semantic theory, but quickly it becomes a chasm threatening to rend its own foundation—as is the case whenever critical examination requires and is confined to the medium under scrutiny. He declares the subject-predicate relationship inadequate because, in reality, a subject can never experience true isolation since a subject can never be truly separated from the reality which defines and contains it. He commends modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) for increasing the dimensionality of subjects and providing for systems of their relation and order. The ability to compare and contrast subjects is the ability to

group them into distinct collections. In other words, systematic structures are derived from the linguistic structures used to describe them. Identity is implicated by vocabulary.

Language is a powerful tool: it informs, arbitrates, and connects us on the most fundamental level across all socioeconomic strata. Language, however, is also constantly changing. Words are added to the dictionary; slang from different parts of the world emerges; international English has become a new dialect. The inherent volatility within language can result in a commandeering of it. Recent years have seen deliberate manipulation of this tool. Word choice, for example, may ultimately influence one’s political platform.

*The Map Is Not the Territory* aims to address this kind of commandeering and to bring to light the embedded complexities of language, as perceived by Korzybski. It highlights the differences between belief as a collection of preconceived understandings, and reality. Comprehension of the world, generated by our brains gathering and disseminating information through languages, is merely a “map.” Reality, the “territory,” exists beyond our constructions—we merely use representations to formulate it in a way that is legible to us. As such, reality and its representations remain highly contestable, especially when our primary methods of representation, language, is exploited. This exhibition questions and subverts these misrepresentations with an air of resilience and resistance.

*The Map is Not the Territory* also applies the concept of *kintsugi*, a Japanese pottery-making practice which highlights fractures with precious metals. The selected artworks act as fragments of our lan-

guage, as well as examples of the countless vantage points which can be taken within our ideological and physical borders. In creating a dialogue among the artworks, this exhibition emphasizes the abiding, formal and conceptual differences of language when viewed as a reconciled whole. Renowned Butoh dancer, Vangelina, founder of the New York Butoh Institute and the Vangelina Theater, has also been invited to deliver a special, one-night performance to introduce and further explore the variety of existing maps.

In the same vein, this catalogue documents the participating artists’ exploration of preconceived understandings of entities. The curators have conducted interviews, written essays, or extended the work of their respective chosen artists. By including such supplementary information, this exhibition demonstrates the multiplicity of perspectives, evident engineering of language, and the infinite number of maps for the territories in which we live.



# Brittany Cassell

By Piper Ross Ferriter

*That Which Does Not Burn* (2016) and *Ain't I a Woman/The Will to Change* (2015) will undoubtedly draw comparisons to Frida Kahlo's portraiture for their shared, magical realism. Cassell's figures are placed in indiscernible locations, prone to alarming wounds, and defiantly stare out from their respective canvases with a self-awareness unsettling in a painted subject. As magical realist artworks, their subjects and circumstances are fundamentally authentic with just a dash of creative license. A splash of special sauce. Cassell's magic ingredient is memory; she uses the murky medium of memory to explore how the accumulated pasts of her female forbears inform her present and future.

Cassell was initially inspired to investigate collective memory and intergenerational impressions by the ever-present, existential question: who am I? What decides how we are defined? Is identity predestined, assigned, or self-constructed? She endeavored to uncover the roots of her burgeoning self in an effort to elucidate her germination. But the individual and universal quickly confounded. Cassell's ancestral and personal journeys are unequivocally her own yet remain remarkably relatable. The classical nudity of her enigmatic women imbues them with archetypal authority while magical realist elements sustain their accessibility; one figure's mask and another's purple skin render them equally anonymous and synonymous, as a third's recent amputation could be literal or figurative. By blurring the barrier between actual and metaphorical, Cassell provides viewers the space to imagine their own actual and metaphorical inheritances. Similarly democratizing, the situational ambiguity of a deserted landscape and reticent interior emphasizes personhood over place. Unanchored, these women could be anywhere just as easily as everywhere. Even the books in *Ain't I a Woman/The Will to Change* are unrevealing—they are its namesake. The works' unfettered relevance is further perpetuated by their temporal fluidity. Cassell dialectically navigates past, present, and future as she visually collapses their distinctions by depicting her protagonists at

her own age and eschewing indications of time. Just as search engine algorithms generate future results from former selections, so Cassell demonstrates how, when *then* begets *now* which becomes *will be*, temporal boundaries dissolve. The paintings float in a reservoir preserved from place and time; their figures are the only islands in sight. And like a map within its map, they embody their self-scrutinizing anachronism: espousing a prior era's artistic movement in today's post-artistic movement era.

Beyond the canvas, the artworks' titles offer additional layers of representation and lenses of interpretation. *That Which Does Not Burn* is a direct translation of *hye won hye*, the West African *adinkra* symbol for imperishability and endurance. *Adinkra* are visual aphorisms or pictographs, like hieroglyphs. The *hye won hye*'s feminine and resolute imagery implausibly recalls both female genitalia and branding irons. It is so closely aligned with Cassell's pronounced, visual vocabulary, this *adinkra* could be the pictorial pattern of her lexicon. *Ain't I a Woman/The Will to Change* combines the titles of the two texts depicted in the work by feminist author and social activist bell hooks: *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004) and *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981). Cassell's titles are significant for their ability to communicate meaning to the uninitiated as well as to those who seek their deeper references. They are also cleverly meta; knowing Cassell might provide a glimpse of her character, but knowing her origins, priorities, and preoccupations will provide *insight*. The titles reflexively exemplify her visual distillation of identity. They are the next matryoshka doll or a contextual map of the same territory. But they are not calques.

Calques are linguistic words or phrases generated by literally translating the term from its original language into another language. Cassell's paintings are not calques because they are not word-for-word translations. Her inquiry into how cultural history and collective memory shape individual identity and experience does not indicate that successive generations are facsimiles of those prior. Her conclusion is more analogous to magical realism's relationship with reality in that reality provides the foundation but magic makes it unique. Or the Japanese pottery practice of *kintsugi* which uses precious metals to conspicuously mend fractures; in lieu of glue's lackluster concealer, glittering gold scars

reunite ceramic shards and celebrate the beauty of imperfection. Mirroring the concept of *kintsugi*, cultural history and collective memory are the elemental fragments of identity, though it is the shape those fragments take when gilded together that ultimately forms an individual's identity. We are not the products of an assembly line. We may be dented, cracked, and chipped—missing limbs, even. But being the final editor of our coauthored identity is golden. And Cassell reminds us this treasure, however tarnished, possesses a magic worth defending.



Brittany Cassell, *That Which Does Not Burn*, Oil on canvas, 2016.



Brittany Cassell, *Ain't I a Woman/The Will to Change*, Oil on canvas, 2015.



# Kate Gilmore

By Piper Ross Ferriter

Kate Gilmore’s video *Sudden as a Massacre* (2011) is 30 minutes of catharsis. Five women dressed identically in floral frocks and silver sandals tear into a 7,000-pound cube of clay and hurl it by the handful at the cheerfully yellow wall and floor that set the stage. Their zeal never abates, though their pace slows and breathing intensifies as their foe is laboriously decimated. Shoes are sacrificed. In contrast to the linguistic gymnastics preferred by the political zeitgeist, physical mudslinging appears satisfyingly productive.

Gilmore has a penchant for filming women (sometimes herself) in cocktail attire as they struggle to complete arbitrary yet arduous tasks. The scenarios are relentlessly absurd. Her tragicomic endeavors mimic the real-life ridiculousness females face on a daily basis: sexism, misogyny, racism, and their infinite intersections. *Sudden as a Massacre* manages to convey overt physicality, determined mentality, and intrepid spirituality in a single gesture. It critiques the gendered hypocrisy of the art world as well as the world-at-large; the women in their identical ensembles seem caricatured, symbolizing the female condition more than individual females—the map more than the territory. They embody synecdoche. Whether disregarded artists or bridesmaids, they are stripped of their identities and reduced to mere women.

Curious about the title, I Googled it. The phrase “sudden as a massacre” appears in Mark Twain’s essay “The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation” (1867), a satirical text in which he feigns resignation from his fictional appointment as clerk of the make-believe Senate Committee on Conchology after an imagined six days in office. It is terrific. He describes in detail the constructive criticism he gave to three government departments, including its disgruntled reception and subsequent rejection. Twain meets with the Secretary of War and recounts,

I told him I had no fault to find with his defending the parole stipulations of General Lee and his comrades in arms, but that I could not approve of his method of fighting the Indians on the Plains... He ought to get the Indians more together... and then have a general massacre... I said the next surest thing for an Indian was soap and education. Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run; because a half-massacred Indian may recover, but if you educate him and wash him, it is bound to finish him some time or other. It undermines his constitution; it strikes at the foundation of his being.

The inverted logic Twain parodies, granting unilateral amnesty to instigators of the American Civil War while strategizing productive persecution of Native Americans, recalls the politically appointed war on women. If unable to efficiently wrangle Native Americans to slaughter, Twain advises an alternative to the Secretary of War: control their bodies and minds. The United States of America’s white, imperialist patriarchy hasn’t changed much in 150 years; Twain’s proposal is appallingly parallel to the intractable and perverse, government-sanctioned commandeering of women’s physical and psychological autonomy.

The women of *Sudden as a Massacre* attack the block of clay like it is the manifestation of all patriarchal obstacles. They are their own artists, the matching bridesmaids in feminism’s commitment to itself. It takes a certain level of resolve to continue fighting for the same rights for over a century—those being simply equal rights. Nothing special. Nothing gratuitous. Nothing more than what the pale, male population is amply afforded. Yet the struggle continues. Frequently, it feels farcical. Like this must be scripted satire. Could we be trapped in a looping, Gilmore performance? If only. There we might actually accomplish something. But the parroted themes of the nightly news suggest stagnant stasis. The incessant, pitter-patter of clay hitting a hard surface in *Sudden as a Massacre* is the metronomic march of the female frontline: the beat goes on. Resist, insist, persist, enlist. Grab a fistful and take aim.



Kate Gilmore, *Sudden as a Massacre*, Video, color, sound, 39:25 minutes, 2011.



# Martine Gutierrez

By Birdie Piccininni

Martine Gutierrez, a Brooklyn-based artist, exhibits an impressive command over an array of artistic disciplines—photography, performance, video, fashion, sound, and installation. Her work expresses transformations of herself into an assortment of idealized, feminine depictions of aspirational beauty. She manipulates the composition of physical spaces to manufacture quintessential, feminine poise and characteristics. Gutierrez explores how society perpetuates rigid perceptions of identity when challenging differences between supposed opposites: male vs. female, gay vs. straight, and minority vs. white. Gutierrez connects her inquiries on personal and collective identity throughout all of her projects.

Gutierrez's series *Line Ups* (2014) uses her own body, mannequins, and luscious backgrounds to investigate identity—not only collective identity, but also her own identity as a transgender woman in today's society. The six mannequins are dressed identically to Gutierrez to evoke stereotypically feminine roles of beauty, fashion, and sexuality.

The series contains seven highly stylized images depicting constructed representations of femininity by posing mannequins and her own body in particular arrangements. Her images serve not only as documentation of her inquiries but also as a performance in which her examinations occur. Gutierrez's discussion of gender roles alongside recent political discourse on bathroom policies implemented by *Title IX* offers an example of how toxic gender identity can be and how it can hinder daily functions. For instance, before her first solo show, *WE & THEM & ME*, at the Contemporary Art Museum Raleigh in North Carolina, *Title IX* amendments were just put into effect. The alignment of these events caused Gutierrez to realize her body was, in fact, political. Her photographs situate her within standardized beauty and gender models from which she would traditionally be excluded. Though Gutierrez's art was not politically motivated as much as it was personally motivated, the adjacent controversy and public debates about transgender rights add another layer of emotion and discourse to her photographs.

*Line Ups* demonstrates significant doubt about what determines identity and imposes its boundaries.

The bold colors and uniformed scenes of the six mannequins used in each of the seven photographs are a beautiful way to invite viewers to reflect on stereotypical, feminine characteristics such as style and sexuality. Her work does not intend to be political but, by challenging societal norms and resisting the *status quo*, it can be perceived as political.

**BP:** Who are you and what do you do?

**MG:** Martine Gutierrez, new media artist. I think of my works as documentations of performance. I don't often do live performances, so people interact with their record via video or photography.

**BP:** What's your background?

**MG:** The background on my computer is a picture from the Rootstein archives of John Taylor with the model Twiggy, taken in 1966 while producing a series of mannequins made to resemble Twiggy.

Or perhaps, my educational background? I graduated from RISD with a BFA in fine arts. My major was printmaking, though most of my projects were sound-driven video installations and public performances.

Or, are you asking "where are you from?" My mother is American and identifies as white, and my father immigrated here from Guatemala. They met in Berkeley, California, which is also where I was born and grew up.

**BP:** How do you work?

**MG:** I work simultaneously in different media. I sing, produce music, choreograph dance, construct costumes, style wigs and hair, do makeup, film, edit film, paint. I have enabled myself to adequately execute every aspect of a project so I may have full control in actualizing my ideas. If I were a movie star, I would also be the director, the scriptwriter, the composer and the movie production team. Needless to say I have learned how to compensate for no budget, without disrupting the surface of my glam veneer.

**BP:** What themes do you pursue?

**MG:** Perception, such as fluid perceptions of reality, ethnicity, and gender as they exist beyond binaries. I often question society's construction of dichotomies like "male" vs. "female", "gay" vs. "straight",

"minority" vs. "white" and so on.

I am interested in every facet of what it means to be 'genuine,' especially when performing in a role society would never cast me in. I stage the scene and emote, but the viewers see what they want to see; they can actively engage with the work or passively make assumptions. While gender is inherently a theme in my work, I don't see it as a boundary. The only profound boundaries are those we impose upon ourselves.

**BP:** How did it all start? Why did you create *Line Ups*?

**MG:** I began collecting mannequins because I thought they were alluring and a part of me wanted to identify with them. Although they are assigned female, their nude and wig-less bodies are extremely androgynous. In 2013 I started arranging myself into groupings with mannequins out of a desperation to belong to a community I could identify with. Throughout high school and college I identified as "gender fluid" – and my sexuality was likewise undiscovered and open. I was afraid to lose the freedom of being everything, but isolated by the same truth—that I was nothing. Without a personal definition and pronoun, something to contextualize my person for a stranger, I was utterly ambiguous in every way. I longed for role models, companions, icons, and when I couldn't find them, I made them.

I didn't know it at the time, but maneuvering all of my fem mannequin bodies, changing their physicality in every picture, as well as changing mine, was therapeutic in leading me to a greater understanding of myself and readiness to identify as trans female in the world.

**BP:** During our first studio visit you explained that your work wasn't necessarily political but your body was, how did that affect your work?

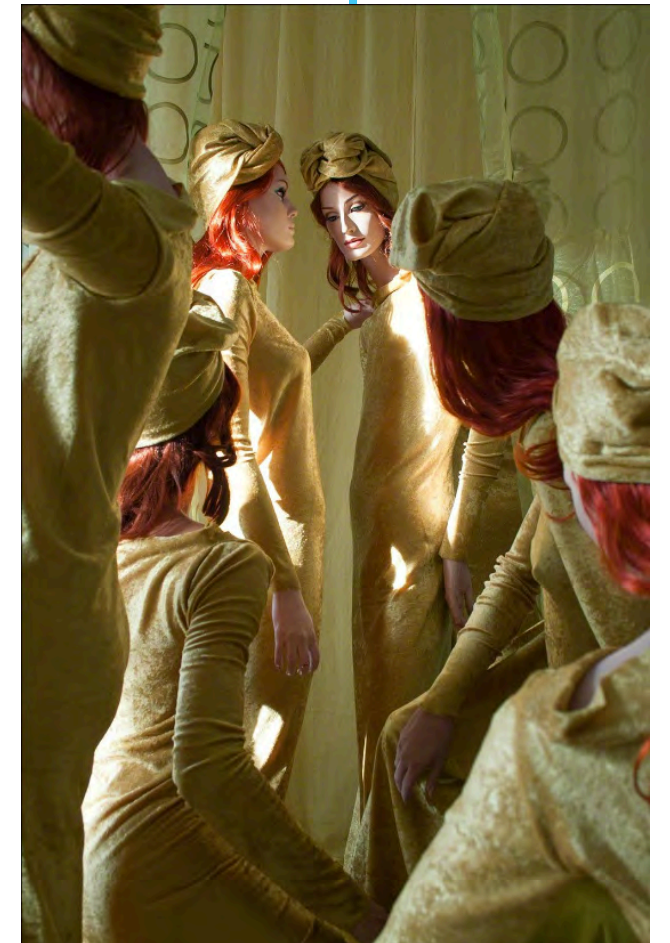
**MG:** I don't want it to affect my work. I don't want the ugliness of the world to infringe on the escape my practice has always allowed me. To ensure the safety of my artistic sanctuary, I protect the ideals of my childhood, my sister goddesses, by any means necessary. Like a cherished temple in the middle of a battlefield—one must protect what is sacred. We don't live in a culture where people wish to be born trans women of color, but it has encouraged me to pursue the great destiny of my life.

There are no opportune moments for marginalized folks, you can't wait in line to be heard, you must make your own opportunities, you must make the masses listen. Even if I don't know where that will take me, and fear how people will treat me, at least I have direction and a temple of sisters.

The empowerment of belonging to a community gives us a shared understanding to withstand the adversity of existing in the world. My gift is joining the goddesses. My sacrifice is the sic realm.

**BP:** How has this series affected your process, work, or life?

**MG:** It's changed it—and I believe my practice as an artist will continue to inform the way I identify, as it helps me understand why others categorize me the way they do. I am continuously intrigued by how others see me because it is often incorrect.



Martine Gutierrez, *Line Up 4*, Archival inkjet print on Arches Baryta mounted on sintra, 2014.

# Ann Hamilton

By Lux Yuting Bai

Visceral anxieties mount as I watch Ann Hamilton's mouth slowly roll the stones. Her lips distort in tension. Her tongue is completely buried amid the marbles. I do not see her face, but I fear for her life. What if she accidentally swallows? What if she slips or breaks her teeth? What if she suffocates herself? The stones bump against each other, creating a sound that reveals their rough surfaces. She cannot utter a word. Physical pain has no voice. She cannot stop, either. Her mouth keeps rolling the rocks in loops like Sisyphus rolling the boulder up the hill.

The vulnerable female body in seemingly perpetual pain evokes a sense of *pathos*. However, the struggle reaches beyond the confrontation between body and matter. Aleph, the first character of the Hebrew alphabet, represents the beginning of speech. The letter originates from the shape of the human larynx as it generates sounds. Notably, it is also an unpronounceable letter constituent of God's name in Exodus. In *(aleph • video)* (1992–93), Hamilton subverts the divine connotation by highlighting the corporeality of the gesture of speaking. Alluding to Demosthenes, the legendary Athenian orator who relentlessly practiced talking with rocks in his mouth, the work demonstrates that to speak is a perilous, tantalizing, and masochistic impulse.

While the video asserts the primal, compulsive desire to raise realities into words, an epistemological question is presented here. *(aleph • video)* was first shown as part of a large-scale installation at the List Visual Arts Center, MIT. The exhibition featured a library of twenty thousand books that supported a mass of androgynous bulbous "bodies." Hamilton parallels body with texts as an alternative site of knowledge and memories, suggesting that the nature of language is as sensual as it is intellectual, as atavistic as it is constructed. In a way, knowledge is accumulated through repetitive somatic experiences.

A discrepancy between making sounds and having a voice appears. Like the paradoxical letter aleph, which embodies the effort of speaking yet is silent per se, the mouth successfully generates sounds while no intelligible meaning is conveyed. Metaphorically speaking, the movement is the "map" that represents communication. The unheard message is the "territory" that is forever unknown.



Ann Hamilton, *(aleph • video)*, 1992–93. Video, color, sound, 30:00 mins (loop). 3.5 × 4.5 in.







# Anh Thuy Nguyen

By Amanda Lee

**AL:** To begin with, tell us about yourself as well as the journey of creating *Of Place and Nation* (2017).

**ATN:** My name is Anh Thuy Nguyen. I am a Vietnamese-born artist who is currently based in New York. My process of creating *Of Place and Nation* started with my many mental disassociations from both Hanoi (Viet Nam) and New York while traveling between the two places over the summer of 2016—meaning that I found myself often longing for one location while physically being in another. I was in Hanoi in June–July 2016 and constantly yearned for my life in New York. When I came back to New York in August 2016, I was hit with unexpected nostalgia for Hanoi. It was due to this overwhelmed feeling that questions of nationality, of place, and of belonging arose. *Of Place and Nation* was then born.

**AL:** The title of our show, *The Map Is Not the Territory*, speaks of the difference between an entity and its abstraction. An artist’s work is often seen as a representation of the artist and of what makes them (culture, gender, sexuality, race, age, etc.). This results in an immediate assumption, even before truly knowing the person as an artist, of an entity. Do you find this challenging, or do you embrace it into your works?

**ATN:** The assumption of identity (based on culture, gender, sexuality, race, age, etc.) has always been a challenge for me. I always try to maintain work within the lines: embracing my cultural identity without oversimplification, and being political without being didactic. Some of my pieces specifically address cultural and political identity, like *Of Place and Nation*, which speaks more directly to my “entity.” But with some other projects, I consciously steer away from the autobiographical direction and approach it with much more disguise. Overall, as an artist, I don’t think I can ever fully “embrace” or endorse public “immediate assumptions” of the artist, especially within my process. It might run the risk of exploitation or generalization. However, as a Vietnamese artist, I am proud of my heritage, and I let it naturally weave itself into my work.

**AL:** The United States of America is currently going through one of the most harrowing political storms of its history. What does that future hold for you as a female artist who is a non-US citizen living in America? Has it sti- mulated a constructive but possibly painful perspective towards your artworks?

**ATN:** As much as I try not to let the current political situation affect my work, I found myself subconsciously making more political art. The work I made in late 2016 and early 2017 transformed significantly in terms of physical shape, from abstract fragmentation to concrete representational political objects—such as the flag in *Of Place and Nation*—and now, protest signage. Since this just happened recently, I still haven’t had a chance to reflect on whether it is fully a constructive transformation, but there is a level of anxiety and despair in the making process that is impossible to ignore. I think artists are generally sensitive to political changes, so it is extremely hard for them to remove themselves from current issues, and I am no exception.

**AL:** Many of your artworks, like *Of Place and Nation*, have an intimate and sensual touch that represents the female body. More importantly, your body. Do you find that this is an important piece of information for the viewers to know when viewing your art pieces?

**ATN:** Overall, yes and no. It depends on the concept of the project. If the project is about femininity, sensuality, and intimacy, then I will try to make sure that this idea evidences itself in the object. *Of Place and Nation* is a particular case, since the work is somewhat an autobiography that is situated within a larger context, so I placed my footprints in the pieces of cement as a subtle reminder of its autobiographical aspect. I am currently in a collaboration about intimacy with another artist based in Viet Nam, in which I exchange impressions of my body every month through postal mail, so the objects act much more sensual, more corporeal.

When I get this question about the female body and its sensuality in my work, I often answer that it is not the sensuality that is the primary focus of the work, but the material it is put against, and how it is placed within space. All in all, what interests me is the confrontation of the female body—its softness, its sensuality—with another object associated with power structures, politics, and masculinity, one that may cause uncertainty and discomfort .



Anh Thuy Nguyen, *Of Place and Nation*, Silicone, polyester fabric, thermoplastic, casted concrete, sand, and mixed media, 2017.



# Helene Nymann

By Jacqueline Kok

## Who Are We?

Butoh dance is raw. It subverts the established systems of knowledge and harmony that Japanese aesthetics are renowned for. Rather than obey the conventions of dance, Butoh demands that its dancer succumb to the darkness. The dancer embraces the crude, innate, and unrefined, while still remaining earthbound. The performance thus becomes confrontational in its interaction with space, senses, and emotions. Charged and often bewildering, Butoh dance seeks to articulate the dancer's movement as movement that exists prior to established knowledge in a slow, unconscious state of expression.

As a special addition to the exhibition, invited Butoh dancer Vangelina, founder of the Vangelina Theater and the New York Butoh Institute in New

York City, activates the space, pulling viewers into an introspective and self-reflexive realm both mentally and physically. Carrying Butoh dance into the twenty-first century, Vangelina incorporates social activism, touching upon important subject matter such as feminism, climate change, war, and perceptions of gender, infusing drag elements into her performances. A master of her craft, Vangelina intimately explores the inner self through Butoh dance.

This energy is further captured in Helene Nymann's *Whether We Are* (2016), a mesmerizing video of human metamorphosis. In a world covered with soot, a body slowly awakens and emerges from the soil, morphing and contorting as fluorescent green dust falls from above. The protagonist, a classically trained ballet dancer, was asked to respond to the immediate environment viscerally rather than through premeditated choreography.

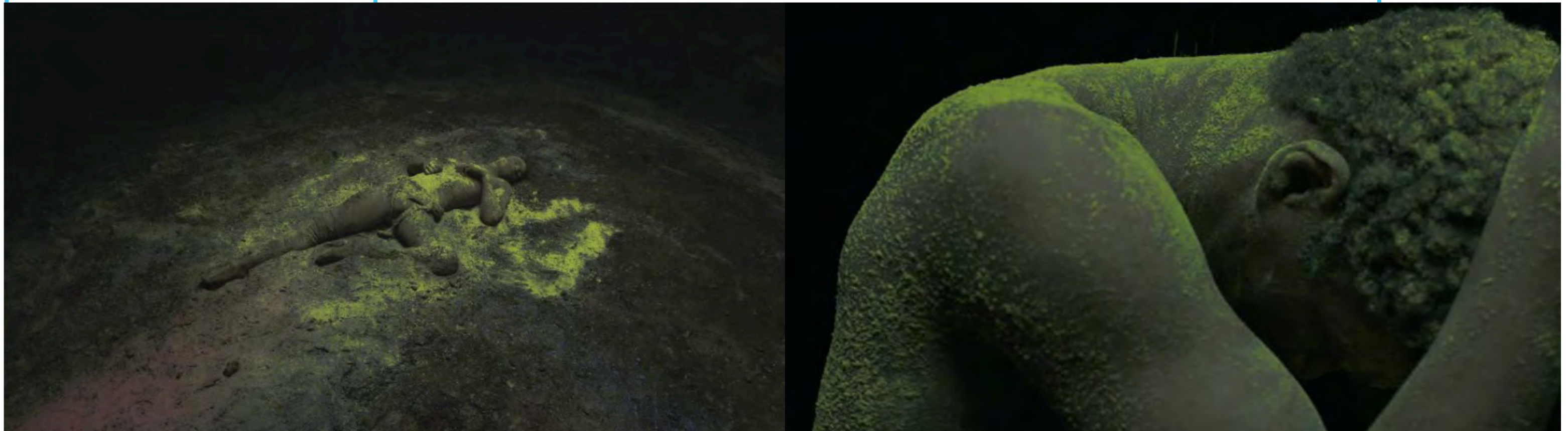
*Whether We Are* examines the body as it endures times of change. In particular, it focuses on how external circumstances may impact the mental and physical state of the self. In relation to embodied knowledge—a type of knowledge where the body in-

nately knows how to act—viewers are left wondering how the environment and other surrounding materials affect these experiences. Using video as a medium, Nymann also explores the relationship between movement, images, and memory in regard to embodied knowledge. The performative environment that encapsulates motion, sound, and sculpture becomes hypnotic, causing us to slip between states of consciousness. The ethereal, trance-like music enhances this experience by mimicking the effects of meditative chants, pulling us even further into our thoughts and feelings.

As we watch the video, we become aware of our own physical and mental state. Because the work's presence, music, and scale contribute to this hypervigilance, we soon find ourselves acting more as participants in Nymann's piece than as its audience. In this moment of transition for all the bodies within and in dialogue with the work, we see how Nymann makes her connection to Butoh. The dancer, rather than performing according to a choreographed ballet routine, yields to his body and the environment, moving freely in space. Almost in response to his actions

as well as to what we are shown, our personal past and current events also start to inform our own bodily and cognitive reactions to the piece and, by proxy, the world around us.

The distinctions between the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious become blurred in Nymann's work, much like in Butoh dance. This indetermination prompts us to reflect upon the differences between knowledge that is acquired and that which is elementally ingrained. Our bodies are subject to constant change, and we struggle to adapt to every single advancement, development, and shift that occurs in our daily lives. It thus becomes worth asking what we have been acquainted with, and whether we are who we think we are.



Helene Nymann, *Whether We Are*, 16:9 HDV, 10:10 mins with sound, 2016.



# Bitá Razavi

By Noelia Lecue

Coloring books are now the fashion among adults; they are the Mother's Day gift par excellence, the perfect souvenir of expensive hotel chains attempting to relate the act of coloring with stays of rest or travel, away from the daily routine. The benefits of coloring are sold as remedies for depression, as well as new solutions for dependency on phones and other electronic devices. Coloring books have become so popular that recent studies have analyzed the links among coloring, relaxation, and the comfort of childhood leisure.

Bitá Razavi purposely chooses coloring books as a medium in order to reach a broader public, an audience with diverse political orientations. She believes that exposing opposed assumptions on gun violence and Islamic terrorism can provoke effective and much deeper dialogues. As demonstrated by her past video work, *Some Critique from Our Parents* (2015), the artist explores art's function of connecting different perspectives and inspiring people who consider themselves outsiders to venture inside the exclusive bubble of the art world.

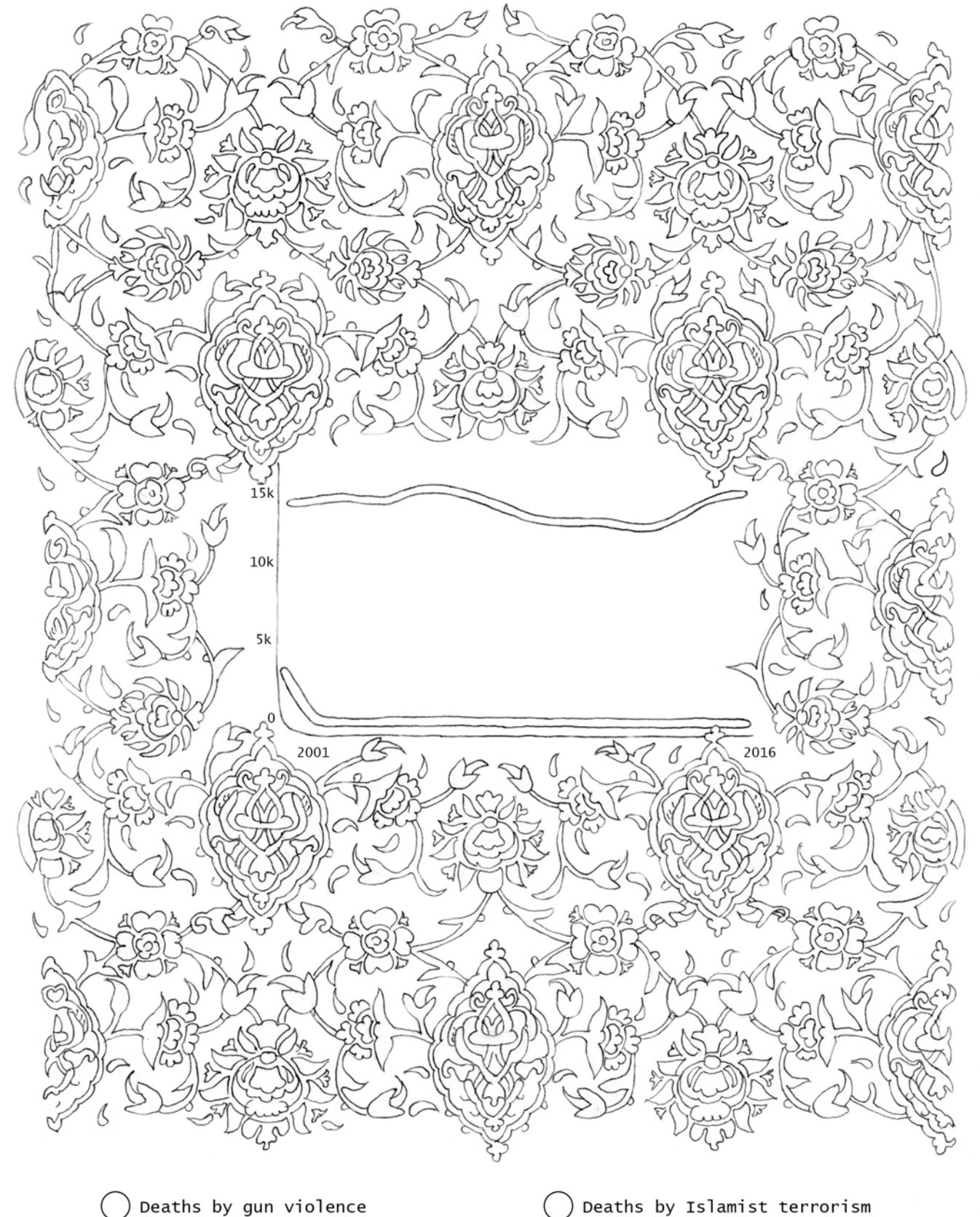
Razavi's work includes politically charged graphs to demonstrate that coloring is not necessarily escapist, but can also reveal crucial, personal realities. In fact, as an Iranian-born artist and Finnish citizen who now resides in the United States of America, Razavi's art practice and indeed her daily life are impacted by the so-called "Muslim travel ban." This is not the first time that her work has dealt with her own, geopolitical context; the artist left Tehran and moved to Finland in 2007 as a result of a populist candidate winning the 2005 elections in Iran. In 2011, she presented *How To Do Things With Words (A Legal Performance)*, a video recording her marriage to a fellow artist with Finnish citizenship. The act addressed her personal and political circumstances after prejudiced policies threatened her immigration status in the wake of an election victory by the True Finns Party in Finland.

Razavi's blank graphs offer people creative authority over abstract data. As participants complete the image and assign it meaning, they actualize their own conceptions and perform their own politics—your map of your territory, your coloring book as your tangible information. Suddenly, this relaxed hobby transforms into a political survey and potentially establishes values of empathy for the people affected by the travel ban.

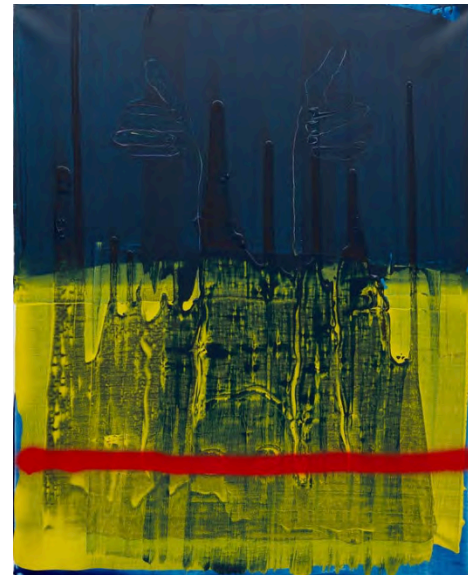
The graph selected for *The Map Is Not the Territory* is just one of many that the artist is compiling into a book that will soon be published: *Coloring Book for Concerned Adults*. All the information collected in this forthcoming publication is extracted from online news sources, but in this case participants need to interpret the data and define their own map legends. The coloring book turns into the color-coded results of a quiz measuring the tolerance of a country under a mandate that is politically attacking human rights while promoting racism through its daily news.



Bitá Razavi, *Coloring Book for Concerned Adults*, Pen on paper, Adobe Photoshop, 2017.







Melanie Reese, *Healer II, Sexuality IV, Slave II*, Mixed media on canvas, 2016.

## Melanie Reese

By Jacqueline Kok and Jasa McKenzie

**JK and JM:** Will you please explain the concept behind the series *Caliban and the Witch* and how you came to be inspired by it?

**MR:** Each painting is inspired by a single word from Sylvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*. This book explores the way certain choice words such as healer, slave, rebel, and sexuality have been used since the Middle Ages to condemn women and position them as second-class citizens. It was through a systematic oppression that women were labeled as witches and ultimately feared, tortured and murdered. Using this historically-loaded vocabulary as a starting point, I then visually reinterpret these terms in order to explore how they relate to women today. Through paint, I build my own vocabulary for discussing how such oppression can be understood, reinterpreted, and ultimately overcome.

**JM:** How did working with specific vocabulary change how you approached language after working on this series? In turn, has that affected the rest of your work at large?

**MR:** This series is not actually the first time I have been inspired by text and words. In past projects I have been intrigued by the 17th century text *The Midwives Book* by Jane Sharp. Sharp was the first female midwife in European culture to actually publish a text on midwifery—prior to her it was only men who published on midwifery... shocking and yet also not at all surprising. I was incredibly inspired by the beautifully poetic terminology she would use to reference female genitalia, which seems to be in deep contrast to the vocabulary we chose to use today. “At the bottom of the woman’s belly, there is a mountain of pleasure near the well-spring.” It was out of this series that I began my fascination with how choice words can inspire either an affection for or a deep fear of women and their bodies.

**JM:** You created this series in 2016, during the election year. Had the social and political situation seeped its way into your thought process and making of the work? How do you see it reflectively in 2017?

**MR:** I created *Caliban and the Witch* in the fall of 2016, which was precisely the culmination of our intense election season. It was an inspiring time as a woman because of Hillary’s historic run, but it was also an increasingly disturbing period. Watching what Trump and the right, even the middle right,

were doing to Hillary and her campaign was like watching a modern day witch-hunt. The parallels between the research I was doing and what I was watching happen to Hillary were, for me, indisputable. If a woman as overly qualified as Hillary can be torn down and berated with such intense hatred, it seemed to me that it was an indication of the socio-political view of how every woman may be treated in this country. This inspired me to continuing churning out paintings—it proved that the parallels between the history of witch-hunts and the modern day American woman I was exploring in my work was extremely relevant. Now that we are fully immersed in the disaster that is the Trump presidency, I am even more disturbed by the accuracy of my *Caliban and the Witch* series. Do we really hate and fear women so much that we are willing to elect a fool like Donald Trump as our president?

**JK:** Your background was originally in figurative drawing and these are clearly a departure from your roots. What prompted you to make such a drastic change in your practice?

**MR:** The transition happened rather smoothly. I had reached a point in my figurative practice where I was feeling stuck. When a figure is involved, the conversation can often end before it’s even begun—people bring their own assumptions, experiences, and readings to any work, but especially to figurative work. I was overthinking every decision concerning the figure and it was stunting my practice. As an exercise, I began to focus on the individual aspects of the figure. I zoomed in, abstracting parts of the body. I began to focus strictly on color, line, texture, mood, etc... the act of painting rather than the figure. It was a natural leap to abstraction from that point. I began to play and have fun again with my practice. I was challenged and inspired by the idea of attempting to have the same conversation I was having in my figurative work with these new abstract paintings. Through abstraction I am able to open up the dialogue and reach a far greater range of people because the subject is what drives the paintings rather than the figure or the painting itself.

**JK:** Our exhibition is titled, *The Map Is Not the Territory*, or in other words, the word is not the thing. Abstraction in painting, much like in language, invites a

multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations. How do you feel the series *Caliban and the Witch* exemplifies the show’s theme?

**MR:** *Caliban and the Witch* is a series which exists purely as a means of exploring the multiplicity of the meanings of language and the ways in which it is expressed in painting. Each painting is an exploration of the ways vocabulary is used to express several different interpretations in a single word or painting. My paintings are simply suggestions of how we understand today the words which were used to oppress and murder women in the 15th-18th century. These words are still being used today, but within a different cultural context and our relationship with these terms has changed. I argue that our history informs our present and with the conversations my work inspires, we can perhaps better understand our present. *The Map Is Not the Territory* expresses a sense of exploring beyond what we are expected to believe is true. If we are to truly understand our current social, political, economic, and ecological state, it is up to us to push past our cultural borders and create our own human territory.



Melanie Reese, *Rebel I*, Mixed media on canvas, 2016.



# Roberto Vega

By Natalia Viera Salgado with Roberto Vega

## On Cracks as Metaphors: *Studies on Fissures*

For Ecuadorian artist Roberto Vega, cracks can provide an alternative space for reflection, representing an open pathway to history. At the Pfizer building in Brooklyn, the artist connects his drawings to already-existing cracks in the space, enhancing them instead of fixing them. *Studies on Fissures*, 2017, which Vega creates for the exhibition *The Map Is Not the Territory*, presents a site specific work accompanied by a collection of ink drawings and a selection of objects and photographs, that explore how the crack can open up possibilities for such reflection. The photos are embedded within sculptural objects made out of plaster, sometimes obscuring the identity of the subject, and sometimes allowing the faces to peek through. These represent a personal archive that

Vega accumulated while walking around New York over the past year and combining it with his personal memories from his homeland. In a sense the archive is cracked open, exposing a personal past.

These cracks are what Vega calls “a reflection on the inscriptions of time.” In order to open up spaces of memory, this work uses his personal writing, archival material, and poetry, as one of his primary inspirations. Poetry, unlike more structured literature, is in many ways a broken form, with cracks in its content. For example the *caesura*, which means in greek a break in the verse. In this case, the poetic notion of “imaginary lands,” brings individuals to consider their personal ideas about territory, and how these ideas may conflict with the dominant standard.

In [*Imaginary Lands*], Vega uses a poetic phrase from his earlier work that is loaded with questions concerning to the realities of land ownership and its borders. Vega has been investigating the idea of memory for five years now. Before coming to New York, he worked with domestic archives while digging into the story of his family and ancestors.

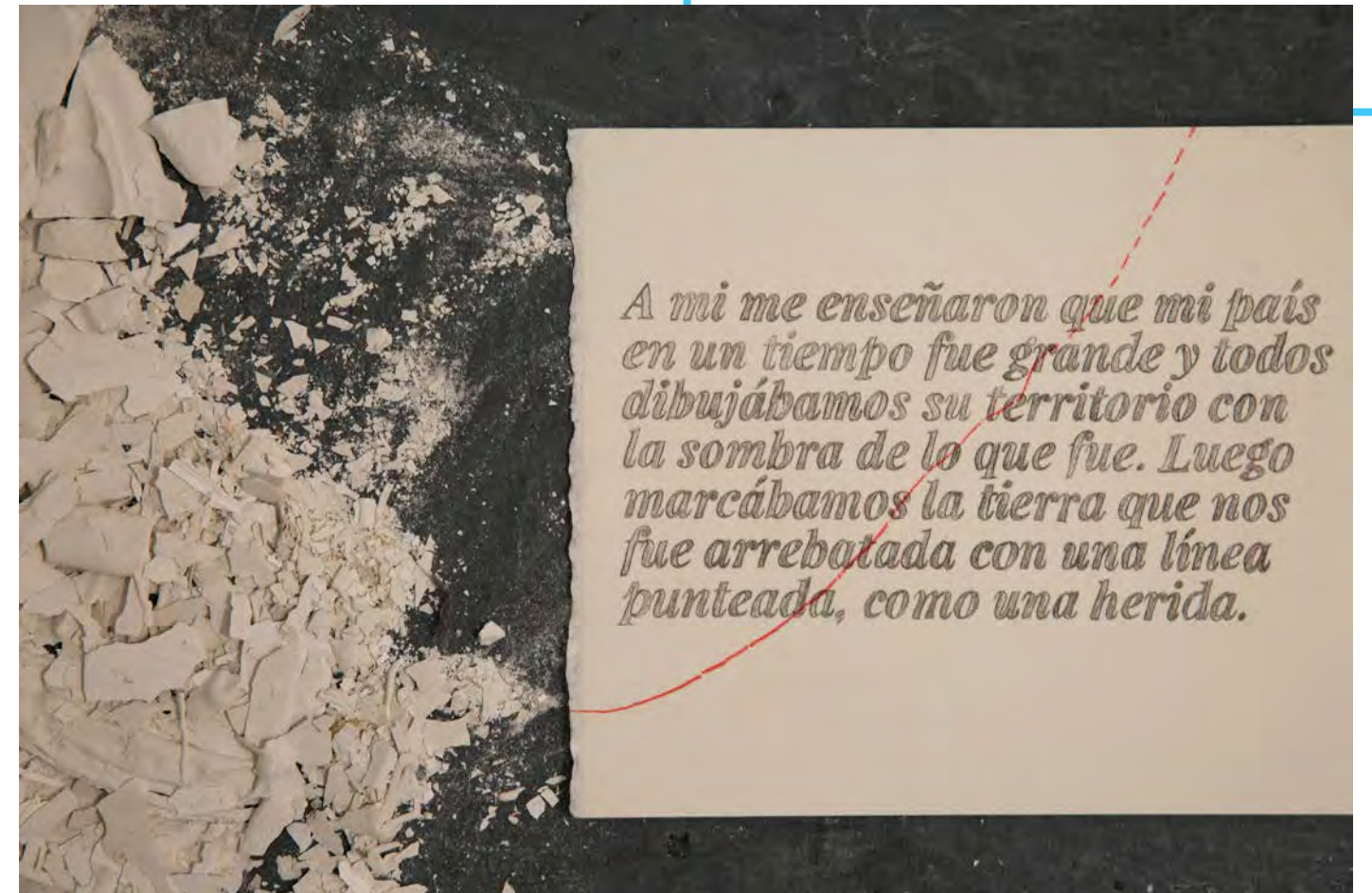
Vega creates a reality that allows for him to reflect on memory and question preconceived notions in order to rethink those stories.

The concept of memory and time can be a very fragile one, he explains it by introducing personal lived experiences in Ecuador: “The country where I was born and raised carries a story full of scars and losses. We lost languages and territories. In 1999, we lost our currency and adopted one from abroad. I believe that Ecuador has a past that, viewed from the lenses of success, is fraught with failures. But it may be that in our fissures and weaknesses we find a space where the creation of a dialogue is possible. Surely this exercise is also an attempt to work from my own scars and my own failures and how, from them, I can propose something and keep on.” Instead of viewing the fissure as a weakness, Vega makes the crack powerfully visible, focusing on its strength. For Vega, we come closer to the collective truth when we study the discontinuity of the present; we take charge of moments of instability and turbulence.

Interventions and marks serve as affirmations that we are present in a certain space at a cer-

tain moment. Vega also works with the footprint (or imprint) of the crack, as he feels that it can serve as a metaphor for our time; it is a way to expose physical, concrete forces, as well as external forces that are beyond our control. This fissure serves as a metaphor, as an impertinence in the habitual register of language and, therefore, the creation of a possibility. The crack serves in a way as a “spatial reality” for knowledge and truth. “The spaces and territories that we inhabit are regulated. Many times the rules that build them are unknown to us. Mapping the space allows us to read and understand it from another point of view. By naming space we can speak with our voice, using our own words. Re-naming and re-configuring space becomes an exercise of freedom, autonomy.” When thinking about the fissure and how one can connect to the world, Vega adds, “perhaps, through the cracks of power we can look out and recover our voice.”

Roberto Vega, [*Imaginary Lands*] (Left) and *Personal Poetry* (Right), Personal writing, archival material, objects, and their debris, 2017.



PRESS RELEASE:  
THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY

*The Map Is Not the Territory* examines the construction of representation through socially and lawfully imposed, arbitrary boundaries. Drawn from Polish-American philosopher and linguist Alfred Korzybski's publication *Science and Sanity* (1933), the title addresses the distinction between an entity and its abstraction. The aim is to interrogate discrepancies between reality and belief in response to the current, ubiquitous use of *non sequiturs* in the public arena. Conceived at the dawn of an unprecedented, divisive presidency, the exhibition upholds the spirit of resistance against misrepresentation and the commandeering of identities in our history and contemporary culture.

Curated by eight women from various countries and regions around the world, *The Map Is Not the Territory* applies the concept of *kintsugi*, a Japanese form of pottery that highlights fractures with precious metals. Selected by each curator, the artworks are singular fragments that reflect a myriad of perceptions of physical and ideological borders. Taking its cue from this repaired earthenware, the exhibition forces a cohesion of conceptual and formal differences that make them glimmer as a reconciled whole.

Some artists in the exhibition challenge historical representations of women, while others probe the construction of narratives from a sociopolitical perspective. Melanie Reese's series *Caliban and the Witch* (2016) prompts the viewer to look beyond the complex veil of historical oppression of women. Kate Gilmore's video *Sudden as a Massacre* (2011) demonstrates a liberated agency of physicality against the pristine, passive female stereotype. Ann Hamilton's (*aleph* - video) (1992/93) asserts the primal, compulsive desire of transforming realities into words. Martine Gutierrez's *Line Ups* (2014) employs mannequins to question the binary notions of "genuine" and "performative" gender roles. Camille Lee's *The Game* (2016) uses a childhood toy to mimic the precarious relations between social issues. Anh Thuy Nguyen's *Of Place and Nation* (2017) addresses the migrational displacement between political identity and personal memories. Brittany Cassell's *That Which Does Not Burn* (2016) and *Ain't I a Woman/The Will to Change* (2015) are an intergenerational inquiry into how cultural history and collective memory shape individual identity and experience. Roberto Vega's site-specific *Studies on Fissures* (2017) presents history as a result of the

intractable forces of memory. Helene Nymann's trancelike video *Whether We Are* (2016) portrays how one's environment gradually transforms one's psychological self. Bitá Razavi's *Coloring Book for Concerned Adults* (2017) questions official representation of data by playfully allowing alternative versions. A special performance by renowned Butoh dancer Vangelina will blur the borders between mental and physical, internal and external, individual and communal, as she activates the exhibition space on Wednesday, April 28th at 8:00PM.

All works question our preconceived understandings of entities, whether it is people, places or concepts, by subverting misrepresentations of reality. The resilience and resistance of these individual works are amplified in aggregate in *The Map Is Not the Territory*. In addition to paintings, photographs, sculptures and media art, site-specific work engages the exhibition space itself, anchoring the concept in the context of the Pfizer Building. Furthermore, the publication made for this occasion features verbal and visual elaborations of the works, their makers and the ideas from which they were born.

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