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**Political Art Action:
The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Erika Hirugami

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Political Art Action: The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness

by

Erika Hirugami

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Charlene Villaseñor Black, Chair

Omar Pimienta's political art action *Consulado Móvil* simultaneously serves as an analogy, an allegory, a symbol, and an accusation that authenticates undocumented bodies, giving a voice to immigrant narratives while problematizing naturalization and citizenship. Citizenship is more complex than a dichotomous ideology that creates two groups of individuals who live in direct opposition, those with the legal privilege to partake in the social contract of a nation and those not allowed to do so legally.

This analysis takes as a point of departure Mexican scholarship that has foregrounded and previously outlined *arte acción*. By migrating this scholarly concept from Mexico and juxtaposing it to U.S. mainstream society's understanding of performance, this study conceptually mirrors the journeys of countless brown immigrants. This study methodologically braids autoethnography, critical race theory (C.R.T., LatCrit, and UndocuCrit), and curatorial dialogues that transcend

testimonios and interviews as data gathering methodologies to best understand how Political Art Action outlines the aesthetics of undocumentedness.

Pimienta's work scrutinizes the legal process by which people naturalize issuing Pasaportes Libres. Analyzed in the following pages are Pimienta's Colonia Libertad (which translates roughly to freedom colony), Ciudadanía Libre, Consulado Móvil, Lady Liberty, and Pasaporte Libre, each an intricate fragment of a more extensive political art action that endures within a neoliberal state that cannibalizes the immigrant community for economic profit. By scrutinizing bureaucratic naturalization and citizenship as a social construct, Consulado Móvil allows each Ciudadano Libre to claim a conciencia histórica.

The thesis of Erika Hirugami is approved.

Laura E. Gomez

Abel Valenzuela Jr.

Charlene Villaseñor Black, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

dedicated to him

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Political Art Action:
The Aesthetics of Undocumentedness

Introduction

habíamos cruzado la frontera muchas veces
en mi memoria esta es la primera
...
ahora entiendo porque siempre entiendo
mucho tiempo después pero entiendo

las preguntas iniciaron ahí
las advertencias iniciaron ahí
la frontera inicio ahí.¹

Migration, border crossing, residency requesting, citizenship granting, imminent deportation, and undocumentedness are each bequeathed with a unique legacy of trauma woven into departure from the safety of home and the embrace of nation, all of which is juxtaposed to the idealized notion of a prosperous future that waits for anyone who migrates north from México to the United States. The perpetual policing of the border gestates a broken bureaucratic system that engenders agony to anyone who comes into its periphery and despair to those who suffer through

¹ Omar Pimienta, *Album of Fences*, ed. Translated from Spanish by Jose Antonio Villaran (Cardboard House Press, 2018), 30.

it. Omar Pimienta's political art action *Consulado Móvil* simultaneously serves as an analogy, an allegory, a symbol, and an accusation that authenticates undocumented bodies. It gives a voice to immigrant narratives while problematizing naturalization and citizenship alike. Pimienta's work scrutinizes the legal process by which people become documented issuing *Pasaportes Libres*. Analyzed in the following pages are Pimienta's *Colonia Libertad* (which translates roughly to freedom colony), *Ciudadanía Libre*, *Consulado Móvil*, *Lady Liberty*, and *Pasaporte Libre*, each an intricate fragment of a more extensive political art action that endures within a neoliberal state that cannibalizes the immigrant community for economic profit, inside a capitalist system that views the undocumented population simultaneously as a threat and a commodity.

At the core of this political art action, Omar Pimienta exchanges an expired passport for a Pasaporte Libre (figure 1) via *Consulado Móvil*, granting each Ciudadano Libre citizenship into *Colonia Libertad*. In doing so, Pimienta defies bureaucratic naturalization processes and provokes a critical understanding of the social contract of citizenship itself while gestating a consciencia histórica amongst its participants, all the while questioning derealization and the bureaucratically-induced melancholy suffered by the immigrant population who must endure naturalization as the process by which to gain access to citizenship. The aesthetics of undocumentedness as delineated by the political art action *Consulado Móvil* mark the axis of this analysis by interrogating naturalization as a process that is profoundly wounding to immigrants. The following pages present interdisciplinary scholarship intentionally crafted to challenge hierarchical and retrospective knowledge creation in an effort to expand the existing knowledge base of Pimienta's oeuvre from the earliest stage of his artistic career.

The study presented here aims to further knowledge creation by exclusively focusing on Pimienta's aesthetic practice, as it has yet to be academically codified. Borrowing methodologies

from curatorial practices will, throughout this study, serve as a road map to knowledge creation from within an immigrant community of arts professionals.

Literature Review

Omar Pimienta

Countless academic articles, art publications, museum catalogs, and other books are written every day essentially to discuss artists in the latest or final stages of their careers as well as artists' estates. The contemporary art world demands that artists maintain international relations as well as sustain studios in multiple countries, if not gallery representation in various continents. Juxtaposing the conflicting necessities of the contemporary art world with the realities of immigrant artists—and to emphasize such contrast—this study focuses on generating scholarship that directly acknowledges that immigrant artists are categorically missing in the annals of art history, Chicana Studies and art criticism. Furthermore, matters of undocumentedness and naturalization are nearly invisible constructs rarely discussed aesthetically. This study aims to expand on the aesthetic representations of bureaucracy as found in contemporary art, more specifically in the work of a Mexican immigrant artist currently residing in the United States.

The work of Omar Pimienta is by and large missing from academic codification; this study aims to rectify that. To testify to the existence and conceptualization of Pimienta's use of political art action in writing, OmarPimienta.com and a single article written by Pimienta for *Revista Código* mark the entire body of literature that speaks about Consulado Móvil. The analysis presented here thus aims to expand this literature by generating scholarship that bridges a dialogue between undocumentedness, immigration, and naturalization bureaucratization, while expanding

contemporary art history to include Omar Pimienta's practice as the axis to understand the aesthetics of undocumentedness.

Pimienta born in Tijuana in 1978, received his M.F.A. in Visual Arts from the University of California, San Diego, in 2010. The first Ciudadanía Libre was issued a few years later, on September 29, 2012, to Ivette Melissa Arreola Casillas, born in Tijuana, Mexico (figure 2). Therefore, the following analysis focuses on the earliest conceptual ideas made political art action developed in the beginning stage of Pimienta's artistic career. Producing scholarship contingent to the emergent stages in an artists' career as presented in this study marks an effort to generate an academic dialogue in opposition to retrospection. Creating, interpreting, critiquing, and expanding on the ideas of artists at the earliest stages of their careers is imperative to aesthetic knowledge creation. The knowledge presented in the following pages is intentionally crafted to challenge hierarchical scholarship to comprise an interdisciplinary epistemology of knowledge creation in community with the art creator. Therefore, being in conversation with the artist in the earliest stages of his career can bring about a deeper dialogue with the artist himself. Thus in-depth knowledge creation can be generated to further understand the potentiality for the work in community with the creator and other political art action participants.

Citizenship

Whereas little written information is available about Pimienta's artwork, the opposite is true about citizenship. This analysis will ground itself in the conceptualization of citizenship brought forth by Aviva Chomsky. In the chapter entitled "Where did Illegality come from?" from her book *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Legal* Chomsky poses the following:

It seems right and natural to us that people should be divided by citizenship and documents into different categories with differential rights. We assume that the world is naturally divided into countries and that every human being somehow belongs in one country or another. People are supposed to stay in the country that they were born in unless they can get special permission to enter another. There is nothing natural about this state of affairs. Countries, sovereignty, citizenship, and laws are all social constructions: abstractions invented by humans.²

Citizenship is of great concern to best understand undocumentedness. The basic notion of existing as part of a nation project must be questioned while discussing migration concerns. Citizen as a construct and a project are at the forefront of any in-depth understanding of the legality of existence juxtaposed to undocumentedness. How to think of the division between people who belong to a nation-state and those who visit or travel to settle, therefore, must be questioned at its very core. As per Chomsky, “there is nothing natural about this state of affairs,” the idea that undocumented individuals are somehow less qualified to live with dignity within their new nation implies that they are somehow not worthy of the privilege that is having full citizen legal rights.

Extensive and intrusive bureaucratic processes are the standard in most countries to scrutinize the incoming population to bestow upon them citizen rights. These abstractions invented by humans to segregate people based solely on their country of origin are nothing but a legal set of constructs built by nations to keep from granting fundamental human rights to a subsection of their essential population. Citizenship is more complex than a dichotomous ideology that creates two groups of individuals who live in direct opposition, those with the legal privilege to partake in the social contract of a nation and those not allowed to do so legally.

In contrast to Chomsky and by focusing exclusively on the brown community in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* Renato Rosaldo states,

² Aviva Chomsky, *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2014), 27.

A significant number of people in the United States, for example, have come to question the citizenship of Latinos by declaring undocumented workers to be “alien” or “illegal.” By a psychological and cultural mechanisms of association, all Latinos are thus declared to have a blemish that brands us with the stigma of being outside the law. We always live with the mark indicating that whether or not we belong in this country is always in question.³

In the case of the United States in particular, marking brown as synonyms with undocumented, allows the host nation to other and stigmatize the incoming immigrant population of the nation, and therefore remove their basic human rights. Omar Pimienta’s political art action’s axis is Colonia Libertad, a geographically specific location found within the contemporary boundary of the Mexican Nation (32° 32’ 34.1952” N 117° 1’ 13.1412” W), a few minutes south of the Mexico/United States border. Pimienta himself was born on this location. Perpetually questioning that any member of the brown community is outside the law directly translates to a constant policing of performative and idealized notions of citizenship. Each member of the brown community, be it immigrant, undocumented, citizen, or naturalized, is branding as lacking citizenship marked solely by their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges that contemporary citizenship is an abstract concept enforced by governments for capitalist gain, as explained by Chomsky and Rosaldo. Focusing on the brown community implies an already stigmatized existence that is constantly made to understand they are undeserving of full human rights as granted by the nation-state of their residence regardless of their legal status. The abstract notion that is citizenship and the complexity of the systems in place to reject individuals from belonging to a specific nation project is too

³ Renato Rosaldo, *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, ed. by William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 31.

extensive for this analysis; therefore, a simplified approach to citizenship that acknowledges a dichotomy between documented (or citizen) and undocumented will be observed.⁴

Undocumented

A mindful approach toward selecting Omar Pimienta's political art action instead of any artwork created by undocumented artists to explore undocumentedness was a conscious decision to establish maximum transparency and refute retraumatizing any individual by publicly signaling their legal status. In the words of Aurora Chang, "American common sense communicates that there are some who are legal and others who are illegal. This demarcation emphasizes a duality that easily equates legality with goodness and civility and illegality with evil and deviance."⁵ As an ethical consideration towards artists who do not openly acknowledge being undocumented, this study will not signal any individual's status as it can be considered by some to be tied to deviance. Furthermore, "images of 'illegal aliens' have been manufactured for the consumption of North American readers who at once see themselves as culturally transparent and feel threatened by the differences of class and culture."⁶ By methodologically examining political art action from an undocumentedness axis, a move toward generating knowledge not made exclusively for the consumption of North American readers becomes one of the many objectives of this analysis. Furthermore, the research presented here problematizes the dichotomous read of undocumented

⁴ An in-depth examination pertaining to the multi-layered citizen subjects will be discussed in an upcoming exploration.

⁵ Aurora Chang, 'Undocumented to Hyperdocumented: A "Jornada" of Protection, Papers, and PhD Status,' *Harvard Educational Review*, 81.3 (2011), 519.

⁶ Chang, 519.

imagery that highlights the abstract construction of citizenship, similarly to what Sayak Valencia denotes as “Regimen Live,” where she explains:

Un desplazamiento total del cuerpo a través del gobierno de las mentes, desde nuestra perspectiva es la tendencia homogeneizada de descorporizar a las poblaciones... donde los cuerpos son aún importantes como máquinas de trabajo físico y en los cuales confluyen, de manera escalonada, distintas técnicas de gobierno necro, bio y psicopolítico.⁷

This analysis will further explore how a decorporealization of personhood creates a manufactured consumption of undocumentedness that enables a gestation of false narratives, enabling governments to enact necro-policies against the brown community currently residing in the United States.

Theory and Method

The theoretical buttresses that hold together this analysis come from various research fields in multiple countries, predominantly Mexico and the United States, each focused on aesthetics, community, action, belonging, or questioning the intrinsic realities of brown immigrants currently residing in the United States. Furthermore, this visual analysis focuses exclusively on first-generation Mexican immigrant artists, and thus a conscious effort to repudiate pigmentocracy is explored by linguistically experimenting with borrowed vocabularies.

Brown

⁷ Sayak Valencia, "Psicopolítica, celebrity culture y régimen live en la era de Trump," *Norteamérica, revista académica del CISAN-UNAM*, 13 no.2 (2018), 245.

In the words of José Esteban Muñoz, “Brown” in a very immediate sense is rendered upon people by their personal and familial participation in South-to-North migration patterns. According to Muñoz, things are brown by law insofar as even those who can claim legal belonging are still increasingly vulnerable to profiling and other state practices of subordination.⁸ In contrast to Muñoz, Joshua Javier Guzman posits “Brown” along with its nominal form, brownness, not just as identity markers such as “Latina/o” or “Chicana/o” are in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.⁹ In Guzman’s analysis, brown speaks for a community. “On the one hand, Brown tells a story of the ongoing mixing of all races, driven by a post-racial ideology that then ignores the incommensurable differences of those singular beings organized and managed by oppressive regimes.”¹⁰ Brown is utilized through this analysis to examine “the sobering intensity of the disenfranchisement of minoritarian people in the United States that is nothing less than browning the way we understand the misapplication and abuses of those suspended realities known as justice, democracy, and freedom.”¹¹ In an effort to explore a linguistical distance from “Hispanic” and “Latina/o/x” or “Chicana/o/x” and to utilize more inclusive vocabulary made from within the brown community, brown will be adopted throughout this study to speak from a community of people of various ethnic backgrounds, races, and intersectionalities.

Critical Race Theory

⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Duke University Press, 2020), 3.

⁹ Joshua Javier Guzman, ‘Brown’, in *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, ed. by Vargas Deborah R., Mirabal Nancy Raquel, and La Fountain-Stokes Lawrence (New York: NYU Press, 2017), pp. 25–28 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pwtbj.11>>, 25.

¹⁰ Guzman, 25.

¹¹ Guzman, 28.

Critical race theory is the theoretical framework that questions the very foundations of the liberal order and includes equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.¹² CRT here serves to analyze historical trauma and the junction of race and power pertaining to the undocumented immigrant population of the United States. Furthermore, LatCrit reveals the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality while acknowledging experiences related to immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype.¹³ And lastly the knowledge set forth by UndocuCrit¹⁴ although an imperfect analogy for this analysis, as it centers on DACAdemics and undocumented scholars all converge epistemologically to ground the following analysis.¹⁵ CRT, LatCrit, and UndocuCrit will serve this analysis as a road map and theoretical starting point, with an epistemological goal to comprehend bureaucratic depersonalization experienced by the brown community.

Aesthetics of Undocumentedness

This analysis marks the first academic exploration of what is referenced here as the aesthetics of undocumentedness. The aesthetics of undocumentedness argues that bureaucratic depersonalization is seldom presented aesthetically and seeks to delineate its present instances. It

¹² Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, third edition (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 18.

¹³ Lindsay Pérez Huber, “Disrupting Apartheid of Knowledge: Testimonio as Methodology in Latina/o Critical Race Research in Education,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22, no. 6 (2009): 639–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903333863>, 643.

¹⁴ Undocumented Critical Theory which is rooted in CRT, LatCrit, and TribalCrit (Tribal Critical Race Theory).

¹⁵ Carlos Aguilar, ‘Undocumented Critical Theory,’ *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, 19.3 (2019), 152–60 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708618817911>, 152. For information on the developments of these various theoretical frameworks see Delgado, Richard & Stefancic.

centers on the aesthetic practices of immigrant artists as they are often disregarded from the art history canon and draws upon their creations to enact a dialogue that centers their intersectionality as foreigners in countries that subjugate their communities for economic gain (in this instance, Mexican immigrants in the United States). It presents itself within the works of countless migrant artists who, like Pimienta, question immigration by exploring the bureaucratization of personhood. The aesthetics of undocumentedness is thus activated when immigrant artists produce artworks centering on migratory concerns such as migration itself, border crossing, residency requesting, citizenship granting, imminent deportation, and undocumentedness, as well as labor exploitation outside one's country of origin. However, it cannot speak for a monolithic migratory experience, as no two immigrants share one same journey. The aesthetics of undocumentedness are surveyed within the following pages to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities of undocumentedness as rendered aesthetically by immigrant artists, in this particular case, by Omar Pimienta.

Political Art Action

In *Arte acción en Mexico: registros y residuos*, Aravena, Henaro, Moreno, and Smith create an inventory of terms and concepts to define artworks in which artists utilize their body as a vehicle of aesthetic articulation.¹⁶ Within their work, they pose that,

La práctica del *performance*, como es conocida por el termino anglosajón, ha sido atravesada por una multiplicidad de modos de entenderla, practicarla, definirla y enmarcarla. Para castellanizar el término, hemos conformado un inventario mutante de nominaciones y conceptos; en éste, el término que ha generado mayor acuerdo es el de *arte acción*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Each an everyone a curator, art historian, art critic, an aesthetic scholar.

¹⁷Cristina Aravena and others, *Action Art in Mexico* (Mexico, 2019), 25.

Though arte acción conveys a myriad of articulations that live within the performative possibilities available to contemporary artists, from happenings to emancipated performances, political art action is posed here as a further step in aesthetic praxis. This study takes as a point of departure Mexican scholarship that has foregrounded and previously outlined arte acción. By migrating this scholarly concept from Mexico and juxtaposing it to U.S. mainstream society's understanding of performance, this study conceptually mirrors the journeys of countless brown immigrants who "participate in South-to-North migration patterns."¹⁸ In doing so, an intersectional migratory understanding of political art action emerges from the scholarship generated simultaneously in both nations. Therefore, the analysis presented here seeks to decenter the privileged knowledge creation axis north of the Mexico/United States border.

In the words of Peggy Phelan, "performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."¹⁹ Migrating arte acción beyond performance allows political art action to transcend its artistic capabilities to denounce socio-political concerns, in this case as they pertain to the aesthetics of undocumentedness. By transcending arte acción and placing socio-political demands as axis, political art action grants artists the aesthetic agency to confront political matters generating a critical conciencia histórica. Thus political art action challenges the ephemeral nature of performance, pushing beyond arte acción while bestowing political and transcendental agency on the interactions generated by the artists who create it.

¹⁸ Muñoz 2013, 3.

¹⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.

Political art action is a term that emerged in conversation with artist Omar Pimienta during the installation of *Consulado Móvil* at the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA) on January 24, 2016.²⁰ The position of this analysis is that Omar Pimienta creates political art action to confront undocumentedness and the systemic concerns of a socio-political, legal, and economic nature that plague the lives of the undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States.

Curatorial Dialogue

The work presented in the following pages will braid autoethnography and active participant style curatorial dialogue that transcends testimonios and interviews as data gathering methodologies.

Jillian Hernandez's publication, *Aesthetics of Excess*, delineates her founding of the feminist community arts project *Women on the Rise!* In her words, "I designed WOTR as an intergenerational feminist art praxis, rather than a form of art therapy, self-work, or carceral reform."²¹ As inspired by Hernandez's methodology in knowledge creation from active participation amongst young women artists, this study will utilize curatorial praxis as its methodological foundation. At the core of exhibition development, a curator is in constant contact with an artist for an extended period of time (from a few days to a few years, depending on the scope of the project) with a single goal to actively negotiate the best case scenario for exhibiting art to a public. Countless emails to discuss logistics, various in-person gatherings to witness

²⁰ Omar Pimienta (artist) in conversation with author (curator), January 24, 2016.

²¹ Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), ix.

aesthetic production, many conversations to fine-tune every minuscule detail pertaining to the exhibition (from the color of the walls to the font of the leaflets), all culminate in a project worthy of being exhibited to a public, alongside this process camaraderie emerges between the artist and the curator responsible for the exhibition itself.²²

Whereas interviews might be cold conversations between two or more individuals for the purpose of data collecting, *testimonios*, as per Lindsay Perez Huber, are a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future.²³ Both interviews and *testimonios* are transcended within the curatorial dialogue as they are conversations between artists and curators actively working on a communal goal. In the words of Dr. Leisy J. Abrego, Ph.D., “to me, this sounds like more than just... *pláticas*. This sounds like an active kind of conversation while doing, conversation while in shared motion, while in shared goals. I think there’s promise in thinking through and carrying out a project using such methods because it’s not just discussion, but actually working together toward a shared goal.”²⁴ Foregrounding the dialogue produced while working toward a shared goal as existent within curatorial practices serves as the foundational methodology for this epistemological study.

²² During some exhibitions and because of human nature, camaraderie might not happen between artist and curator.

²³ Huber, 644.

²⁴ Dr. Leisy J. Abrego., Ph.D., email message to author, Jun 7, 2021.

Autoethnography

Phenomenologically driven autoethnography, my own subject-centered proclivity as a formerly undocumented member of the brown community, is another pillar in the methodological framework by which this study is conceived. In the words of Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt, autoethnography chooses to locate itself within the subject-centered proclivities of humanist thought and phenomenological inquiry and to subscribe to a metaphysics of being that seems to continue to resist the powerful presence and theorizing practices of affect theory, materiality, and the posthuman.²⁵ Working closely with Omar Pimienta in 2015 and 2016, I curated *Consulado Móvil* at the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA) and Marcas Contemporary, a gallery in Santa Ana, California. Both iterations were a part of the exhibition *Transcendental Convergences*, thought of as a collaboration between MOLAA and Marcas Gallery. To self-reflect and resist the powerful practices of silencing the narratives of immigrants, the various curatorial dialogues had between Omar Pimienta and myself while preparing to exhibit *Consulado Móvil* at various locations will be foregrounded in this study.

I am a Ciudadana Libre myself. I exchanged my expired Mexican passport to obtain a Ciudadanía Libre (Figure 3). *Consulado Móvil* granted me a Pasaporte Libre (figure 4) which gives me a Ciudadanía Libre from Colonia Libertad. Amongst the numerous ciudadanos libres, I have many colleagues, both authors and curators alike, a few friends, a former mentor, an ex-husband, and my mother, Ana Preciado. She is also a Ciudadana Libre (figure 5). The bulk of the figures utilized to illustrate this analysis foreground her particular experience participating in the political art action *Consulado Móvil*, her application process, and ultimately her acquisition of a pasaporte

²⁵ Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt, "Autoethnography and Activism: Movement, Intensity, and Potential," *Qualitative Inquiry* 25, no. 6 (2019): 566–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418800754>, 566.

libre. Omar Pimienta's archival photographs of the political art action *Consulado Móvil* are the visual elements that center this analysis.

Herbert Marcuse's critique of Walter Benjamin positions the artwork's aura as fundamentally tied to its moment of creation. Marcuse's analysis posits that a piece that has left its historical moment may respond to a different situation, and therefore its truth can potentially become falsified. However, because of new forms of perception, the original aura of the artwork can also transcend itself and be interpreted, instrumented, and translated. Through this process, the artwork's aura becomes more complex, refined, and full of meaning.²⁶ Inspired by Marcuse's critique of Benjamin's, a complex read of Pimienta's political art action emerges to challenge immigration policies and the naturalization bureaucracy that subjugates brown immigrants in the United States. In "Arte, sociedad y memoria. De la educación en el arte como reactivo social," Claudia Berdejo Pérez states,

El valor de una memoria social crítica descrita a partir del arte abre la posibilidad de contar la historia desde aquellas voces o sectores sociales que no tienen el escenario para hacerlo... De ahí que el arte ayude a estos sectores vulnerados a construir una memoria en la que se reapropien de la historia, y en el proyecto que se presenta la construcción de la memoria se realiza para darles voz y rostro, contribuyendo con ello a la restitución del tejido social quebrantado.²⁷

Making undocumentedness the axis of this analysis generates a unique read of Pimienta's political art action, which gestures a memoria histórica which by design is political. Deliberating on the aura of an artwork utilizing subsequent autoethnographical perception, together with the

²⁶ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art as a Form of Reality*, 1969. 2018; New York; The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, <https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/art-as-a-form-of-reality-by-herbert-marcuse-1969> [accessed 15 April 2020).

²⁷ Pérez, Claudia Berdejo. "Arte, Sociedad Y Memoria.: De La Educación En El Arte Como Reactivo Social." In *Sociología De La Cultura, Arte E Interculturalidad*, 193-CLACSO, 2019, 199.

digital archival contents of the curatorial project (texts, emails, notes, the exhibition catalog, and checklists), aligning CRT to visual analysis, allows for a transcendental read of the artwork. Thinking through a memoria social crítica from within curatorial dialogue allows Pimienta's political art action to voice the undocumented community members who suffer a tejido social quebrantado.

Analysis

Omar Pimienta has described Consulado Móvil as “participatory action art,” “social sculpture,” and “political art action” over the past five years. The complexity of Pimienta's ciudadanía libre, as afforded by Consulado Móvil, allows for several intricate designations that emerge from a mere description of the artwork. The multi-nodal political art action is a constellation of interwoven relational occurrences of equal involvedness for the participants who engage with Consulado Móvil. Consulado Móvil exists in a nomadic state as of 2012 when Omar Pimienta theorized it. Since then, Consulado Móvil has occupied (been created in, recreated, produced, exhibited in, witnessed, and engaged with) galleries and museums worldwide.

Provenance

Pimienta's political art action Consulado Móvil has occurred at Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) in San Jose, Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA) in Long Beach, Instant HERLEV Institute Art & Site Research in Herlev-Denmark, City Gallery in San Diego, Marcas Gallery in Santa Ana, Biennale Internationale de Casablanca in Morocco, Desai|Matta Gallery in San Francisco, MUZEO in Anaheim, Oceanside Art Museum in Oceanside

(OMA), Museum of Contemporary Art in Tucson, El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA) in El Paso, Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez (MACJ) in Ciudad Juarez, Museum of Contemporary Art (MCASD) in San Diego, Oficina de Proyectos Culturales in Puerto Vallarta, and The Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University in Orange-California.²⁸

Action

Consulado Móvil consists of the political art action by which Pimienta and often his partner Marcella Vargas come together to enact the bureaucratic performativity that is granting citizenship (figure 6). On a small table or desk, Pimienta places the tools of his trade, an electric typewriter, his FP-100C instant polaroid portrait camera, scissors, a date stamper, Colonia Libertad memorabilia, a few writing instruments, and blank applications for a ciudadanía libre. On an adjacent wall a white banner depicting Colonia Libertad's escudo colonial for each of the future ciudadanos libres to pose next to, while requesting their ciudadanía libre. A few feet away a softbox light allowing Consulado Móvil to hint at the bureaucratic aura often associated with both the interview and the biometrics offices of USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services).

Consulado Móvil claims embassy inside a white cube at its core,²⁹ welcoming those who wish to engage with the political art action by asking them to relinquish their expired passport (figure 7). Pimienta consequentially claims the metaphorical materiality associated with legal citizenship in any country across the globe. In exchange, he issues a Ciudadanía Libre to Colonia

²⁸ Omar Pimienta, 'Consulado Móvil / Mobile Consulate — Omar Pimienta' <<http://omarpimienta.com/consulado-movil-mobile-consulate/>> [accessed 22 November 2020].

²⁹ "White Cube – Art Term | Tate," accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/w/white-cube>.

Libertad, also in the form of a paper passport (figure 8). Comparable to both Mexican and U.S. naturalization processes, the Foreign Affairs ministry of Consulado Móvil, which most often consists of Pimienta himself and his partner Marcella Vargas, performatively enacts bureaucratic procedures that enable the participant to become a citizen of Colonia Libertad and emerge a *ciudadano libre*. Simultaneously *concientizando* and *evidenciando*, Consulado Móvil challenges the process of naturalization as it happens within specific geographical spaces demarcated by a nation project such as embassies. With this political art action, Pimienta signals to Mexico/United States relations and the bureaucratically produced depersonalization inflicted onto the Mexican immigrant community once they arrive in the United States if they are granted access to even apply for naturalization.

Cleansing

Analogous to an official passport requesting process, to partake of Consulado Móvil and become a *ciudadano libre*, one must be photographed and fingerprinted (figure 9). Pimienta himself takes four passport pictures (figure 10) that are 35 x 45 mm on an FP-100C instant polaroid portrait camera;³⁰ one of the pictures is placed in the *Pasaporte Libre* (figure 4 and 5), one in the application for *Ciudadanía Libre* (figure 2 and 11), Consulado Móvil keeps one, and the participant takes the last one of the four images.

As per Pimienta, the type of film employed by Consulado Móvil leaves behind a residual negative that gets reclaimed during the chemical cleansing processes of the photograph itself. In the words of Tahseen Shams, time and time again, immigrants have been associated with diseases.

³⁰ Pimienta, 'Consulado Móvil / Mobile Consulate — Omar Pimienta'.

As such have been perceived to threaten and contaminate the health of the United States: Irish immigrants have been tied to cholera, Italian immigrants with polio, Jewish immigrants with tuberculosis, Chinese immigrants with the bubonic plague, Haitian immigrants with HIV, and today the undocumented immigrants are perceived as carriers of multiple diseases.³¹ Currently, Chinese immigrants are blamed for the spread of COVID19. The chemical cleansing process of the photograph is thus directly correlated to the medical clearances that future citizens must endure becoming part of their host nation, in this case, the United States. To rid the immigrant population of residue left behind by their country of origin, like the photographs utilized for Consulado Móvil, immigrants must endure chemical cleansing in the form of vaccines to be worthy of naturalizing in hopes of gaining access to citizenship.

The photograph taken by Pimienta marks the instance in which a Ciudadano Libre lives in-between citizenships, signaling a temporal existence in national limbo.³² By marking the single momentous temporality of an instance being between citizenships, Pimienta allows the future ciudadano libre to be free of citizenship. By marking said temporality with a camera, Pimienta interrogates the construct of citizenship as marked by any particular nation project and archives freedom from citizenship utilizing a camera. By signaling to the bureaucratization of naturalization in the United States, Pimienta opens a dialogue that challenges the notions of belonging to a nation's social contract, simultaneously pathologizing the immigrant community and bestowing psychological depersonalization upon the undocumented people who internalize otherness by feeling foreign, as they are asked to assimilate to mainstream society in the host country.

³¹ Tahseen Shams, "Beyond Here and There," in *Here, There, and Elsewhere: The Making of Immigrant Identities in a Globalized World* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 44.

³² Pimienta.

Pimienta grants each ciudadano libre a suspension of internal foreign depersonalization by extricating nation-belonging from its participants (if only for a moment). Consulado Móvil permits its ciudadanos libres the freedom to exist in a space uninhibited by the trauma found at the core of border crossing, residency requesting, citizenship receiving, and naturalization in general. In that moment of citizenship suspension, each ciudadano libre is unmarked, non “othered,” free, and unrestricted by abstract constructs of citizenship or membership in a problematic nation project such as the United States. By departing from association to any specific nation, at that moment before being embraced by Colonia Libertad, each ciudadano libre can disregard all of the damaging and harmful psychological and physical implications of being othered in a nation that enacts necropolitics amongst the immigrant communities currently residing within its borders. As per Achille Mbembe,

También se alude en *Necropolítica* a la cosificación del ser humano propia del capitalismo, que explora las formas mediante las cuales las fuerzas económicas e ideológicas del mundo moderno mercantilizan y reifican el cuerpo: se estudia de que manera este se convierte en una mercancía mas, susceptible de ser desechada.... Las personas ya no se conciben como seres irremplazables, inimitables e indivisibles, si no que son reducidas a un conjunto de fuerzas de producción fácilmente sustituibles.³³

As the sovereign nation that is the United States marks an individual as undocumented, they become legally exempt from specific human rights, and their bodies become commodified and disposable. Pimienta negates the existence of such dichotomies by opening a space free of citizenship and the problems it produces in that it cosifica al ser humano in this case immigrant.

Therefore, by partaking in this political art action, the participants transcend critical engagement to situate themselves (if for a brief moment) in citizenship limbo by relinquishing the

³³ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolítica, seguido de sobre el gobierno privado indirecto* Traducción y edición Elisabeth Falomir Archambault, (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Editorial Melusina, 2011), 14.

object that signifies citizenship and belonging to a specific geographical region (fig 1).³⁴ In this particular case, Pimienta references the complex naturalization process in the U.S., which, as per the CATO Institute, can take up to twenty-three years to process a single naturalization application.³⁵ After carefully photographing each new Ciudadano Libre, the development of film becomes an allegory of a broken bureaucratic model, sanctioning Pimienta's reclamation of the abstract concept of citizenship via chemical cleansing. The chemical cleansing employed by Pimienta alludes to the medical examinations required as part of the naturalization process. The socio-political climate in the U.S. consistently demands that immigrants be sanitized before welcoming them into their population. "Time and time again, immigrants have been associated with diseases, and as such have been perceived to threaten and contaminate the health of the United States... Today it is undocumented immigrants who are perceived as the carriers of numerous diseases."³⁶ As if bureaucratically chemically disinfecting immigrants somehow would make them worthy of membership into the United States citizen social contract.

Naturalization

As part of this political art action, upon inhabiting Consulado Móvil, the participant is given a Solicitud de Pasaporte Libre, an application form to be filled with the applicant's personal information (figure 12). This form requests the name of the participant, as well as their country of

³⁴ Figure two shows my mother receiving her *pasaporte libre* as well as relinquishing her expired passport to Omar Pimienta's *Consulado Libre*, and becoming a *ciudadana libre*.

³⁵ David J. Bier, "Immigration Wait Times from Quotas Have Doubled: Green Card Backlogs Are Long, Growing, and Inequitable," Cato Institute, June 18, 2019, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/immigration-wait-times-quotas-have-doubled-green-card-backlogs-are-long>.

³⁶ Shams, 44.

birth, and a fingerprint. Lastly, the application has a single space provided for one of four pictures, pictures Pimienta himself takes after the participant files the application; Vargas then embosses a stamp that reads “Welcome to Colonia Libertad • Pasaporte Libre” with a space for the file number of each application. I was personally issued Pasaporte Libre number sixty-one on January 24, 2016, by the Consulado Móvil Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As of February 2017, Omar reports having sixty-five passports. By enacting a speedy bureaucratic process, Pimienta signals once more to the brokenness of the USCIS, and its system, which fails to manage naturalization, which can take over two decades to process.

Consulado Móvil’s Foreign Affairs Ministry can completely process a Ciudadanía Libre request in under ten minutes, questioning the naturalization process and the bureaucratization that renders becoming a citizen of the United States nearly impossible if at all probable. Pimienta fashions a social contract that enables a ciudadano libre to become citizens free of governmental structures that differentiate between individuals based on pigmentocracy or class status.

To return to the words of Aviva Chomsky, she poses that,

it seems right and natural to us that people should be divided by citizenship and documents into different categories with differential rights. We assume that the world is naturally divided into countries and that every human being somehow belongs in one country or another. People are supposed to stay in the country that they were born in unless they can get special permission to enter another... But there is nothing natural about this state of affairs. Countries, sovereignty, citizenship, and laws are all social constructions: abstractions invented by humans.³⁷

By challenging the complexity of the invented abstraction better known as citizenship, Pimienta questions the natural state of affairs and the special permissions granted to specific individuals regarded worthy of U.S. citizenship. By enabling participants to become ciudadanos

³⁷ Chomsky, 27.

libres within the political art action known as Consulado Móvil, Pimienta concientiza every ciudadano libre within his political art action and creates a conciencia critica within each ciudadano libre so that they too can challenge their understanding of the social contracts they hold to any nation projects.

The conceptual passport issued by Consulado Móvil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in itself appears to be like any other passport, a small booklet made of a few pages that denote membership into a geographical demarcation, in this case to Colonia Libertad (figure 13). The passport issued to each citizen of Colonia Libertad is a red booklet of the exact dimensions of the Mexico or United States passports (12.5 cm x 8.75cm or 3 1/2 in x 4 7/8 in). However, whereas the Mexican passport has twenty-nine pages available for possible visa stamps, and the U.S. passport has twenty pages (aside from the informational pages), Pimienta's Pasaporte Libre has only fourteen pages for further visa stamps.

Every iteration of Consulado Libre has its very own visa stamp, each made to commemorate the exhibition that highlights this political art action and the location and date of presentation (figures 14 and 15). For instance, on October 1, 2017, Consulado Móvil was exhibited as part of the *Undocumenta* exhibition that took place from September 2017 – January 2018, as part of the Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time LA/LA: Latin American and Latino Art in L.A. at the Oceanside Museum of Art in San Diego County. The visa for that iteration reads *UnDocumenta*, and below it appears the logo for the Oceanside Museum of art and the logo for PST LA/LA (figure 15).

UnDocumenta utilized satire to critique the blue-chip-driven exhibition *Documenta* that takes place every five years in Kassel-Germany, while also surfacing undocumented concerns. For the exhibition catalog, curator Alessandra Moctezuma explains that the act of symbolically “giving

up” one’s nationality forces us to think of the tenuous state of those who cross borders into the unknown.³⁸ Thus Pimienta’s political art action undocuments the participant by abstracting nationality simultaneously in a symbolic, a real, and a metaphoric way. In the real, Pimienta asks that each Ciudadano Libre relinquish a passport and, therefore, questions citizenship validity. Symbolically this action allows each ciudadano libre to critique the social contract of the U.S. nation project, and metaphorically this temporarily can provoke an undocumenting of the documented.

Escudo Colonial

Similar to other passports, a *Pasaporte Libre* displays citizen information as follows: last name(s), name, country of birth, passport number, the date the passport was issued, and Pimienta’s signature acting as the official *Consul* of the delegation issuing this document (figures 4 and 5). Whereas the seal of the Mexican passport’s cover is the national emblem displaying an eagle devouring a serpent while perched on a cactus, and the U.S. passport carries the great seal, a *Pasaporte Libre* has a circular emblem that reads “Welcome to Colonia Libertad” (figure 16) in gold letters with an abstracted and flattened depiction of Lady Liberty herself after a sketch by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi (figure 17). Bartholdi originally designed the Statue of Liberty as standing on a Mesoamerican pyramid,³⁹ drawing that is prominently displayed on *Colonia Libertad’s* national seal (figure 17). The depiction within *Colonia Libertad’s* seal (figure 18) dates

³⁸ Alessandra Moctezuma, *Undocumenta Exhibition Catalog* (Oceanside Museum, 2018), 18.

³⁹ Pimienta, ‘Consulado Móvil / Mobile Consulate — Omar Pimienta’.

back to *Lady Libertad* (2007), a project by which Pimienta challenged the transterritorialities that artwork occupies in various trade markets.⁴⁰

The emblem of *Colonia Libertad*— a sculpture of the statue of liberty made of brown plaster standing on a Mesoamerican pyramid made of gray plaster that visually reads as cement, measuring 50x 50 x 74cm,⁴¹ similarly migrated between nations with fictitious identities every time she crossed the border. Lady Libertad, a plaster figure, was produced by Omar Pimienta in Colonia Libertad in collaboration with Victor Toscano, a well-known plaster figure manufacturer from the neighborhood (figure 19) as the plaster figurine industry was, for many years, an important source of revenue for Colonia Libertad until copyright laws were enforced at the border diminishing its production. In her multiple identities, Lady Libertad crossed the border as both fine art (figure 20), as it was presented in the exhibition UnDocumenta at the Oceanside Museum of Art, and as *fayuca* (figure 21), as it is available for sale in the shops along the Mexico/United States border crossing point in Tijuana, Baja California. Making the insignia of Ciudadanía Libre (figure 18), as provided by Consulado Móvil's Foreign Affairs Ministry, is also a site of immigrant contestation. As per Hito Steyerel, “even though political art manages to represent so-called local situations from all over the globe and routinely packages injustice and destitution, the conditions of its production and display remain pretty much unexplored.”⁴² Pimienta explores inherent systems of value and trade within this body of work that migrates between a developed art market and a *fayuca* market of an underdeveloped neighboring nation.

⁴⁰ Omar Pimienta, “Lady Libertad V1 — Omar Pimienta,” 2007, <http://omarpimienta.com/lady-v1/>.

⁴¹ Pimienta.

⁴² Hito Steyerel, “Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy - Journal #21 December 2010 - e-Flux,” E-flux - Journal #21, December 2010, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>.

In the words of Irmgard Emmelhainz, “La producción de arte contemporáneo se encuentra cercada por una red de protocolos que dictan las formas de producción del arte que circula en exposiciones, galerías, bienales y ferias.”⁴³ By problematizing, challenging, provoking, and using the art market’s structures, Pimienta aggravates and disputes value and an economically driven migratory pattern that connotes the g-local capitalist agendas behind citizenship granting the creation of undocumented personhood for capitalist gain. The liberal argument is for creating a state that neglects its responsibilities to society and its subjects, establishing a community of people “subjected” within the framework of the law without considering that freedom and economic processes can produce social inequality.⁴⁴

Lacking most agency are the subjects marked as undocumented, utilized by the neoliberal state for economic wealth. In the words of Barrera. “Things are as they are on the border because of the interplay of some very special interests.”⁴⁵ Barrera simultaneously signals to the complicated migratory naturalization concerns and matters pertaining exclusively to the undocumented community. Employers favor such workers because they are more readily exploitable and can be turned over to immigration authorities if that causes trouble.⁴⁶ The naturalization system is machined to perpetuate the production of an undocumented subject, a subject disposable and free of fundamental human rights. A fragile brown body simultaneously generates maximum surplus value and ultimately becomes the imaginary villain responsible for the nation’s faults. A demand

⁴³ Emmelhainz, 120.

⁴⁴ Valencia, 41.

⁴⁵ Barrera, 126.

⁴⁶ Barrera, 124.

is placed on the undocumented brown body to perform undocumentedness bureaucratically, psychologically, and as a spectacle for the nation's citizens.

Digital Engagement

To further problematize the plasticity of bureaucratization processes, Pimienta offers the possibility to engage with Colonia Libertad without the need to partake in Consulado Móvil. One of the strengths of this political art action is the multiplicity of critical engagement opportunities that allow any individual to become a Ciudadano Libre. For instance, in three simple steps, anyone can acquire a Pasaporte Libre online (figure 22). Like Consulado Móvil, the participant is asked to fill out an application, upload their photograph, submit their exchange passport via mail, and thus may receive a Pasaporte Libre. The inclusion of this online component is noted here as becoming a Ciudadano Libre (online) is part of the same political art action; the additional engagement model serves to further complicate Colonia Libertad's geographical possibility. Therefore, Consulado Móvil can exist in countless designations, including digital realities and the participants' homes. By digitally expanding the geographical reach of Consulado Móvil, Colonia Libertad becomes a nation within nations, a nomadic homeland for a population dispersed across the globe that shares the boundless capabilities of a Ciudadanía Libre. Additionally, Pimienta has created a complementary and private digital space (which currently resides on Facebook) where Ciudadanos Libres can learn about Colonia Libertad and keep updated on the destinations of the traveling archive.

The sixty-five object based archival identities of the individuals who are Ciudadanos Libres upon entering Colonia Libertad are exhibited as the Archivo de Ciudadanos Libres that accompanies Consulado Móvil. This artwork (part of the political art action) problematizes record-keeping structures and challenges accessibility to archival records. In Pimienta's own words,

El Archivo Libre—que en este momento cuenta con sesenta y cinco pasaportes, en su gran mayoría mexicanos y estadounidenses, pero entre los cuales también hay argentinos, colombianos, españoles, holandeses y peruanos— no será vendido como pieza de arte a menos que sea adquirido por algún museo en su totalidad... Al final el archivo crece con cada instalación del Consulado Libre.⁴⁷

Archivo Libre, as per Pimienta, is not for sale to any private individual or corporation; if it ever migrates via the art market, it will do so exclusively for institutional archival purposes at a museum. Pimienta places each of the Ciudadanos Libres on display in every iteration of Consulado Móvil and therefore challenges visibility regarding the immigrant community. In the words of Phelan, “Institutions only function is to preserve and honor objects—traditional museums, archives, banks, and to some degree, universities—are intimately involved in the reproduction of the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate formulas of representation.”⁴⁸ If and when the Archivo de Ciudadanos Libres is acquired by an institution, beyond honoring the objects, Pimienta will succeed in making a museum that is complicit with preserving immigrant voices, pushing beyond sterilizing narratives of dispossession toward the other. Whether a museum is capable of being this brave remains to be seen. Archivo Libre is not the first time Pimienta exploits the diverging principles of the art market

⁴⁷ Omar Pimienta, ‘Ensayo: Welcome to Colonia Libertad’, *Código. Arte. Arquitectura. Diseño*, 2010, 2017, s/F <<https://revistacodigo.com/arte/ensayo-welcome-to-colonia-libertad/>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

⁴⁸ Phelan, 165.

—recall Lady Libertad. The secondary market poses intricate and more significant concerns to this political art action. However, private museums would also cause concern as per Pimienta’s intention.

To further problematize acquisition and archival holdings, Pimienta’s political art action is intricately tied with the legality of immigration itself. It directly manages authentic documentation issued legally by various nations; as per Massey, Durand, and Malone, the employer sanctions brought forth by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 directly translated to a creation of a black market for bogus documents.⁴⁹ Therefore Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 1543 prescribes that alteration of a passport may be persecuted by law.⁵⁰ Furthermore, The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, title II, subtitle A, section 217, enhanced the strength of such penalties to accommodate both terrorism and drug trafficking.⁵¹ All of which is in direct conversation to the creation of Pasaportes Libres.

Consulado Móvil’s Pasaportes Libres are not counterfeit; they are not fake; they are tangible proof that Pimienta’s political art action utilizes contemporary aesthetic practices as a shield and a loophole which is further investigated throughout the political art action itself. Pimienta is not issuing forged passports to Colonia Libertad; each pasaporte libre acts as a reminder of the overtly complicated bureaucratic journey that each immigrant must endure in the process of naturalization. Each pasaporte libre denounces the black market trade created by over bureaucratization. Passport forgeries emerge in the black market for those who must wait for decades to naturalize. Pimienta’s

⁴⁹ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Intergration* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 199.

⁵⁰ “1945. 18 U.S.C. 1543 -- Making Or Using A Forged Passport | JM | Department of Justice,” accessed September 7, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/jm/criminal-resource-manual-1945-18-usc-1543-making-or-using-forged-passport>.

⁵¹ “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA),” House of Representatives § (1996), <https://www.congress.gov/104/crpt/hrpt828/CRPT-104hrpt828.pdf>.

political art action interrupts bureaucratically established circulation networks for the various passports that make up the Archivo de Ciudadanos Libres. By repurposing expired passports, Pimienta breathes a second life into the object-based materiality that marks the culmination of naturalization. Pimienta, therefore, found a way to codify and honor as well as preserve the countless immigrant journeys of each ciudadano libre. Archivo de Ciudadanos Libres acts as a living archive that honors and creates a community of individuals born of different nations, who come together to via political art action to denounce the abstraction notion of citizenship as of any single nation project.

About Naturalizing

Whereas my mother's immigration journey has been over two decades in the making, my naturalization path includes being removed from her application to naturalization as I aged out of the process, which granted me a residency along with hers. My second opportunity to naturalize came years later where I was voluntarily removed from this country only to have to submit a third request from my country of origin. Naturalizing is a long journey plagued with multiple rings of fire that each immigrant must learn to cross at their own risk for the promise of a better future. As a first-generation immigrant myself, I know this all too well. As a proud first-generation immigrant of Mexican descent, naturalization was very painful; it felt shameful to renounce portions of my mexicanidad to articulate allegiance to a country that hates the people in my direct community.

Choosing to foreground an autoethnographical/curatorial methodology to explore the queries presented in this analysis is a deliberate choice, a conscious choice inspired by Pimienta's political art action to honor the voices of my community and focus this analysis in knowledge creation that centers the realities of immigrants residing in a nation-project that chooses to utilize

citizenship as a construct to limit our everyday interactions. Working alongside Pimienta and engaging with other *ciudadanos libres* is a reminder of the ever-present reality of perpetual policing experienced by the brown bodies courageous enough to reside north of the Mexico/United States border.

The first time I spoke to my mother about working with Omar Pimienta, we were cooking; I forget what we made. Cooking is how I communicate with my mother. How to perfectly dice a tomato as per the necessity of the dish is commonly juxtaposed to contemporary art knowledge at my mother's house.⁵² First-generation immigrants discussing Mexican art and food is as common in my everyday life as in my exhibition floor.⁵³ As this conversation took place in 2015, I do not recall the context verbatim, but one thing still stands out, my mother's concern that Pimienta and I would provide false hope to other immigrants like herself. As a young curator eager to exhibit this political art action, I quickly explained to her that since this political art action was to take place at a white cube instead of a consulate, no one could make such a mistake.

In the atrium of the Museum of Latin American Art, in the middle of a political art action, three Mexican immigrants set aside contemporary art to discuss the very nature of our daily lives residing north of the Mexico/United States border. While *Consulado Móvil* took place at MOLAA in 2016, an older woman walked through the museum doors requesting Pimienta issue her a passport to visit her dying mother back home. Pimienta paused the political art action to take a minute to explain what he was trying to accomplish to this woman. As Pimienta explained, we had no legal authority to grant her permission to visit her mother; my heart shattered to pieces.

⁵² Although I wrote this paragraph from memory, I recently confirmed this conversation to be accurate.

⁵³ I am a transnational child, yet I migrated to settle in the north as an adult. For my exhibition "On their Backs: Latinx labor in the U.S." Albert Lopez' political art action "Tacos a la microonda" served tacos to the exhibition guests.

I include this narrative as part of the analysis presented here to codify hope methodologically. Although the bureaucratic system in place to naturalize immigrants migrating north to the United States is a decade long process that engenders agony to anyone who comes into its periphery and despair to those who suffer through it, immigrants at the end of the day still hope to be reunited with their loved ones, still hope to be treated with dignity, still hope to receive fundamental human rights from their host nation, and have the audacity to still hope.

The legal contours of contemporary art

Pimienta explores the aesthetics of undocumentedness like many of his contemporaries but with a *sui generis* method. Unlike Pilar Castillo's *Passport* (figure 23), Pimienta's is not a hyperrealistic depiction of a forged document. Distinct from Carlos Almaraz's *Resident Alien's Border Crossing Identification Card* (figure 24), Pimienta surpasses showcasing a historical archive and transcends object-based exhibiting practices by creating political art action. Unlike Hung Liu's *Resident Alien* (figure 25), Pimienta does not depict a monumental portrait of every immigrant but instead features everyday narratives monumentally. Dissimilar to Ai Wei Wei (figure 26) or Tanya Bruguera (figure 27), Pimienta's passport is not the currency turned contemporary art that denounces a nation-project's bureaucratization. However, instead, Pimienta returns to a passport time and time again to unearth the potentiality of exploration as codified in the single paper object that serves to limit the countless lives of immigrants every day. Miao Jiaxin's *Ash* (figure 28), a live performance that took place in New York in 2014, during which the artist shred his passport into a burger to subsequently eat, is but a performance in adjacency to Pimienta's *Consulado Móvil*.⁵⁴ Unlike Pimienta, Jiaxin's performance does not create active

⁵⁴ Miao Jiaxin, "Ash | Miao Jiaxin," 2014, <https://miaojiaxin.com/ash/>.

participants from his audience and therefore is not a political art action. A simple search for the word “passport” on the artsy platform yields 276 results for contemporary artworks currently being sold in the art market online—none of the artworks on sale via artsy challenge contemporary art market practices like Omar Pimienta’s.⁵⁵

Erika Harrsch’s *Borderless-United States of North America* (figure 29) project is yet another political art action in the contemporary art world created by Mexican artists currently residing in the United States. In Harrsch’s version, participants fill out an application to subsequently spin a wheel that may or may not grant them a free passport. In Harrsch’s wheel, there is a one-in-nine chance to gain access to her expanded concept of a nation that conceptually merges Mexico, Canada, and the United States. In Harrsch’s wheel, “Illegal alien,” “non-citizen,” and “you are not eligible” are also options one can gain upon entering to win a passport. Pimienta’s political art action refuses to retraumatize immigrants by further dehumanizing them. Pimienta’s political art action is an inclusive project that makes equal space for everyone who wishes to engage with it.⁵⁶

Conclusion: Necrocapitalism in Political Art Action

Colonia Libertad serves as an analogy, an allegory, a historical symbol, and an accusation. A physical version of a Colonia Libertad (where Pimienta was born) exists today, a fourteen-minute walk away from the San Ysidro Port of Entry of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. As Pimienta recounts,

⁵⁵ “Search Results for ‘passport’ | Artsy,” accessed September 10, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/search?term=passport>.

⁵⁶ Pimienta himself took part of Harrsch’s political art action at Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA) in San Jose, for the exhibition Hope and Madness in 2013.

Crecí en la colonia Libertad —en el margen del país, visto desde el centro de la República, y en el centro de la bisagra de la frontera...— Esta colonia creció separada de todo, delimitada al norte por un par de alambres que significaban el fin de la nación y el comienzo de la otra; al sur, por las vías del ferrocarril y, poco más allá, el río Tijuana; y al este, por una serie de asentamientos más jóvenes que se fueron extendiendo rápidamente.⁵⁷

As an analogy, *Colonia Libertad* marks a wound between two separate nation constructs that collide on this specific geographical location (32° 32' 34.1952" N 117° 1' 13.1412" W), one developed, one underdeveloped. Both nations sharing resources, a border, necropolitical tendencies, and an immigrant community in constant flux to accommodate either nation's capitalist demands. As an allegory, *Colonia Libertad*, which translates to "Freedom Colony," serves to reveal the potential for a different way of existing within a social contract that pledges allegiance to society instead of a nation project in which citizenship produces a disposable community of people. Furthermore, as a historic symbol, it makes the following reference:

La colonia fue fundada por trabajadores sindicalistas, tomada a fuego, repartida entre los trabajadores de forma relativamente democrática; sin embargo, fueron los mexicanos repatriados de la gran de los años treinta los que la poblaron. La deportación de estos de norte a sur y, con el tiempo, la migración de sur a norte con la demanda laboral causada por la Segunda Guerra Mundial fueron dos de los elementos que hicieron de la colonia lo que es ahora: un espacio de tránsito y, a su vez, de delimitación.⁵⁸

As an accusation, *Colonia Libertad* challenges the capitalist-driven necropolitical agenda that places demands upon undocumented immigrants. It denounces the deported Mexican citizens in the 1930s. It conveys that war profiteering rests on the backs of the millions of people that make

⁵⁷ Pimienta, "Ensayo: Welcome to Colonia Libertad."

⁵⁸ Pimienta, 'Ensayo: Welcome to Colonia Libertad.'

up the undocumented community that is relentlessly in transit becoming disposable as part of dual nation project separated by a wounding border.

Pimienta undocuments the social construct of citizenship by challenging naturalization—simultaneously denouncing its conception and authority to other the personhood of millions of immigrants fighting to partake in the nation project that is the United States. “Each country expresses its sovereignty by deciding who is allowed to enter into its territory and who is allowed access to citizenship. So we rarely question the idea that countries should be able to decide who can cross their borders and treat people differently under the law depending on statuses that these same countries assign them.”⁵⁹ By signaling to the everyday realities of undocumented brown bodies, the stories of migrants, the narratives of immigrants, the bureaucratization of naturalization, and the privilege of citizenship allows Pimienta to undocument the legal process by which people become documented.

Pimienta deputizes each Ciudadano Libre with the strength to undocument the socio-political system that legally subjugates immigrants based on the social construct that is nationality, assigning naturalization to keep people away and deportation to exploit their livelihood. Borrowing from W.J.T Mitchell’s “What do pictures want?” delivers the possibility for a new desire to emerge from within the political art action that is a Ciudadanía Libre. Each Ciudadano Libre transcends emancipation as a spectator to become profoundly involved in political art action-driven processes that question belonging to a nation project. “Perhaps the most interesting consequence of seeing images as living things is that the question of their value (understood as vitality) is played out in a social context. We need to ponder that we do not just evaluate images; images introduce new forms of value into the world, contesting our criteria, forcing us to change our minds... They change the

⁵⁹ Chomsky, 27.

way we think and see and dream. They refunction our memories and imaginations, bringing new criteria and new desires into the world.”⁶⁰ Pimienta’s political art action delivers the possibility of transcending the current value placed on citizenship in the contemporary world; what each *ciudadano libre* contests can therefore function as the foundational criteria for a desired world free of the abstract constructions of citizenship.

By scrutinizing bureaucratic naturalization and citizenship as a social construct, *Consulado Móvil* allows each *Ciudadano Libre* to claim a *conciencia histórica* that contests the necropolitical parameters upon immigrant bodies, especially those undocumented from within the *oeuvre* of the political art action. As set forth by Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, Necrocapitalism is defined by the contemporary forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death.⁶¹ Banerjee discusses that a sovereign decision to apply a state of exception invokes a power to decide the value of life.⁶² Therefore, the necropolitical parameters set forth by the United States government bestows legal exceptions onto undocumented bodies so it can freely dispossess them of personhood for capital gain. Banerjee’s examination of Aihwa Ong posits that neoliberalism as an exception produces specific arrangements of sovereignty and citizenship enabled by the ‘infiltration of market logic into politics’ while constructing subjectivities that reflect market citizenship.⁶³ By isolating individuals from citizenship, necropolitics utilizes market logic to dehumanize brown immigrant bodies. In the words of Giorgio

⁶⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 92.

⁶¹ Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, ‘Necrocapitalism,’ *Organization Studies*, 29.12 (2008), 1541–63 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607096386>>, 1541.

⁶² Banerjee, 1544.

⁶³ Banerjee, 1546.

Agamben, “la politización de la nuda vida como tal, constituye el acontecimiento de la modernidad.”⁶⁴ For Agamben la nuda vida is la vida a quien cualquiera puede dar muerte,⁶⁵ in this case undocumented immigrants. The nuda vida exists as a parallel to what Judith Butler called vida precaria, como un intento de aproximación a la cuestión de una ética de la no violencia, basada en la comprensión de cuan fácil es eliminar la vida humana.⁶⁶ Consulado Móvil makes each Ciudadano Libre develop a conciencia histórica; in doing so, it gives every participant of the political art action the necessary instruments to denounce the necrocapitalist implications of undocumentedness. Be it a nuda vida or a vida precaria, undocumentedness marks brown immigrant bodies by market logic and strips them of their rights to personhood. Pimienta’s political art action offers each ciudadano libre with the necessary resources to contest the existence of a nuda vida or a vida precaria.

Becoming a Ciudadano Libre allows each participant to defy the chronological temporality that critically allows for a deep understanding of citizenship as a construct rather than a right bestowed upon an individual by a nation project. The political art action Consulado Móvil generates a dialogue that questions the precarity of undocumentedness as created by the market-driven logic of the sovereignty of the United States. By layering engagement with the political art action’s multiple nodes, Pimienta demands that each participant understand different fragments of the complex totality of immigration, necrocapitalist, necropolitics, the hyper bureaucratization of naturalization, and the precariousness of undocumentedness. What matters most is that this

⁶⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: El Poder Soberano y La Nuda Vida*, (Valencia: Pre-Textos), 11.

⁶⁵ Agamben, 18.

⁶⁶ Judith Butler, *Vida Precaria, El Poder Del Duelo y La Violencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2006), 20.

political art action's provocation becomes the fuel to constantly question the construct of citizenship free of geographical limitations.

In the words of Omar Pimienta,

... ahora entiendo porque siempre entiendo
mucho tiempo después pero entiendo...⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Pimienta, *Album of Fences*, 30.

Figures



Figure 1. Omar Pimienta and Ciudadana Libre Ana Preciado, 2015

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Marcella Vargas

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Artwork conceptualized in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana Preciado) requesting Ciudadanía Libre from Consulado Móvil at Marcas Gallery

Digital Source Omar Pimienta

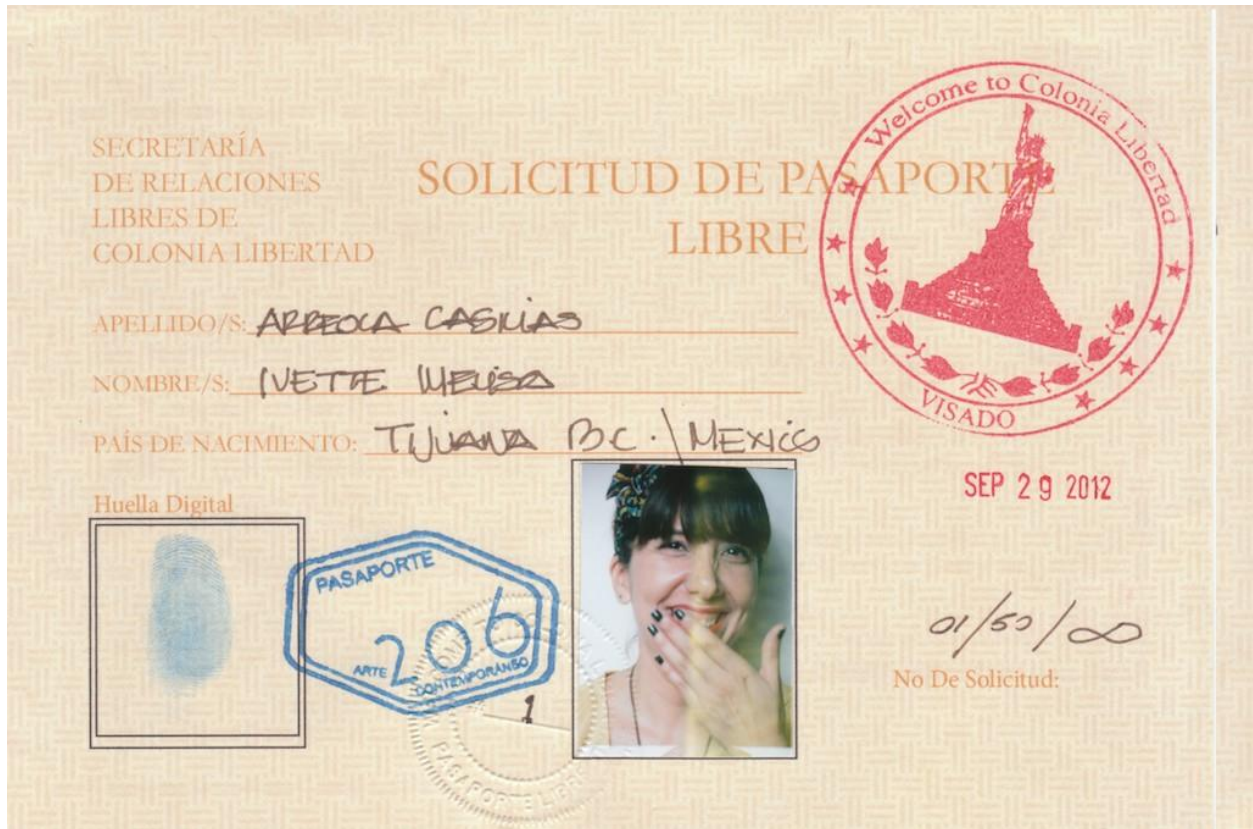


Figure 2. First even Ciudadana Libre, 2012

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Digital Source OmarPimienta.com



Figure 3. Erika Hirugami's expired Mexican passport

Photograph courtesy of self



Figure 4. My Pasaporte Libre

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Erika Hirugami

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil



Figure 5. Ana Preciado's Pasaporte Libre

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Erika Hirugami

Photograph courtesy of Ana Preciado

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil



Figure 6. Consulado Móvil

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Artwork conceptualized in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana Preciado) requesting Ciudadanía Libre from Consulado Móvil at Marcas Gallery. Next to Omar Pimienta his partner Marcela Vargas, next to Ana Preciado her daughter Mayra Martinez.

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 7. Ciudadanos Libres

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Digital Source OmarPimienta.com



Figure 8. Omar Pimienta, Pasaporte Libre, 2012

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive

Political Art Action: Pasaporte Libre

Work created in 2012

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 9. Ana Preciado having her picture taken for her Pasaporte Libre, 2015

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Marcella Vargas

Photograph courtesy of the artist's archive.

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Work created in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana

Preciado) requesting Ciudadanía Libre from Consulado Móvil at Marcas Gallery

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 10. Four Passport Photos

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal

Political Art Action: Pasaporte Libre

Work created in 2012

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 11. Omar Pimienta preparing photographs for Pasaporte Libre, 2015

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Marcella Vargas

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive. | Art Action: Consulado Móvil

Work created in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana Preciado) requesting Ciudadanía Libre from Consulado Móvil at Marcas Gallery

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 12. Pasaporte Libre application

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Marcella Vargas

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive.

Political art action: Consulado Móvil

Work created in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana Preciado)

Digital Source Omar Pimienta



Figure 13. Pasaporte Libre in progress, 2015

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Marcella Vargas

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive.

Political art action: Consulado Móvil

Work created in 2012, image from December 19, 2015 depicting a Ciudadana Libre (Ana Preciado) requesting Ciudadanía Libre from Consulado Móvil at Marcas Gallery

Digital Source Omar Pimienta

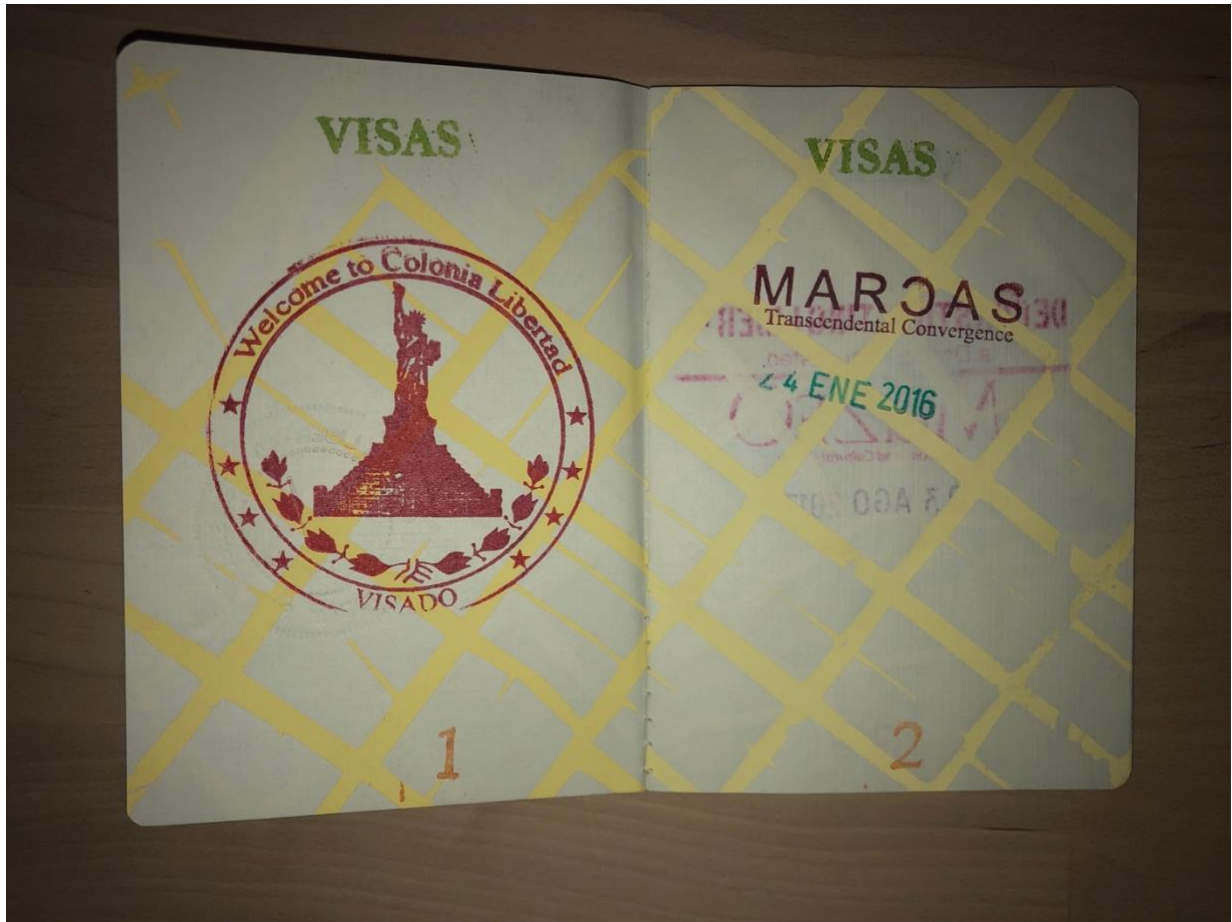


Figure 14. Visas on Hirugami's Pasaporte Libre

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Erika Hirugami

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive

Political Art Action: Consulado Móvil

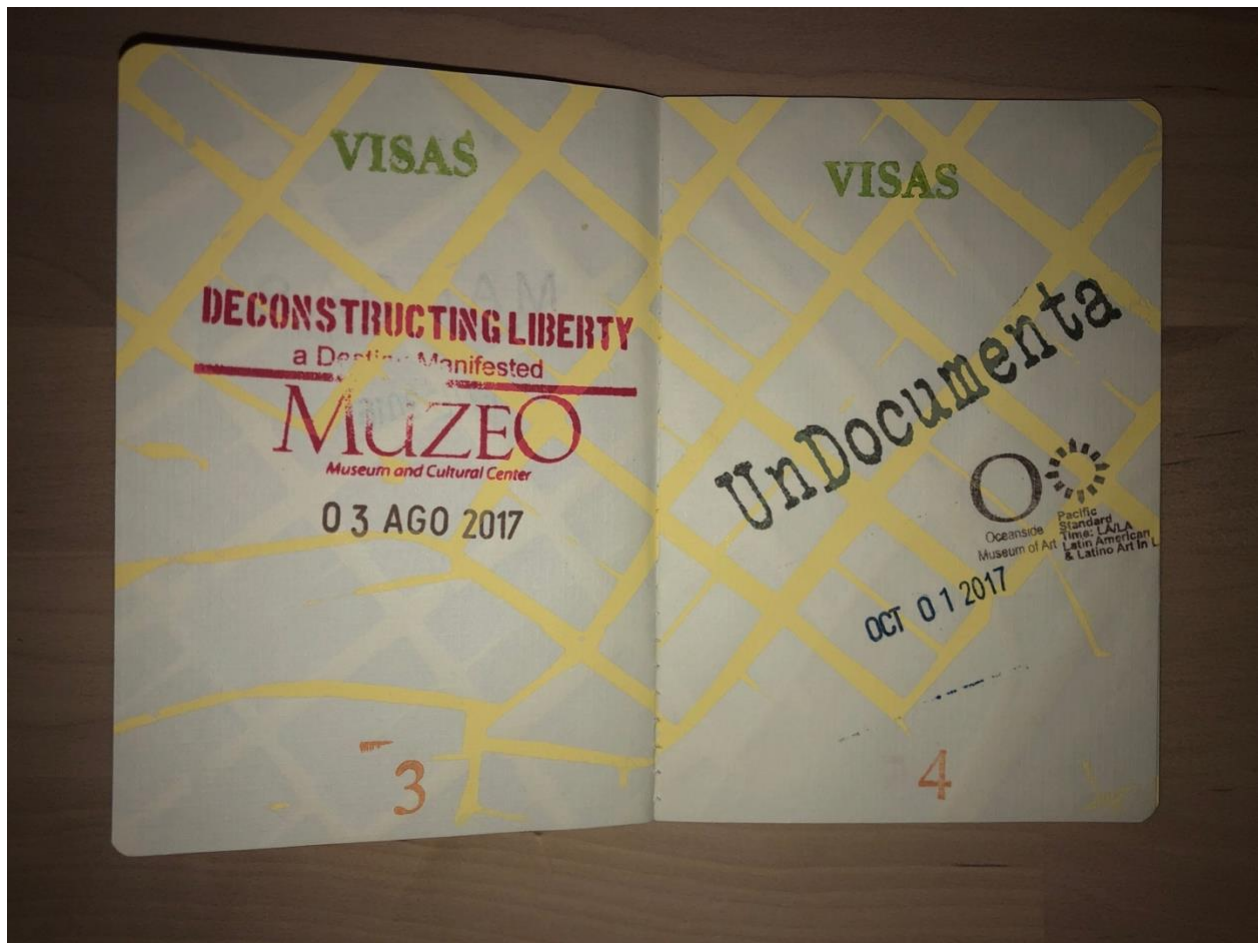


Figure 15. Visas on Hirugami's *Pasaporte Libre* (cont)

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Erika Hirugami

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive

Political Art Action: *Consulado Móvil*



Figure 16. Erika Hirugami's passports

Photograph courtesy of self



Figure 17. Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's Sketch

Artwork by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi

Digital Source OmarPimienta.com



Figure 18. Colonia Libertad seal on sticker

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph by Erika Hirugami

Photograph courtesy of Erika Hirugami's personal archive



Figure 19. Lady Libertad

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive

Digital Source OmarPimienta.com



Figure 20. Lady Libertad at Oceanside Museum of Art

Exhibition installation photograph

Foreground Lady Liberty by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy Oceanside Museum of Art

Digital Source https://oma-online.org/past_exhibitions2017/undocumenta/




Figure 21. Lady Libertad as fayuca

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Photograph courtesy of the artist's personal archive


Digital Source OmarPimienta.com

ENGLISH ESPAÑOL DANKS FRANÇAIS



CIUDADANÍA LIBRE

Bienvenido a la Colonia Libertad
Welcomed to Colonia Libertad



The online consulate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colonia Libertad is now able to grant you *Ciudadanía Libre*.

Four simple steps:

1. Fill out your *Ciudadanía Libre* application.
2. Load the image of your choice, preferably a picture of you, but any images that enables your identification will be accepted.
3. Send us your real passport (expired or not). Your passport will become part of the archive of *Ciudadanía Libre*. Your passport will be stamped and a picture of it will be archived and displayed on this page. The real passport will be framed and will travel with the archival material to the different exhibitions held of *Ciudadanía Libre* (by no reason your passport will be sold or exchanged, it will be part of the infinite archive).
4. You will receive your *Pasaporte Libre* by mail. The acquisition of *Pasaporte Libre* certifies you as a citizen of Colonia Libertad and guarantees you free movement along the earth's land, sea, or aerospace as you require.

Pasaporte Libre is infinite.

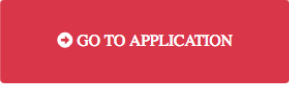


Figure 22. Ciudadanía Libre online

Artwork by Omar Pimienta

Political Art Action: Ciudadanía Libre

Digital Source OmarPimienta.com

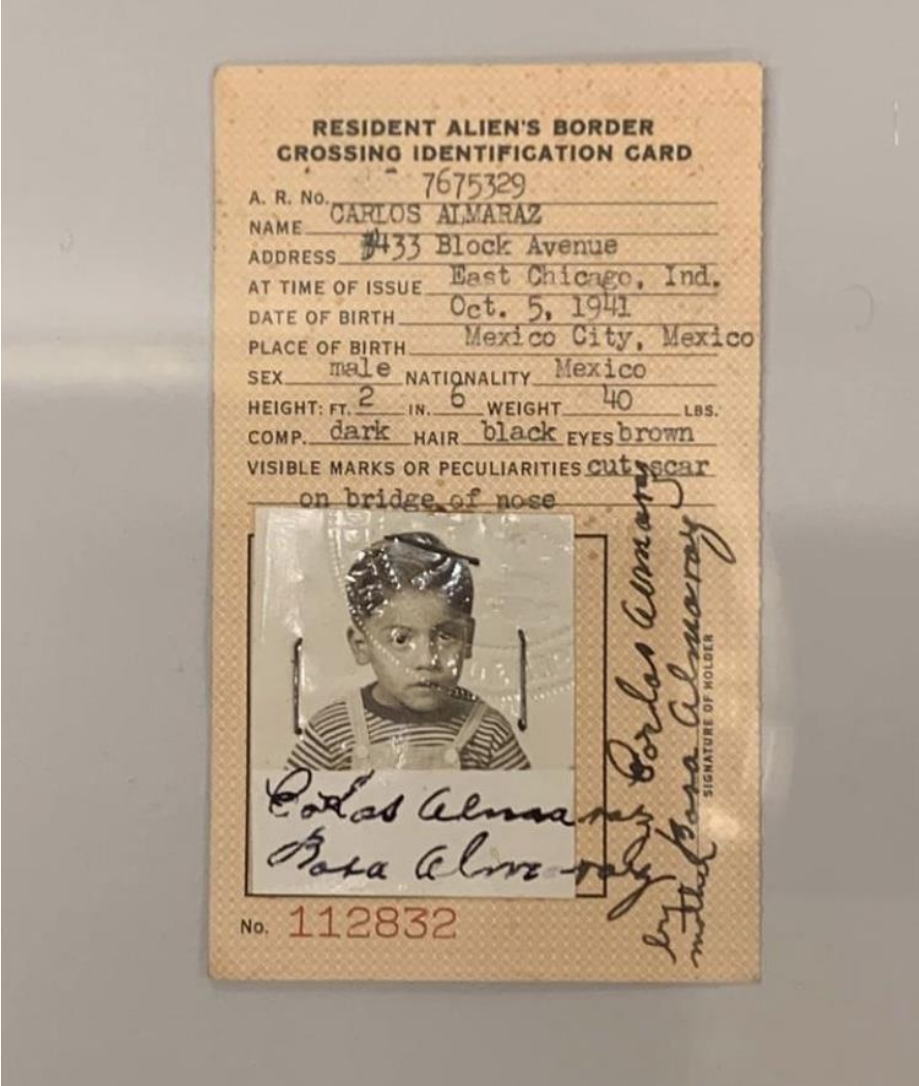


Figure 24. Resident Alien's Border Crossing Identification Card

Artwork by Carlos Almaraz

Still from video "Carlos Almaraz: Evolution of Form: An Exhibition Walkthrough at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes" minute 21.22.

Digital Source Plaza de Cultura y Artes <https://lapca.org/exhibition/carlos-almaraz-evolution-of-form/>

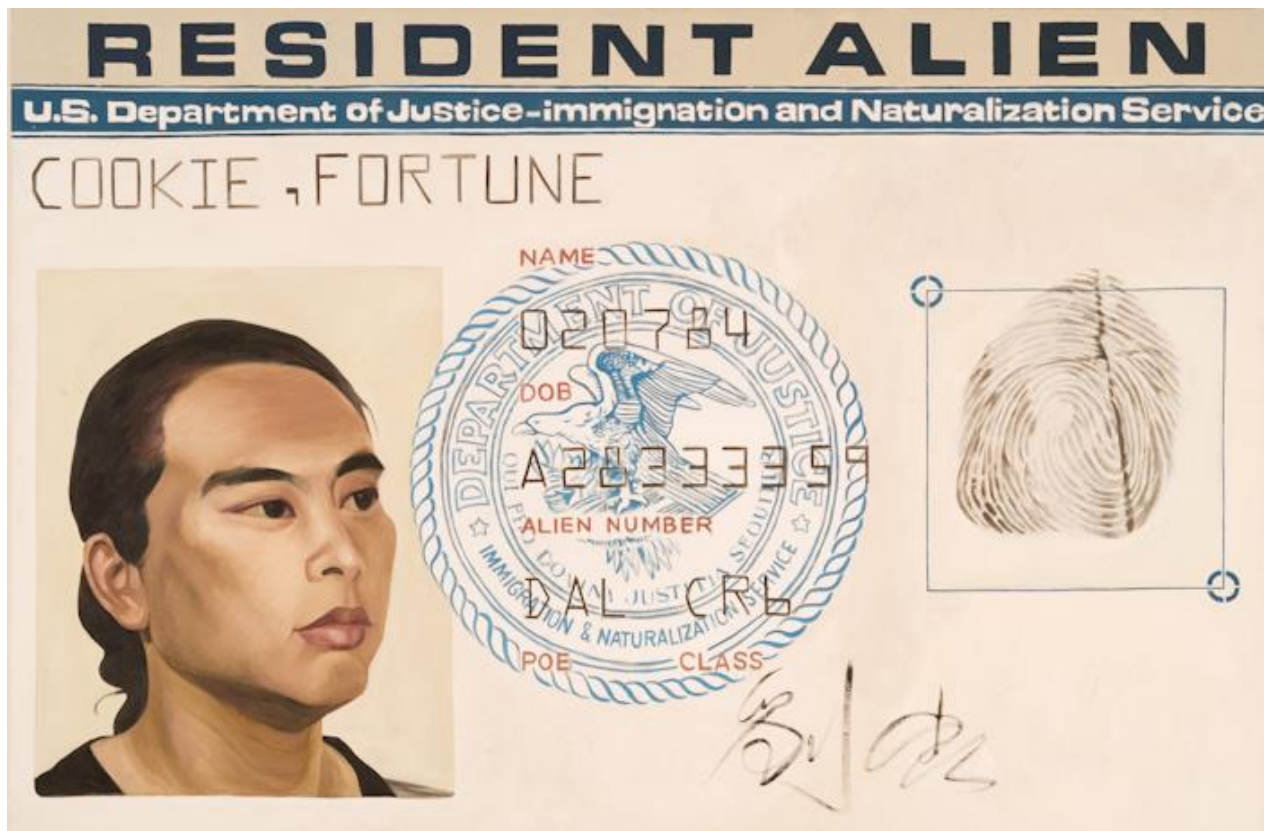


Figure 25. Resident Alien

Artwork by Hung Liu

Photograph by San Jose Museum of Art

Digital Source San Jose Museum of Art <https://sjmusart.org/embark/objects-1/info/1764>



Figure 26. Ai Wei Wei's Passport

Photograph by Ai Wei Wei

Digital Source NY Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/world/asia/ai-weiwei-chinese-artist-and-provocateur-is-given-back-his-passport.html>



Figure 27. Tania Bruguera's Passport

Digital Source Artnet News <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cuban-authorities-return-tania-brugueras-passport-316338>



Figure 28. Ash

Performance by Miao Jiaxin

Photograph courtesy of the artist

Work created in 2014

Digital Source Miao Jiaxin

<https://miaojiaxin.com/ash/>



Figure 29. United States of North America Passport

Action by Erika Harrsch

Photograph courtesy of the artist

Work created in 2009

Digital Source Erika Harrsch

<https://www.erikaharrsch.com/passport.html>

Photograph depicts Omar Pimienta applying for Erika Harrsch's United States of North America (USONA) Passport at the group exhibition Hope and Madness in MACLA (Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana) in San Jose, CA in 2013.

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