

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

LA Artists Take Us from the Colonial Past to the Interstellar Future

Winners of the City of Los Angeles Individual Artist Fellowship highlight contested histories and utopian pasts in their group show.

Abe Ahn June 18, 2018



Close-view of Michelle Dizon, "The Archive's Fold" (2018), multi-image slide, digital video, and sound installation (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

LOS ANGELES — In 1926, oil heiress Aline Barnsdall donated several acres of her Olive Hill estate to the city of Los Angeles. The hilltop estate of olive and citrus trees overlooking Hollywood Boulevard would have been eagerly received by the municipal government had Barnsdall been a typical member of the city's elite. A traitor to her class, she sympathized with organized labor, befriended the anarchist activist

Emma Goldman, and advocated for radical causes that gave the city's political leaders pause. Today, the former estate is a distant echo of Barnsdall's original intent to build a utopian artist colony. Barnsdall Art Park contains the city's Municipal Art Gallery and the Frank Lloyd Wright–designed Hollyhock House, but gone are the billboard signs once used to advertise the progressive political causes championed by its namesake.

Several works in the *City of Los Angeles (COLA) Individual Artist Fellowships Exhibition* at the Municipal Art Gallery highlight contested histories and utopian pasts. Since 1997, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs has yearly awarded grants to promising "mid-career" artists in Los

Angeles. This year, the grants were worth \$10,000 each and gave recipients in the visual, performance, and literary arts a chance to create new work to be exhibited to the public.

The Barnsdall Art Park itself is the subject of “Aline’s Orchard,” an installation by artist [Cassils](#) that surrounds visitors with sounds and textures evoking olive groves and clandestine interactions. The park’s history as a queer cruising site is recalled not by sight, but by noises and smells made all the more vivid by darkness.



Installation view of Sandra de la Loza, “Pacific Electric Railway Strike of 1903” (2018), remade turn-of-the-century float, redacted poem silkscreen prints, reproduced photos and newspaper articles on foam core

Sandra de la Loza uses archival images and historical recreations to juxtapose regional histories. Overshadowed by the legacy of railroad magnate Henry Huntington, whose Pacific Electric Railway once cut through much of Southern California, are the immigrant workers who laid down its tracks and organized for equal pay in a 1903 labor strike. A portrait of Santa Teresa Urrea, a Mexican folk healer and revolutionary insurgent, hangs nearby a picture of Huntington as a specter of nearly forgotten labor history. Reproductions of newspapers from 1903 are redacted

in black, leaving behind key phrases and words that paint an incomplete picture of the 700 Mexican workers who led the strike.



Installation view of Julie Shafer, “Parting of the Ways” (2018) rubbings (graphite, wax, paper) and photographs (inkjet print) from a location on the Oregon Trail (mid-to-late 1800s)

Ghostly traces of history also appear in [Julie Shafer](#)’s series of graphite rubbings and photographs of the Oregon Trail. “Parting of the Ways” documents a site in Wyoming in which migrants traveling west had to choose between two paths. The fork is memorialized by carvings left behind by travelers from the 19th century whose ultimate fates are unknown, giving only a name, date, and sometimes a point of origin.

Black-and-white images of the site resemble survey photographs from the period that might have stoked speculation of resources and westward migration. While traces of these migrations seem subtle or hidden, they are portents of the rapacious extraction of resources and loss of life that eventually followed.



Guillermo Bert, "Tumble Dreams" (2018), digital projections on tumbleweeds

The oral histories of contemporary migrants who cross North American borders are the focus of Guillermo Bert's "Tumble Dreams," where the mythology of the West is complicated by forced and voluntary migrations from the south. The faces of migrants from Latin America are projected onto tumbleweeds, a symbol of the American West, as they recall harrowing accounts of eluding border patrols, overcoming

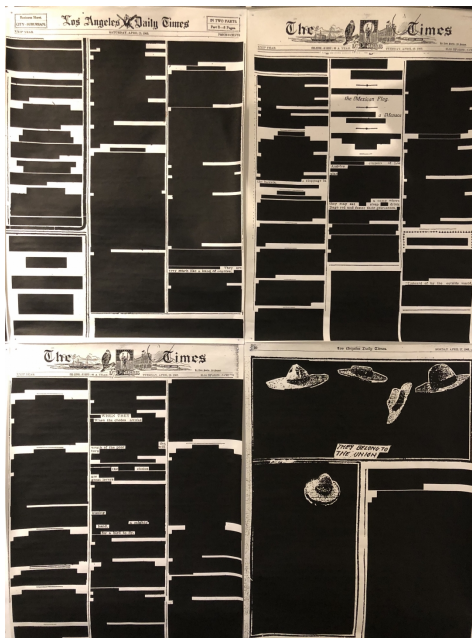
hunger, and being separated from family members. In "The Archive's Fold," by Michelle Dizon, transnational migrations and legacies of colonization are narrated by fictional correspondences across time. Photographs of the Philippines from colonial archives and the artist's family albums attempt to piece together a personal narrative in the context of larger histories. Letters between the artist's great-great-grandmother and the artist's imagined descendant from a dystopian 2123 project a story of diaspora that stretches from the colonial past to an interstellar future.

While COLA 2018 does not have an explicit theme, labor and immigration histories come to the fore as a lens through which to view the present and future. These artworks may refer to economic or political aspirations never fully realized, but they lay claims to ancestries and narratives that may present a way forward.



Close-up view of Julie Shafer, "Parting of the Ways" (2018)

COLA 2018 continues at Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery (4800 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, 90027) through June 24.



Close-up view of Sandra de la Loza,
 "Pacific Electric Railway Strike of 1903"
 (2018)



Installation view of Michelle Dizon, "The
 Archive's Fold" (2018)

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC