

Hacia la Vida | Toward Life

Hoesy Corona & Cog-nate Collective



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Introduction

Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) presents *Hacia la Vida | Toward Life* featuring the work of Baltimore-based interdisciplinary artist Hoesy Corona and the San Diego-based Cog•nate Collective (Amy Y. Sanchez Arteaga and Misael Diaz). Together, the artists' work honors the position of the immigrant and serves as a reminder that the act of migration is deeply optimistic and full of hope.

Cog•nate Collective's practice is centered around developing research projects, public interventions, and experimental pedagogical programs in collaboration with communities across the US/Mexico border region in a communal effort to resist systems of oppression. The exhibition takes its title from their featured installation of a custom series of 7-day prayer candles and an accompanying audio broadcast – both of which quote Mexican singer Chavela Vargas' ballad of the same name.

Hoesy Corona is similarly focused on validating and centering immigrant experiences through installation, mixed media work, and performances that invent narratives around bodies moving across the land. In this exhibition, Corona presents new iterations from three ongoing series of work, Climate Ponchos, Mother Death Life Mamas, and Terrestrial Caravan, in which he summons the looming climate crisis to emphasize that anyone on this Earth could experience the uprooting and disruption of emigration.

Corona and Cog•nate Collective invite audiences to look past the artificiality of borders; and instead, to find and celebrate common humanity. Cog•nate Collective's use of quotidian objects as the vehicles for language-based political advocacy parallels Corona's claiming of space through bold and vibrant aesthetics, which draw upon his own childhood memories of Mexico. Together, the works in *Hacia la Vida | Toward Life* hold up a mirror to our preconceived notions of immigration and present a space to empathize with acts of journeying, join the pursuit of hope, remember the interconnectedness of community, and find joy as a method of resistance.

Hacia la Vida | Toward Life is co-curated by Tephra ICA curatorial staff Jaynelle Hazard and Hannah Barco. The exhibition is supported in part by Leidos with special programming presented in partnership with the Mexican Cultural Institute and Reston Community Center.

“No pregunten quien soy
porque no se los digo,
sólo se que donde voy
el amor va conmigo.

Y a puro valor
he cambiado mi suerte
hoy voy hacia la vida
antes iba hacia a la muerte”

“Don't ask who I am
because I won't tell you,
I only know that where I go
love goes with me.

And by sheer courage
I have changed my luck
today I'm going towards life
before I was going towards death”.

Chavela Vargas, excerpt from *Hacia la Vida*



Guest Essay by Almudena Caso

Love, courage, and life. These are the qualities that the Costa Rican and Mexican singer Chavela Vargas brings together in her song *Hacia la Vida*, and which are also present in this exhibition of the same name. This exhibition is a celebration of personal and collective self-improvement, a commitment to move forward in the creation of a better future for all, with space for difference and a place for encounter. In particular, a better future for migrants and for our planet.

However, approaching immigration brings us face-to-face with a reality: walking towards life can be risky. Human beings have always relocated around the planet moved by necessity, will, desire, love, adventure, and in the worst cases, without having chosen to do so. Because of our shared humanity, the motivations are common regardless of origin or destination. However, the experience is not the same for everyone as we cannot cross the lines marked in maps and laws with the same ease.

In my personal experience, as a Spanish woman, I have had shorter or longer stays in several countries. I would be lying if I said that I have ever been stopped at a border. They have never questioned my presence, my provenance, nor my intention. I can visit other countries and dwell among bodies, that in cruel contradiction are forbidden coming to visit my own. Or only if they manage to overcome something similar to the 12 labors of Hercules at an administrative-economic level (issued by the state). Tests that, I can assure you, I would never pass.

Not having the same privilege does not prevent millions of people from wanting to set out on the road to a better life, carrying hope, courage and a few belongings in their suitcases. These migrant bodies are sometimes invisible, silent and always vulnerable. Bodies that run the risk of being dehumanized in the face of punitive surveillance, that does not understand that “no person is illegal” and that we all have the right to change our fate. These invisible bodies are made present through the socially engaged art practices developed by Cog•nate Collective and Hoesy Corona.





Inhabiting the border is part of Cog•nate Collective's life experience and family history. Descendants of Mexican migrants in the United States and based in Southern California, the theme of immigration is a constant in their work.

As a starting point, Cog•nate Collective develops their work in the space of the market, "el tianguis." Spaces with a strong identity in Latin America, where shopping, encounters, and enjoyment take place. From this paradigmatic space, Cog•nate Collective takes the raw material of the market for their artworks with a double intention. On the one hand, to revisit their family origins and life experiences, and then mix them with their political outlook. On the other hand, to vindicate joy and play as tools for transformation, inviting the audience to take an active part in their artwork.

Such is the case of the installation *Protest Balloon (American Citizen/Ciudadanx Americanx)*, composed of silver mylar balloons with yellow lettering on which read "Ciudadanx Americanx" or "American Citizen" in both Spanish and English. The audience can actively participate in the installation by taking a balloon with them. This gesture, which transports us to childhood festivities, fairs and markets, here becomes a political act.

The balloon announces that the person holding it is a citizen beyond the boundaries of the United States as "America." This definition of America makes reference beyond the United States, to the continent that hosts it, which has 34 other countries. De facto, all the inhabitants of these countries are Americans. In this double sense, Cog•nate Collective claims that American citizens are all people from the continent, questioning, therefore, not only the nomenclature, but also the current immigration perspectives and laws. Finally, it is a border story. Cog•nate Collective recounts rehearsing the phrase "American Citizen" in the best English possible with family members, and friends, as many border dwellers did during their upbringing, in order to be able to cross the border more efficiently. When they went to cross the border, the Customs Agents at the Port of Entry would stop them and ask them where they were from to assess whether to let them pass from Mexico into the United States. Saying that phrase well could save them from paperwork, waiting and more questions, regardless of whether they had their papers in order.

In Hoesy Corona's work, the experience of migrant invisibility is intertwined with the climate crisis. The artist, who emigrated from Mexico as a child, takes his own experience as a Latinx Queer person as a starting point.

In his work, in which nature is protagonist, silent bodies are materialized, full of beauty, but whose presence is uncomfortable. In his series *Mother Death Life Mama*, anthropomorphic, wearable sculptural works bring the audience closer to the experience of the cycle of life and death. Dressed in bright colors and with long manes adorned with flowers, their eyes are covered by a ribbon, a gesture that does not allow us to discover their identities, and that puts us in touch with an unsettling sensation.

The works come to life when they are used in Corona's performances. At this moment, they represent majestic women actively inhabiting the space and, by their mere presence, question the audience, who can actively participate in their walk by following and interacting with them. In this space between life and death, Corona claims a colorful aesthetic and connection to Earth, both common in many parts of Latin America. A primal beauty for the transition to the next. Nature as the place where everything begins and ends, particularly in this critical ecological moment.

In *Hacia La Vida | Toward Life*, Cog•nate Collective and Hoesy Corona ask audiences to position themselves before the territorial tensions of the present. However, they do so from a frank point of view that has chosen to vindicate color, joy, and play as forms of resistance. They invite us to approach conflict, migrant and climatic, from a proactive perspective, which promotes a renewed look from which to imagine other possible futures together. To take courage and love as indispensable travel companions in our journey towards life.



Biography | Cog•nate Collective

Cog•nate Collective develops research projects, public interventions, and experimental pedagogical programs in collaboration with communities across the US/Mexico border region.

Since being founded in 2010, their work has interrogated the evolution of the border as it is simultaneously erased by neoliberal economic policies and bolstered through increased militarization –tracing the fallout of this incongruence for migrant communities on either side of the border.

As a result, their inter-disciplinary projects often address issues of citizenship, migration, informal economies, and popular cultural, arguing for understanding the border not as a bifurcating line, but as a region that expands and contracts with the movement of people and objects.

They are currently based in San Diego, CA and work between Tijuana, MX and Los Angeles, CA.



Installation views at ICA San Diego featuring Cognate Collective, *En todas partes y en ninguna a la vez...* [Everywhere and nowhere at once], 2021-2022



THE
WOMEN
MUST HAVE
ROSES
TOO

LUGAR
DE CADA DIA.
NO SOMOS MURO.
PUENTE SOMOS.

WARRIORS,
MINDS AND HEARTS,
OF BATTLE AND
GUT FOR THE BATTLE
OF BATTLE
NO BATTLE

SEEKING
THAT
BRED PI
THE W
IN GARCIA
ROLES
DANCE
REFL
DEATH



CIUDADANOS
AMERICANOS

AMERICAN
CITIZENS

AMERICAN
CITIZENS



Cog-nate Collective, *Protest Balloons (American Citizen/Ciudadano Americano)*, 2018/2023

Biography | Hoesy Corona

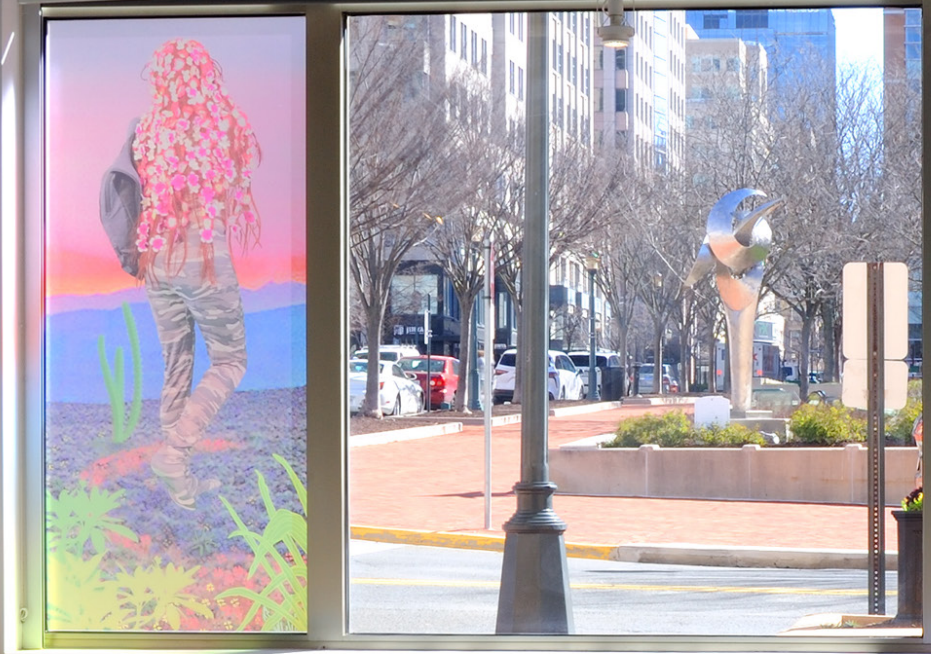
Hoesy Corona (based in the U.S.) is a Queer Latinx artist creating uncategorized and multidisciplinary art spanning installation, performance, and sculpture. His latest installation *Terrestrial Caravan* (2022) at the Academy Art Museum in Easton, MD is on view through Aug 2023. He is a current Winston Tabb Special Collections Research Center Public Humanities Fellow 2022-2023 at the Johns Hopkins University's Sheridan Libraries'.

Hoesy has exhibited widely in galleries, museums, and public spaces in the United States and internationally including recent solo exhibitions *All Roads Lead to Roam* (2023) at Eric Dean Gallery at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN; *Sunset Moonlight* (2021) at The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, MD; and *Alien Nation* (2017), at The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden presented by Transformer in Washington, DC. Hoesy is a former Taf Fellow 2019-2020 in Tulsa, OK and a Halcyon Arts Lab Fellow 2017-2018 in Washington, DC. He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards including The Nicholson Project artist residency, The Mellon Foundation's MAP Fund Grant, and the Andy Warhol Foundation's Grit Fund Grant. His work has been reviewed by The Washington Post, Bmore Art Magazine, and The American Scholar among others. In 2022 he was named the inaugural Restoring Hope, Restoring Trust Artist in Residence 2023 at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN. He is a current resident artist at The Creative Alliance in Baltimore, MD.











Exhibition Checklist and Descriptions

Cog•nate Collective

Semanario Para Bordar [Days of the Week Embroidery Set], 2021

Ink on cotton

22 x 22 inches each

Domingo – “Tierra para todos...” (from Ricardo Flores Magon, *Hacia la Vida*)

Lunes – “The worker must have bread...” (from Rose Schneiderman 1912 textile worker strike)

Martes – “Uprising...” (from Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*)

Miercoles – “Luchar es el pan y la sal...” (from Comunicado EZLN, *No Somos Muro, Puente Somos*)

Jueves – “Seeking a now...” (from Audre Lorde, *A Litany for Survival*)

Viernes – “For a colonized people...” (from Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*)

Sábado – “Sin pan no habrá paz” (from South American protest chant)

Amy Y. Sanchez Arteaga’s maternal great-grandfather, Ricardo Medina, was a traveling merchant who primarily sold textiles along the Western coast of Mexico before migrating to Baja California in the 1950s. He continued to sell textiles and other home goods, and in his lifetime traced thousands of “telas para bordar” or “cloth for embroidery” at a tracing table he built and brought North with him.

These embroidery squares, which are now often silk-screened and mass-produced, can still be commonly found in street markets and swap meets along the border. They usually feature traditional, idealized still-lives, religious iconography, and decorative imagery that the embroiderer can customize to suit their home décor and personal vision of the world. Sets of 7 squares are sold as “semanarios” one for each day of the week (semana means week in Spanish).

Cog•nate Collective’s semanario blends found traditional images and patterns with political citations and texts, merging conceptual ancestors and forms that have been important to the formation of their artistic praxis. Each square was hand traced on fabric purchased at the National City Swap Meet, using Ricardo Medina’s tracing table.

En todas partes y en ninguna a la vez... (El Cielo del Sobreruedas Pancho Villa) [Everywhere and nowhere at once (The sky of the Sobreruedas Pancho Villa)], 2021

Part 1 of two-channel video installation

15-minute video loop

En todas partes y en ninguna a la vez... (El Cielo del Tianguis Lagunilla) [Everywhere and nowhere at once (The sky of the Tianguis Lagunilla)], 2022

Part 2 of two-channel video installation

15-minute video loop

This two-part video installation originated as a visual exploration of the sky above the Sobreruedas Pancho Villa in Tijuana, where the artists recorded a walk through the marketplace in spring of 2021. The title of the work is borrowed from a popular saying attributed to Francisco “Pancho” Villa, the Mexican Revolutionary figure, who gives the Tijuana neighborhood, and by extension, the marketplace its name.

The artists undertook the same gesture at the Tianguis de la Lagunilla in Mexico City, one of the oldest and longest running marketplaces in the Americas, which has roots in the Great Mercado de Tlatelolco, a hub of exchange of the Mexica empire.

The artists visually trace the etymological relationship between the word, “tianguis” which refers to public marketplaces and comes from the Nahuatl word, “tianquiztli” and is also the name that the Mexica give to the what is also known as the Pleiades constellation. The work seeks to triangulate the terrestrial and embodied experience of movement through the marketplace with the poetics of language originating in the sphere of the celestial.

Cog•nate Collective has developed projects and community-based pedagogical platforms in swap meets, street markets, and tianguis cited in the borderlands between the Californias since 2010.

Protest Balloons (American Citizen/Cuidadanx Americanx), 2018/2023

Printed mylar balloons, ribbon, helium, and pvc balloon corral

Dimensions variable

Protest Balloons, originated as a workshop that was part of MAP (Mobile Agora Project) – a series of community-based projects and pedagogical platforms facilitated by Cog•nate Collective within public marketplaces between the Californias, which invited participants to paint political exigencies on balloons as if they were picket signs. For this in-gallery version of the project, the artists have created balloons printed with a design inspired by two experiences relating to migration and border-crossing.

In 2018, Resilience OC, a youth justice organization based in Orange County, California, convened a gathering in a public park in Downtown Santa Ana for local youth and their families to receive information and support one another through the uncertainty caused by federal immigration policy changes threatening to eliminate the DACA program – which offered protection for over 600,000 undocumented youths. Adult counter-protestors from surrounding cities and counties arrived and confronted the group, of mostly youth, shouting xenophobic slurs and phrases such as, “America is for American Citizens.”

Such statements ignored the fact that America is a continent, and that citizenship is a tenuous construct that has been applied with great inconsistency by the state in the history of the Americas. Any person residing anywhere in the Americas could be considered an American Citizen.

This brought to mind the artists’ experience of crossing the border as children in the 90s. In particular, the practice of rehearsing the phrase, “American Citizen” with family members to respond in English to questions that would be posed by Customs Agents at the Port of Entry, to expedite crossing from Mexico into the United States. Such acts of rehearsal became a foundational counter-articulation, positing an alternative framework for citizenship.

The series of balloons presented as part of the exhibition are screen-printed with the phrase in either English or Spanish, with a map of the American continent on the inverse side. The public is invited to take a balloon with them, flying it to enunciate this political position in relation to a continental understanding of America.

Hacia a Vida (Toward Life), 2023

Sound installation

18-minute audio loop

The sound installation, *Hacia la Vida*, includes very low frequency radio patterns (field recordings of naturally occurring radio waves caused by solar flares in the earth's ionosphere, the liminal border-zone between earth and space); excerpts of Magonista texts including Ricardo Flores Magon's *Hacia la Vida* – originally published in the Los Angeles newspaper *Revolución* in 1907, later republished in *Regeneración* in 1910, and read by Pepe Rojo from the *Comite Magonista Tierra y Libertad*; field recordings of migrant rallies in Baja California; music; and readings of excerpts from migrant testimonies collected in shelters along the U.S./ Mexico border.

Hacia a Vida (Toward Life), 2023

Silkscreened 7-day paraffin candles

Dimensions variable

The featured candle design and prayer-poem are inspired by the artists' conception of migration as a life-affirming act of resistance against oppressive necro-political States. The candles are white – a color associated with healing and protection, which is used to purify and protect in Mexican *curanderismo/ brujeria* (healerism/withcraft) – with orange text – a color associated with creativity, spiritual awakening, and justice. The work, and the exhibition, takes its title from Mexican singer Chavela Vargas' ballad of the same name.

Votive candles, or *Veladoras*, typically picture Catholic saints as well as syncretic iconography incorporating pre-colonial American and African spiritual traditions, and are associated with prayers and rituals that the candle can be used to activate.

Normally intended to be burned over a period of 7 days, the candles are used to confront odds that seem insurmountable, to ask for strength, and derive power during situations that require hope, faith, but also endurance and action.

Hoesy Corona

Climate Ponchos, 2019

Duralar, vinyl, and plastic rope

39 x 58 inches and 40 x 56 inches

Hoesy Corona's *Climate Ponchos* are an extension of his *Climate Immigrants* performance series – a multimedia installation that considers the impending plight of climate-induced global migration and its impact on people of color. The wearable sculptures are adorned with imagery that depicts the archetype of the "traveler". The subjects are featured in unilateral transition while wearing backpacks and hats, carrying suitcases, and holding children.

Climate Ponchos have been featured at The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Siren Arts; Transformer DC; The Corcoran Gallery of Art; The Reach at The Kennedy Center; Oklahoma Contemporary; Walters Art Museum; and Friends Artspace among others.

Mother Death Life Mama (4 on view), 2020

Mixed media wearable performance sculptures

Dimensions variable

Life, death, fear, the unknown, mother nature, mother.

Mother Death Life Mama is an ongoing performance and sculptural series that considers human mortality, fear of the unknown, and our fraught relationship with mother nature. In the *Mother Death Life Mama* performances, visitors are confronted with the nature archetype, summoning the looming climate crisis to emphasize that anyone on this Earth could experience the uprooting and disruption of emigration.

Mother Scapegoat, 2020

Mixed media wearable performance sculptures

Dimensions variable

Blame, shame, scapegoating, personal bias.

Mother Scapegoat is a meditative, poetic, and sculptural exploration of indoctrination into societal othering as a form of devoted practice. In the work, the deity is the Scapegoat and acts as a figurative representation of the blame and shame that impacts queer individuals. In the Scapegoat series, the deity is shown relaxed in a safe environment that re-envision a triumphant ending for the social castaways.

Terrestrial Caravan (5 on view), 2022

Digital collage printed on clear vinyl

78 x 34.5 inches each

Hoesy Corona's Terrestrial Caravan series incorporates the archetype of the traveler, who is seen holding suitcases and voyaging through a wide array of landscapes. The lone figures are seen crossing both natural and man-made borders against impending waterways, cliffs, edges, and walls that allude to the possibility of an unspecified threat. Corona tackles the reality of human involvement with climate change while celebrating the lushness and vibrancy of flora, bodies of water, geographic forms, and bringing attention to the power of nature.

Passing Through, 2023

Jacquard weaving with hand embroidery

80 x 60 inches

Passing Through is part of the series Climate Immigrants – an ongoing performance that expands upon issues of immigration by implicating everyone and not just a select group, addressing one of the most pressing topics of our time: climate-triggered immigration in relation to US-centric xenophobia.

All artworks courtesy of the artist.

Acknowledgements

Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) is committed to promoting innovative contemporary art and thinking. Leading with curiosity and care, we are a catalyst, generator, and advocate for visual and interdisciplinary arts.

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Front cover: Hoesy Corona, *Climate Immigrant*, 2019. The Reach at The Kennedy Center, Washington, DC



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