

# Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

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## **The crossing**

There is a pathway traveled by migrants that cuts away from the Mexican border as it slithers north through the Arizona desert up to Interstate 8. Migrants know this highway as la Ocho, the road that takes them to a better life, but the trail that leads to that highway is ruthless and unforgiving. Its sand, underpinned by sighs and shattered dreams, begins in Sonora, somewhere in El Gran Desierto, and slashes through Sonoyta on Mexico's side of the border. It swings in a westerly direction and crosses the line toward the American side at Tinajas Altas. At that point the route pushes north through the Lechuguilla Desert into Arizona and beyond, finally reaching la Ocho. There the pathway stops without reason or explanation. It just stops.

Hot wind blows through that desert corridor and sweeps across miles of sand; it swirls dust devils beyond the horizon, and its fiery tongue licks cactus and ironwood trees nearly to the ground. Only the craggy mountains that rise from the flat floor of the desert can withstand the blasts. They stand defiant, and even their names evoke fear: Gilas, Aguilas, Growlers and Mohawks.

From sunrise to sunset, saguaro cactus cling to the skirts of those mountains seeking shelter from the relentless sun. Like sentinels, arms stretched upward, they wait patiently for lost travelers to slink by, usually seeking the meager shade given off by their branches. And just as the saguaro cactus seek the shade of the mountains, other life holds fast to them. Slithery lizards creep in and out of crevices to avoid the dangerous rattler, and even the skittering scorpion. Plants and stunted trees jut out of cracked ancient rocks. Fearfully, they all await the inexorable sandstorm that will come as it has for millions of years.

Natives, conquistadores, settlers and prospectors have dared to undertake the desert crossing, and it is undeniable: the dead outnumber those who have lived to tell what happens on that passage. So many migrants vanish without a trace, although a bone or a skull or a mangled shoe is sometimes sighted. Most likely it will be an empty plastic jug that is seen skittering across the sand. Yet despite so much danger, human migrations go on. People attempt the crossing because they have dreams to pursue or oppressive lives to escape. Those people fix their eyes on Yuma, Dateland, Ligurta, Gila Bend and beyond. They change routes, crisscross and retrace their steps, because of the danger of being discovered by la Migra<sup>1</sup>, uniformed men who drive unstoppable vehicles, or worse, the others who call themselves vigilantes.

Despite the risks, some migrants make it to la Ocho, and once on that highway, the flow of people moves to where jobs wait. Word gets around when a letter with a few American dollars reaches towns in Mexico, in El Salvador or villages in Guatemala and Honduras. When news arrive telling that a loved one made it across, that he or she is at work in Pittsburgh, Bangor or Hayward, then the many disappearances on the desert road fade from memory. It is at that moment that a tiny spark flares inside Demetria, Pablo, Braulio or Chela, until it becomes a bonfire. A few clothes are packed, and the cycle is set in motion, embraces are exchanged, and the perilous journey begins. Only words of warning linger: !Cuídate<sup>2</sup> de la Migra! !Cuídate del coyote! !Cuídate del narcotraficante! !Cuídate... cuídate...!

Graciela Limón, *The River Flows North*, 2009

1. the migration police 2. beware

### **Painting out the U.S.-Mexico border**

There's a 50-foot strip of the U.S.-Mexico border fence in Nogales in Sonora, Mexico that bears little resemblance to the rest of the nearly 2,000-mile boundary separating the two countries. Rather than resembling the rusty bars that conjure images of prison cells, it looks like a clear blue sky on a cloudless day.

It was painted early last week as part of Performance in the Borderlands, an initiative of the ASU School of Film, Dance & Theatre headed by Mary Stephens that creates opportunities for students and community members to explore identity and politics through cultural performance.

San Francisco-based artist Ana Teresa Fernandez, who was born in Tampico, Mexico, spearheaded the painting as part of the initiative's inaugural statewide artist residency program. During a residency that ran from October 5 through 15, Fernandez participated in diverse public engagement activities in Phoenix, Flagstaff, Tucson, Nogales, and Douglas — including the re-creation of a 2011 work titled *Borrando la Frontera* (Erasing the Border) created along the border dividing Tijuana and San Diego, which consisted of painting a section of the border fence blue.

Fernandez conceived both “paint outs” as a way of erasing the border. By painting the border fence blue to match the sky, she created the illusion that the fence no longer existed along a portion of the border. In each case, she worked alongside others to make it happen. About three dozen people painted with her in Nogales, including ASU students, community members, and her mom — whom Fernandez credits with raising her consciousness of the border.

While Fernandez was studying art in San Francisco (she holds a B.F.A.<sup>1</sup> and an M.F.A.<sup>2</sup> from San Francisco Art Institute), her mother took a photography class and began using photography as a means of documenting the border. Fernandez was working in cafes and restaurants on the weekends at the time, where migrants she worked with often shared their stories. The experiences made her “want to reconnect with the border.” [...]

It was 2011, and Fernandez started wondering how well people on opposite sides of the border debate were really communicating with each other — and whether they should be screaming at each other or having more quiet, intimate conversations. She asked herself: What should I do?

Fernandez called her mom, and shared an idea: She wanted to “paint out” a portion of the U.S.-Mexico border. “Let’s do it,” her mom said. And they did.

Lynn Trimble, *The Phoenix New Times*, October 23, 2015

**1.** Bachelor (*licence*) of Fine Arts **2.** Master of Fine Arts