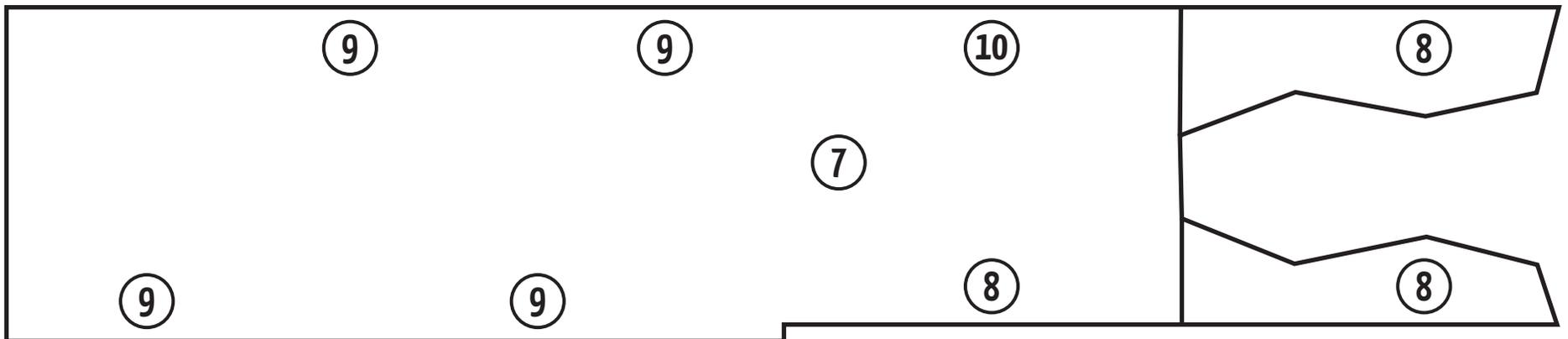
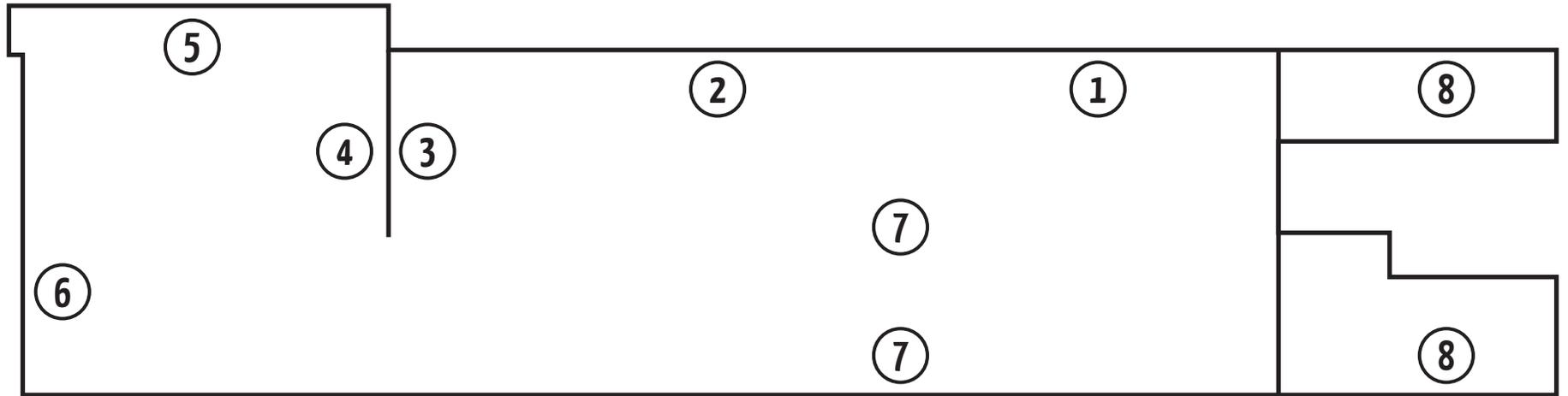


Hostile Terrain

Gallery Map



Please take care to avoid stepping on the vinyl words.

Map Key

Undocumented Migration Project

1. Hostile Terrain 94 Map

Gallery 51 is honored to partake in this participatory art project sponsored and organized by the Undocumented Migration Project (UMP), a non-profit research-art-education-media collective directed by anthropologist Jason De León. The exhibition is composed of ~3,200 handwritten toe tags that represent migrants who have died trying to cross the Sonoran Desert of Arizona between the mid-1990s and 2019. These tags are geolocated on a wall map of the desert showing the exact locations where remains were found. This installation will simultaneously take place at a large number of institutions, both nationally and globally.

Trinh Mai

Trinh Mai is a second generation Vietnamese American visual artist who examines the refugee and immigrant experience, then and now. Through a vast breath of media, she helps tell the stories of we, the enduring People, while focusing on our witnessing of war, the wounds we've survived, our collective need to heal, and the custodial responsibility to which we are heirs. As a California-based interdisciplinary artist whose work is driven by innovative narratives of storytelling, her artistic creations re-imagine personal and inherited memories, family roots, and spiritual connections that alter conceptions of our identities and shared histories.

2. That We Should Be Heirs

2019, acrylic, Bà Ngoại's (Grandmother's) unread letters, cotton grown at the farm from which my husband and his family harvested when they first arrived in America, hand embroidery, holy water, stones collected from the Pacific Coast, raw canvas, personal hand-written scrolls contributed by community members, thread, Pacific Ocean water, and wool

One of the Vietnamese beliefs is to give the dead a proper burial so that their souls can rest. This installation invites participants to bury their fears and burdens so that they might find a moment of rest before marching forth.

In my recent work, stone has represented the weight and burden that we have carried for ourselves and for those whom we love. For millions and billions of years, these stones have endured tremendous pressures. They have been thrust against hard surfaces, tumbled over rough edges, and broken down by violent falls, all to become exactly what they are—scarred but refined, imperfect but beautiful. They are us.

Guests are invited to write about their fears, bind their writings into scrolls, and bury their fears into the pockets that serve as tombs for our burdens, vaults for our secrets, or sepulchers in which to lay our pains to rest. Along with a stone, the scrolls are enclosed in the wall that, too, is dappled with scars much like we are. This installation encourages touch, an intimate gesture of gently grazing our hands upon the threaded scars in acknowledgment of our distress among the many. Paralleling the spiritual and sometimes quiet exchange that occurs in compassion, there is also a hushed physical exchange that takes place with every touch: while our fingertips lift the invisible salt crystals of the Pacific Ocean water, the oils from our hands are unnoticeably absorbed by the cotton threads, anointing the scars.

3. Má Cured in Vietnam

2010, acrylic, ink, oil, collage of Vietnamese newspaper on cardboard, 20 x 28"

This portrait of my mother at age seventeen honors her various personalities – the nurturer, the friend, the provider, the free Spirit and the survivor.

4. Flesh of My Flesh

2020, Belle's acrylic, charcoal, dirt collected from the garlic fields in which my husband Hiên and his family labored with other immigrant families when first arriving in America to be compensated one dollar per bucket harvested, holy water, ink, Pacific Ocean water collected from the harbor of San Pedro, where Hiên served time in the immigration detention center, and tears shed for him as I considered the hardships that he has endured on paper; arrows crafted with indigenous methods using found branches, found feathers, found string, and wax.

Many of the Psalms were written during times of war, lamenting suffering, rebuking those responsible for the suffering, protesting innocence, petitioning for divine assistance, anticipating collective response, and with sincere thanksgiving even through the turmoil. This portrait was inspired by Psalm 91, a promise of protection for the faithful.

During the immigration crisis that has pervaded the country, ICE raids suffered by households of refugee and immigrant families often take place during the still of the night to disrupt our rest during a time when our families are most vulnerable. Injustice knows no time. These afflictions wound us night and day.

Psalm 91:5 and 7 reads: Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

Perhaps the thousand and ten thousand are our fallen neighbors, or the arrows that have just missed their marks, preserving the lives of we the privileged. Tens of thousands of Vietnamese American refugees have been detained since our arrival on American shores, and many have been unlawfully deported back to a country whose communist regime regards them as defectors, agitators, traitors, enemies. They now face a persecution from which they had fled during the war in Việt Nam in the 1970s.

Some of the arrows are made with the feathers of the California great horned owl, a bird that is documented as a permanent resident of its territory. We can only hope for this same status. While they aim aggressively to pierce flesh, my husband stands confidently, hopeful in things to come. This portrait is a visual prayer of protection for we who are teetering on the trembling foundation of justice, that we might stand firm in the faith that will give us sure footing.

5. And we shall come forth as gold

2019, acrylic, charcoal, gold leaf, hand embroidery, tears shed for the refugees on paper

An American goldfinch airlifts a child from a golden landscape. Vietnamese greenfinches are stamped with red crosses as symbols of courage, recovery, and the preservation of life. They lead the flock toward freedom, shielded by the same light that reveals them.

While we witness the plight of our refugee and immigrant families with tightened fists and open arms, it is a wonder if we will ever know why these tragedies occur. As creatures of reason, we try to find resolve and purpose, lest the children suffer in vain. When considering why this suffering settles upon the human landscape, I refer to gold. Like gold brought to flame in the furnace, we are purified when put through fire. The flames seem to engulf, but the affliction draws out particles of impurity. Though we hath been tried, we shall come forth as gold.

6. From the Snare of the Fowler

2019, Belle's acrylic, charcoal, hand embroidery, and tears on paper
This piece began telling the story of a Vietnamese greenfinch who is working tirelessly to untangle the refugee children from the snares that befall them. After living with it for some time in the studio, my perception of the work shifted: the greenfinch began binding the children in a cord with which he will pull them out of the wilderness.

In this new interpretation, the greenfinch moves from a defensive state into a more assertive role as hope springs confidently into aggressive action.

A prayer for the refugee families, that they may be led to firm terrain with eyes set on a long-suffering hope for the life ahead.

Sanctuary City Project

Sergio De La Torre and Chris Treggiari became interested in the concept of sanctuary cities after a series of raids across the Bay Area and country in 2008. This marked a dramatic federal shift from working towards comprehensive immigration reform to pursuing a policy of aggressive enforcement and criminalization. The project, which began as a research-based project in 2008, emerged in 2017 as the Sanctuary City Print Shop at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where it engaged hundreds of people at the Center and at public events beyond it. From the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exhibition, the Sanctuary City Project created a series of more than 30 original screen print posters developed from the stories of community members and address the complexity of the immigrant experience: Why did you come here? When did you forget you were an immigrant? A sanctuary is a quiet place. The resulting posters offer an opportunity for dialogue around the topic of sanctuary cities and immigration.

7. Undocumented Unafraid (vinyl)

8. Sanctuary City Project Posters

9. Sanctuary City Project Videos

Student Work

10. Immigration Posters

MCLA Introduction to Design students worked with Sergio De La Torre and Chris Treggiari of Sanctuary City Project to learn how to use Design Thinking to design posters about immigration. They used primary and secondary research techniques to inform their thinking. Once they had an idea, each student ideated various designs for initial feedback before creating a final pressure print matrix.

Untitled, Ana Sheehy

Jobs Shouldn't Be A Privilege, Jack Vezeris

IM MIGRANT, Ryan Powers

Untitled, Paige Wandrei

Present Day Pilgrims of Liberty, Joseph Vigiard

Embrace Immigration, Andrew Cruisce

Speak Your Home, Sean Soucie

Give Me Your..., Ian Crombie

Opportunity, Abby VanSteemburg

A Better Life, Alana O'Connor

**Find program information at
mclahostileterrain.com**