

# Exhibitions and Programs



# Beatriz Cortez and Kang Seung Lee

## Becoming Atmosphere

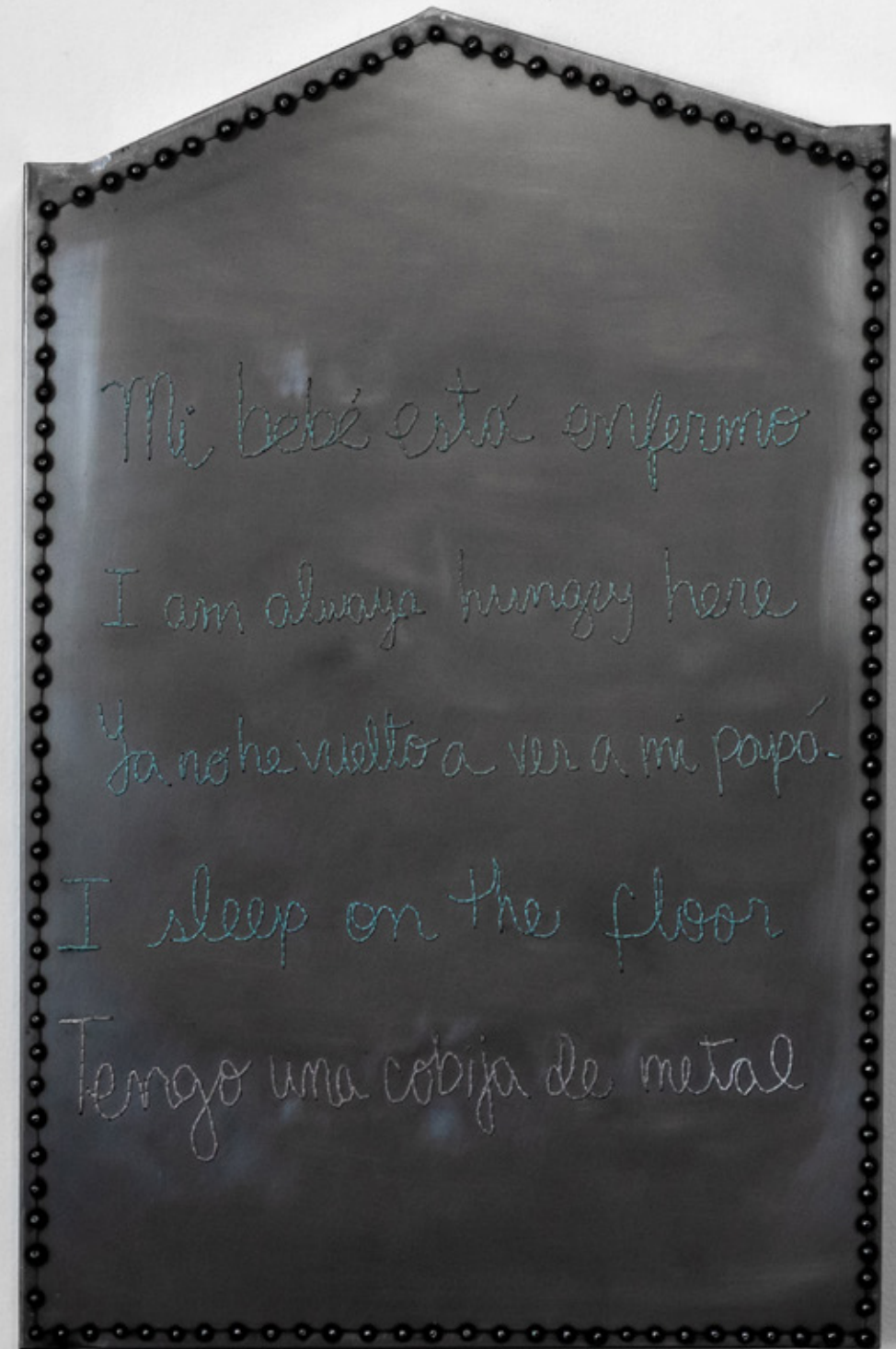
**Beatriz Cortez and Kang Seung Lee:  
Catching Breath**  
By Anuradha Vikram

Artists Beatriz Cortez and Kang Seung Lee's collaboration begins where all life starts, with breath. Conversation between the two artists and friends had long been underway when I first approached Cortez to do a residency and exhibition at 18th Street Arts Center in 2018. She immediately proposed a joint residency that would allow the two artists to realize their longtime interest in working together. Even before Covid-19 taught us to be fearful of sharing air with one another, Cortez and Lee began an extended meditation on illness, cooperation, and breath.

Cortez is a sculptor—a medium of the body and of touch—and a philosopher whose practice is discursive, anchored in talking. She had been reading Emanuele Coccia's *The Life of Plants*, which takes a microcosmic and metaphysical view of the biological world. Cortez understands continental philosophy through a world-view formed by dialogue with Indigenous people of the Americas. As such, she brought awareness of ancient cultivation practices to her engagement with Coccia's ideas about plants' central role in the ecosystem.

He writes, "To breathe means to be immersed in a medium that penetrates us with the same intensity as we penetrate it."<sup>1</sup> In the exhibition, ideas about grief, generational memory, propagation, and the infinite potential of humankind become ephemeral and intuitive. Ideas become atmosphere.

Cortez has suspended a nomadic "space capsule" from the rafters of the 18th Street Airport Gallery. Made from welded, unsealed steel, the object's many six-sided faces are each capped with a small plastic capsule filled with seeds. Three long tendril-like legs protrude like tentacles from the bottom of the structure. The seeds are native to the Americas: used for centuries in indigenous agricultural and medicinal practices. Beneath the capsule, Cortez's 2019 sculpture *The Infinite Mixture of All Things Past, Present, and Future* pumps rhythmically up and down. Small sprouts of green sit atop the sculpture's nine pistons, which express audible puffs of air as they move atop their mechanisms. Welded steel *Roots* (2020) sculptures, nebulous, could also be trees or clouds. Growth is



Beatriz Cortez, *Tombstone / Lápida*, 2020. Steel, embroidered cotton cordon. Approx. 33.5 x 21.5 x 1.5 inches. Photo by Marc Walker. Courtesy of the artist.



Installation view of *Becoming Atmosphere* in 18th Street Arts Center's Airport Campus Propeller Gallery. Photo by Marc Walker.

At the center of the gallery is another plant: a cactus, on loan from the artist Julie Tolentino. Tolentino propagated a cutting of a cactus belonging to Harvey Milk, an item she obtained from an archivist friend that had originally been collected from one of Milk's former roommates. At the time of Milk's assassination in 1978, his roommates inherited the plant, which they kept alive as a way of tending to his memory. Kang Seung Lee's artistic practice resembles this multi-year project of tending to memory in loss. His work is concerned with inheritance, and with legacy. Working with the remnants of queer icons' lives, he treats historical connections as personal, built through a combination of research and individual networks. In *Becoming Atmosphere*, Lee weaves together histories and objects associated with pioneering gay artists Tseng Kwong Chi, Oh Joon-soo, Derek Jarman, Peter Hujar, and Avram Finkelstein, each of whose lives and work were impacted or abbreviated by the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Lee's graphite drawings are intimate and delicate, full of details rendered with a soft touch that reflects the artist's gentle, contemplative manner. The drawings can be modest or monumental in scale. Intimate drawings of California poppies from Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, UK, have been made from garden cuttings sent to Lee by Garry Clayton, husband of Keith Collins who cared for Jarman at the end of his life and maintained the cottage until his own death in 2018. Adjacent is a large-scale rendering that monumentalizes Finkelstein's original notebook sketch working out the iconic SILENCE=DEATH pink triangle logo, which he developed along with Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Krelloff, Chris Lione, and Jorge Socarrás and came to symbolize ACT UP activism in the late 1980s. A third group of drawings reinterprets Hong Kong-born American artist Tseng Kwong Chi's iconic *East Meets West Self-Portraits* (1979–1989), in which the artist photographed himself at important landmarks in Western history including the Roman Coliseum, Notre Dame in Paris, Los Angeles' iconic Hollywood sign, Sleeping Beauty's castle at Disneyland, and the World Trade Center twin towers in New York. Lee's renditions depict Tseng

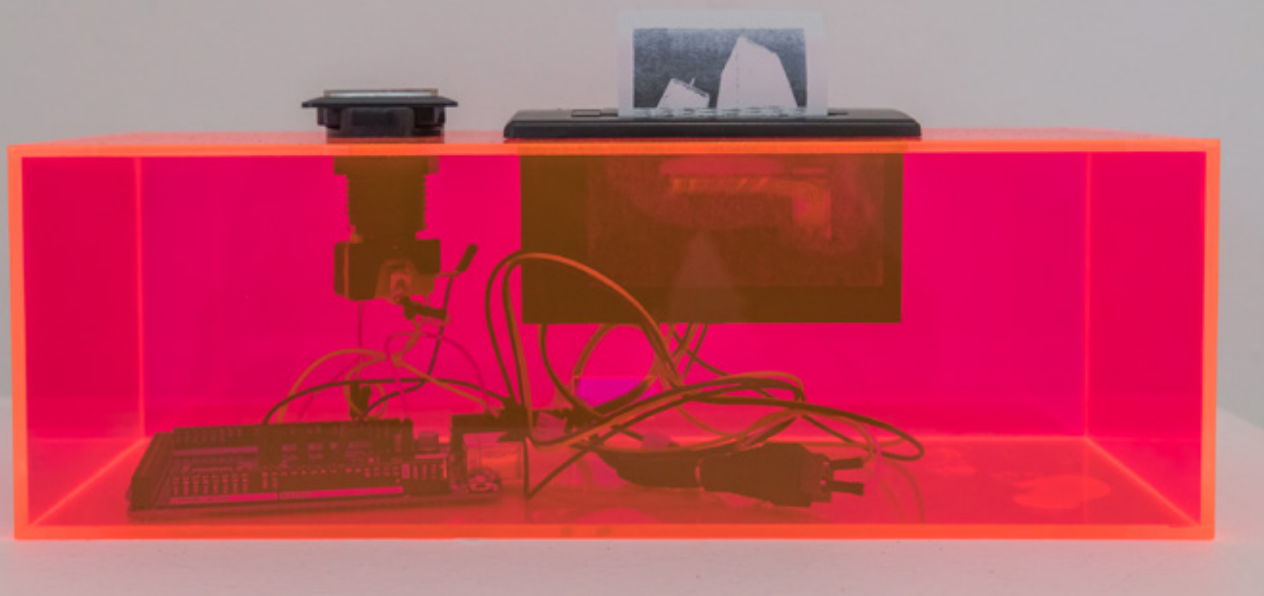
Kwong Chi's severe, uniform-clad figure as a puff of smoke, with only the artist's hands and the ID badge that hangs from his shirt pocket remaining solid. In an adjoining gallery there are drawings based on Peter Hujar's photographs of waves breaking in the Hudson River off the now-demolished Christopher Street cruising piers.

Connecting places to one another is an important theme in Lee's work, most prominently in the three-channel video work *Garden* (2018). Here, Lee has made several graphite drawings on animal vellum, which he has then cut apart and buried in separate pieces at two memorial sites. One frame shows the burial act at Prospect Cottage, where Lee pulls apart pebbles and soil to place the object. The other shows Lee scooping earth from Namsan Park, formerly a cruising spot in Seoul, into a piece of Korean *sambe* cloth that is made from hemp and used for rituals. Lee transposes stones from each site to the other as the video positions Derek Jarman's life and death alongside that of Korean poet Oh Joon-soo. Both artists lived at the same time, both made work from their experiences as gay men, and both were lost to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Beatriz Cortez engages memory on another, geological scale. Her *Glacial Pothole* (2020) is a corollary to the *Glacial Erratic* that she installed in Rockefeller Center, New York, as recipient of the Frieze LIFEWTR Sculpture Prize. The sculpture references the rock masses that populate Manhattan island, remnants from the last Ice Age when glacial ice melted and left mineral deposits inside openings in the bedrock. These ancient forms are a reminder of the earth's endurance through previous cataclysmic eras.

In the same small gallery with *Pothole* and Lee's drawings of Hujar's photos, there are two small Plexiglas boxes with large white buttons. Using a miniature thermal printer controlled by an Arduino, these boxes generate small printouts of images and texts collected and created by the artists. Titled *The Future Perfect*, this work builds on the construction of language by referencing a grammatical tense that expresses what is going to happen subsequent to events occurring at a later date in time. This mode of expression,

Beatriz Cortez and Kang Seung Lee, *Becoming Atmosphere*, 2020. Arduino printer and receipt paper. 4.5 x 12 x 4 inches. Photo by Marc Walker. Courtesy of the artists.



which is common to many languages, expresses an awareness of the future as its own reality contingent on the outcomes of the present. Observations about “The Future Perfect” collected from friends and loved ones and translated into Korean, English, and Spanish emerge from one of the boxes, while the other generated images of Lee’s Tseng Kwong Chi drawings. “When the future comes,” one reads, “we will have imagined love in new ways.” Like Chi’s wispy form, the image will eventually dissipate as the thermal ink fades from the paper’s surface.

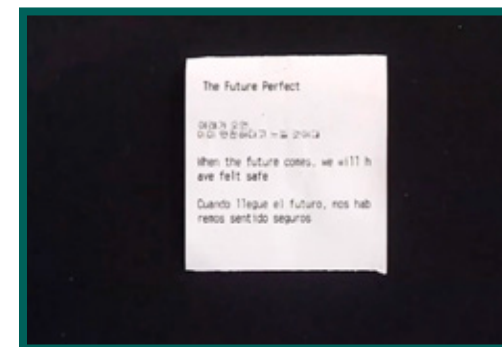
Near the entrance to the Airport Gallery, two small objects bring the exhibition narrative back to current events, injustice, and loss. A welded steel *Tombstone/Lápida* (2020) made by Cortez bears the words of migrant detainees taken from declarations of asylum made to US government officials under the Flores Settlement. “Mi bebé está enfermo,” reads the stitched-in text. “I sleep on the floor.” On the neighboring wall, Lee has embroidered another piece of *sambe* cloth with 24-karat gold thread. “The little boy that I am taking care of never speaks,” it reads. “He likes for me to hold him as much as possible.” Cruelty justified by policy—some things just don’t change.

If, as Coccia suggests, plants make the world through their being, then so too do we human beings, as philosophers from Hegel to Deleuze have argued. Only by actualizing our potential to create, to love, and to live freely do we galvanize the atmosphere with the force of our immanence. Though violence and disease has struck down many in their prime, those of us who survive have a responsibility to propagate the memory of those we have lost. We owe it to them to live and to perpetuate the values that give life.

*This exhibition is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the City of Santa Monica’s Cultural Affairs Department, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, and 18th Street Arts Center’s generous community of donors.*

<sup>1</sup> Emanuele Coccia, *The life of plants: a metaphysics of mixture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 11.

## ... we will have been together [a script of a performative lecture] By Andy Campbell



### Andy Campbell:

On that day I was wondering how I’d find garlic.  
On that day a colleague sent me a text message—a picture of a beautiful backyard, thick clouds scudding across a bright blue sky... within moments a second message from her: “Sorry, not for your eyes.”  
On that day I wondered how things were in Texas.  
On that day I was in Long Beach, California.  
On that day I was meant to be recovering from an event the day before.  
On that day I received emails with subject headings like: “Our New Reality,” “Deliciousness Matters,” “Re: Fair Use?”—all went unopened.  
On that day I took a picture of our cat, curled up and sleeping  
On that day I took a screenshot of a meeting I attended, thinking it would be important to remember what I was doing. This and the photograph of the cat are all I have of that day.  
On that day I made myself coffee and watched TV with my boyfriend until we fell asleep.  
On that day I was asked to remain in my home.

### Beatriz Cortez:

On that day I got up at 3 in the morning.  
On that day we took the street without permits.  
On that day we played like children with chalk, all of us, from all ages, together, during the pandemic.

Inspired by the future perfect tense, art historian and critic Andy Campbell reflected on the various historical legacies and speculative futures (as well as the vicissitudes of plant care) at play in Beatriz Cortez and Kang Seung Lee’s *Becoming Atmosphere*. Both scripted and improvised, this semi-collaborative talk on February 4, 2021, was devised as a companion to the exhibition, and was inspired by the difficulties and pleasures of finding common cause. Below is an edited version of the writing produced by Campbell for the talk.

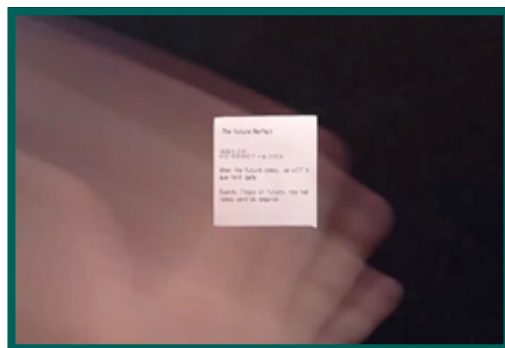
On that day we made a mural on the ground that said: DEFUND ICE.  
On that day many masked friends from all my worlds showed up at MacArthur Park in solidarity.  
On that day I met people from seven different Central American immigrant rights organizations that I had never met before.  
On that day I took a nap in the car while Douglas and Freya watched over my sleep.  
On that day I ran like a kid around the lake in MacArthur Park while the planes sky-typed our phrases in the sky.  
On that day I watched the atmosphere softly rock my phrase/our phrase in the sky: No Cages, No Jaulas.  
On that day I said to my friends: I want more days like today.

### Kang Seung Lee:

On that day my partner Geoff dropped me off at the Huntington Hospital Emergency Room. He wasn’t allowed to come in.  
On that day I had a very sharp pain on my chest and every time I coughed it felt like someone was slicing my chest with a knife. “I need to go to the hospital but it’s so dangerous there,” I kept telling Geoff.  
On that day I talked to my doctor over the phone. “It’s probably from the coughing but could also be a blood clot, you need to go to the ER but it’s so dangerous to be there,” she sighed.  
On that day no one touched me at the ER except the one nurse who drew blood from me and took samples for the COVID test.  
On that day I took a selfie on my ER bed.  
On that day I typed a message to Beatriz, “If something happens to me, please be there with Geoff, and oh, make sure to water Harvey the cactus.” but didn’t send it.  
On that day I wondered if my mom would get along with Geoff if I was gone.  
On that day standing ten feet away from me, the ER doctor told me I wasn’t having a stroke.

On that day the nurse explained how to quarantine at home. "But I don't think I have covid," I asked. Response: "We just assume you do."

On that day on my Uber ride home, I was afraid I was going to pass anything to the driver. I tightened my mask one more time.



*Handwritten signature or mark.*

*August, but it isn't August.* It's something else—called something else here. Amongst the charred and melted metal is a small container, holding even smaller containers, safeguarding DNA. Only one of these fragile emissaries has survived. Its genetic material, its most precious gift, has been tended and looked after for thousands of years. It has grown tall and lain fallow. It has fed families and left them wanting. It has been rotten and it has been sweet; sometimes both simultaneously. And though the people who nurtured it had many names (for themselves; and that others had for them), they are entirely unknown to these inheritors.

What will be done with this receipt? What will be done with this seed?

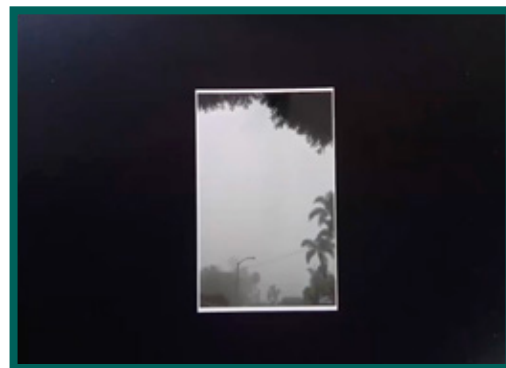
There is nothing about it, really, that demands to be planted. Nothing, really, that suggests its purpose. And so it is kept aloft, in some isolated place. Respected and admired, it is a thing to visit—a strange communication from an elsewhere, from an othertime.

To see it is an honor, and not everyone is full of honor. Sigh.

"Maybe I'm reading too much science fiction," I tell my friend Laura. "Nooooo!" she says and laughs. Through her gentle mocking I come to realize that everything during the pandemic seems carry the gloss of betterment—of being 'good'. We are told it's okay to take time away from a need to quantify and mark time with achievement. It's a paradoxical position, and one which, according to Atlassian, has resulted in workers of all kinds working longer hours.<sup>1</sup> On social media I

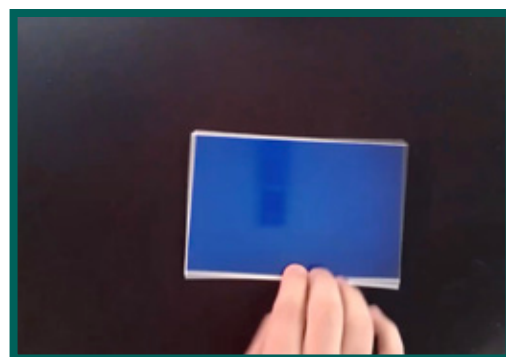
see memes that begin, "I don't know who needs to hear this but...", outlining all the ways in which the pandemic has been bad for mental health, bad for self-esteem, bad for work, bad for sex, bad for connecting, bad for inner work. I click my tongue because I needed to hear what these memes tell me, but I will likely not be able to heed their advice. The unending now has thrown into stark relief the tension between what Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han has identified as the *vita activa* (the active life) and *vita contemplativa* (the contemplative life).

Hear and heed—a path between message and action. How to interrupt, or, at least, stem the flow? I don't know.



"So called strategies of deceleration do not overcome this temporal crisis," writes Byung-Chul Han in *The Scent of Time*, disabusing us of romantic notions of "winding the clock back," returning to a "simple life," or getting too invested in "refusal."<sup>2</sup> Such strategies, he warns, "cover up the actual problem." Instead, he argues for the investment and incorporation of the *vita contemplativa* within the *vita activa*, a knowing embrace of the demands of two temporal cadences; an arrhythmic *do-si-do* which might resuscitate destitute choreographies, bring new ones into being.

*Handwritten signature or mark.*



*A garden is a calendar is a life.  
A park is a sketch is a root.  
A graveyard is an archive is a fold.  
A party is a torrent is a hole.  
A glacier is a tongue is a world.  
A pantry is a portal is a void.  
A diary is a cosmos is a seed.  
A sketchbook ... is air...  
a spaceship ... is air*



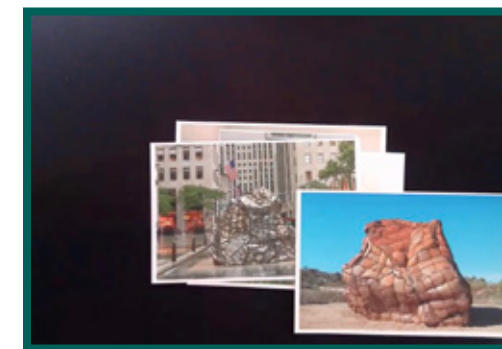
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*NOVEMBER, and it is November, I checked.* I visit with Beatriz and Kang. I have made a wrong turn. I went to 18th Street's main campus by accident (was moving too fast in the morning) and then subsequently, and frenzily, drove the ten minutes or so to the old Santa Monica airport. I park at the wrong entrance (of course), but I don't re-park my car, thinking I won't have the time, I just walk a little faster.

Because I am late, and because I didn't park in the right parking lot, Kang and Beatriz don't see me come into the gallery (they're parked nearby, watching the door). Greeting me at the door instead is Julie Tolentino's *Archive in Dirt*, a plant cutting once owned by Harvey Milk—the first openly gay politician to hold office in the United States. Milk's political win was, of course, predicated on the efforts of those who came and tried before him—most notably José Sarria, called "The Nightingale of Montgomery Street" for his high tenor, who ran for San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1961 and lost. (This is the very same office Milk would win fifteen plus years later).

So: the plant. It is a living piece of a broader im/material archive of queer care—marking the figures and achievements of the queer communities we commit to memory. Throughout the years Tolentino has nurtured this plant, and now has lent it to Kang and Beatriz for this exhibition; itself an overt act of trust.

Trust is one of the primary registers Beatriz and Kang work in. To even mount this show there had to be trust—built over time since they were both in the same MFA cohort at CalArts. For Kang to gain entrance to Derek Jarman's cottage and garden in Dungeness, there had to be trust. For Beatriz to build an uncoated steel glacial "rock" as though it were deposited, "erratic", in front of Rockefeller center—there had to be some kind of trust. Or at the very least some kind of contract—which pulls trust through an administrative and legal tangle, transforming it into obligation. (I remember virtually checking up on *Glacial Erratic* over the short time it was exhibited, with great anticipation, so as to see if the oxidized surface of the sculpture was weeping, staining the ground of this public place. To my chagrin – but likely to the relief of Beatriz and the organizers who helped make this placement possible—it didn't appear to leave any mark. Currently it is installed San Diego, its dazzling patina now harmonizing with the dirt below it).

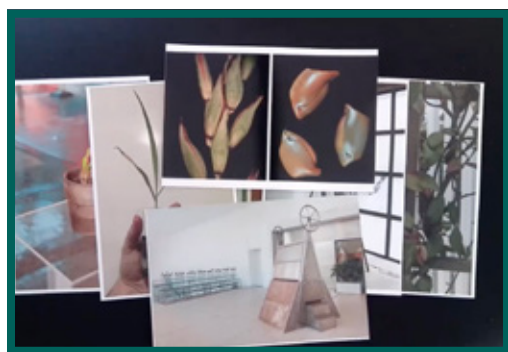


The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy writes that "For the unheard-of, one has to get one's ears ready."<sup>3</sup> This is essentially the lesson of Tolentino's *Archive in Dirt*, which might be considered a decades-long conversation about the capacity to hear, to tend, and to live-with.

Over the course of quarantine my boyfriend Jay and I have tried our hands—like many others—at gardening. For a few weeks we had a working herb garden going and would pluck thyme or cilantro to help with our efforts in the kitchen. But it all fell to pot, and so did subsequent efforts. The problems are numerous: we are distracted even though we remain, largely, in place; we don't have a yard where we can put things into a ground—everything must be in pots with appropriate drainage; and perhaps the biggest hurdle, we really don't know what we're doing. Between our neighbor who sometimes waters the plants around the property we rent, and our own fussiness, I think ultimately many of our plants died because we over-watered them. And then, when realizing our

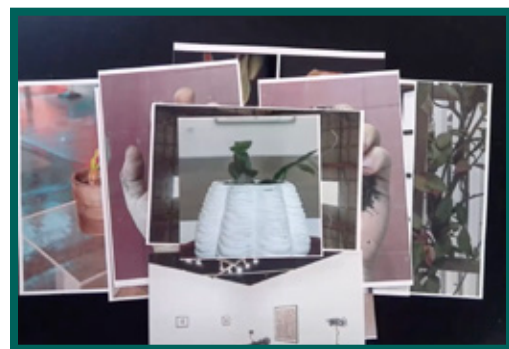
error, we overcorrected by under-watering. By forgetting. Now once vibrant plants are dull and brown; we hope Spring might be a time of redemption.

I am reminded of this again, when, after touring the exhibition, Beatriz gives me one of the corn plants from *The Infinite Mixture of All Things Past, Present, and Future* (2019). The sculpture shares material and formal commonalities with previous sculptures like *Tzolk'in*, installed at the Hammer Museum and the Bowtie Project for the 2018 Made in L.A. biennial. Like that sculpture, every so often this one comes to life, to lift and rattle a neat row of small saplings—in this case, corn. Corn itself is a developed technology, which over thousands of years was cultivated from *teosinte*, a wild grass with sweet cane and rows of pods with hard-shelled kernels, into the tall plants with frizzy husks and colorful kernels that we know today. This happened in a geographical area that spans the current states of Guerrero and Michoacán, Mexico (Michoacán, from the Nahuatl word meaning “place of the fishers”—and Guerrero, a derivation from the Spanish word for “war”).



Unfortunately, this sapling didn't make it. I am embarrassed to admit this. Who kills a gift? To make up for we broke up its soil and placed it into various pots, hoping that it will continue to nurture beyond our neglect.

Like *Tzolk'in* and like *The Archive in Dirt*, *The Infinite Mixture of All Things Past, Present, and Future* is a portal—related spatially and conceptually to the intergalactic seed probe titled Generosity hanging in the rafters of the show, and the small, loose copse of “Roots” sculptures—silent accompaniments to Kang's richly worked historical appropriations.

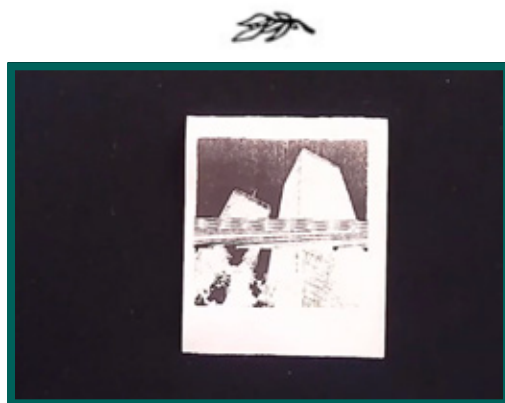


By focusing on the vertical, Beatriz puts the many violences of lateral expansion on notice.

Julie's plant, which was Harvey's plant, and is, for the time being, Kang and Beatriz's plant, too, is a tuning fork to the roiling circuits of connection that instantiate the broader show. It is an affinitive organizational schema, one which permits the drawing of genealogies without predestining or differentiating between kith and kin.

The sculpture comes alive, its animation produces a metallic rattle.

The pressure and pleasure here is: how to join a conversation already in progress?



#### Kang Seung Lee:

Today I woke up to an email from the landlord of my studio. My studio was broken into yesterday and they're changing the locks of the building. No art was stolen. Today I think how ironic and unsurprising it is that my art is worthless to some people. Today I realize, actually, it would be okay if all of my works are stolen. Today I watched a youtube video of a light cable TV show from 1982, in which Tseng Kwong Chi was interviewed by Kestutis Nakas. Pointing out the SlutForArt visitor's badge, Nakas comments, “I see you are a visitor here.” “I am a permanent visitor here,” Tseng answers.

Today I think I am a permanent visitor here, too. Today I wonder if I am still looking for a sense of belonging? Leslie once told me what I was looking for was probably connections, not belonging. Today I made captions for an upcoming show and wonder why Americans still don't use the metric system? Today I talked to my friend Patricia, who is in Joshua Tree. She is about to give birth. Today I registered for a screening and conversation with Cecilia Vicuña. I'm not sure if I'll be listening to the talk: the amount of online artist lectures is scary. I'll never be able to watch all of them in my lifetime. Today in the middle of this talk I'm thinking I should call mom, but I know probably I won't.

#### Andy Campbell:

Today I woke up at 5am, even though my phone's alarm is set for 6. Nerves. Today I made myself a cup of coffee, first by putting sweet n lo in the cup, then coffee, then milk, I stirred it with my finger. Today I wore my best, cleanest shirt. Today I wondered how much longer my hair would get before getting the vaccine. Today I understand what is expected of me, and hope that Kang and Beatriz trust me. I know they do. Today I got an email from a friend of twenty years, the subject heading: “WHAT'S UP?” Today I did a tech check, a run-through of this text, pausing for Beatriz and Kang's parts, imagining what they would say. Today I picked a scab on my shoulder, causing it to bleed a little. Today I put on my second best, cleanest shirt. Today I clicked the link, maybe the same link that you clicked, but different, one that made me a host, visible yet not.

#### Beatriz Cortez:

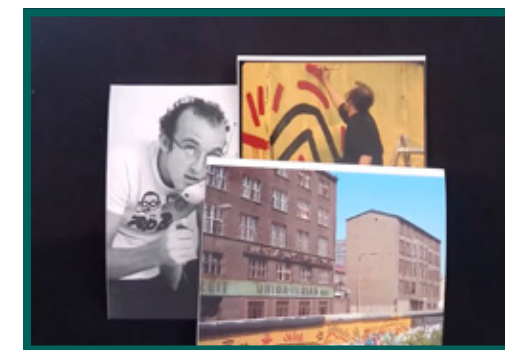
Today we are here building things together, in spite of the isolation. Today it makes me happy to spend this time with the two of you. Today I received a gift in the mail even though it wasn't my birthday. It was from Tati and it was a pair of David Bowie socks. They came with a note that read “Take your protein pills and put your helmet on.” It reminded me of the time when I used to spend my days welding in the shop. Today I listened to “Major Tom.” Today I made a batch of casamiento, or Salvadoran rice and black beans... comfort food.

#### Today STONES

Today I dreamt a new work with Rafa Esparza over text. Today I had a long conversation with myself about the conceptual content of verb tenses. Today Kang told me that the future perfect doesn't really exist in Korean! Today my dad got the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine.



*October 23rd or thereabouts.* The artists Tseng Kwong Chi and Keith Haring were both in Berlin. They arrived in the Western part of the city at the invitation of the director of the Mauer Museum, who had asked Haring to paint a mural on a parcel of wall near Checkpoint Charlie—the primary crossing point between East and West Berlin, a crossing mostly used by foreigners (meaning here the allied forces). The Mauer Museum, which still exists today, is an institution dedicated to studying and memorializing this dividing wall, even as it still stood, splitting the imaginations and affinities of Germans on both sides. In preparation for Haring's work, volunteers from the museum painted a long portion of the wall yellow under the cover of darkness, and Haring spent the better part of the following day painting a monumental chain of interlinked figures in black and red, referencing the colors of the German flag. It was a gesture that appeased the sentiments of West and East Germany, and would later be destroyed by further markings and then, finally, the dramatic dismantling of the wall in 1989.



The photos of Haring working on this mural were taken by Tseng Kwong Chi, one of over 20,000 photographs he took of Haring and his various artistic projects throughout the pairs' lives. They died a month apart from one another—one devastation after the next.

Whether it was the same day, a different day, or a different trip altogether, Tseng Kwong Chi also made an artwork at Checkpoint Charlie; a photograph of

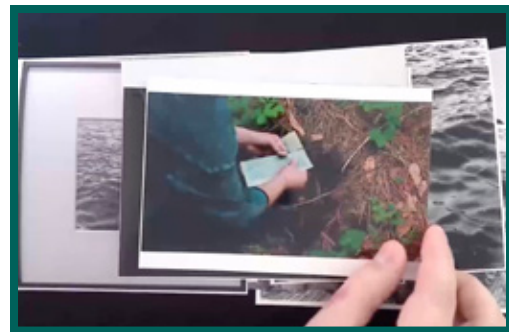
himself as his alter-ego, a persona the artist identified as an “inquisitive traveler,” a “witness of my time,” and an “ambiguous ambassador,” *running* across the checkpoint. It’s important, this detail—the running—so important that the artist included, even if parenthetically, this fact in his title: “Checkpoint Charlie, (running) Berlin, Germany.”



He runs to get away, to get out, to go through, to pass quickly. He runs because he is surveilled, because running communicates the stakes of this surveillance. He runs and a guard turns his head. He runs to be noticed... but not caught.

It is one of the only photographs in this series where Tseng is moving as he presses the remote shutter release in his hand. He is a blur. The American flag, too, is a bit of a blur, whipping in the air above and behind his left shoulder.

Kang Seung Lee, who over the course of the past few years, has rendered Tseng, and other photographic subjects such as Robert Mapplethorpe and polyamorous revelers in Sydney, as blurs, is, I would argue, acutely attuned to the ambivalences of Tseng Kwong Chi’s project. Wearing a silver Zhongshan suit and mirrored glasses, Tseng builds an somewhat inscrutable character. The photo-identification badge, usually attached to his shirt pocket (but missing or obscured in the Checkpoint Charlie photograph), reproduces the artist’s face wearing sunglasses and the words “SlutForArt” purposefully rendered as one conjoined, continuous word. Dressed in this way, as he did in hundreds of photos, he went “from an invisible minority to a visible alien” in the words of Ikkyo Day. While Haring’s project sought to bring about healing and reconciliation, Tseng’s project is happily not so easy to instrumentalize. Perhaps it is because of this fact that in Kang’s images of Tseng’s photographs, his ID badge is always more detailed than his body—pointing to the way in which documentation comes to stand in for the subject.



Kang’s investigation of Tseng’s photo-performances, and his life, complement other works in this exhibition and outside of it: a drawing reproducing pages from Avram Finklestein’s sketchbook—(Finklestein was one of the progenitors of the Silence = Death graphic used by AIDS activists still today); drawings of photographs of the Hudson River taken by Peter Hujar—(the beatific reflections and opacities of the water a telling metaphor for the cruising grounds abutting the East River); a drawing of a poppy blossom sent from Derek Jarman’s garden in Dungeness; a drawing of a portrait of Joon-Soo Oh, a Korean AIDS activist; a video installation wherein drawings and stones are exchanged between Jarman’s cottage in Dungeness and Tapgol and Namsan parks (the latter of which were historic cruising grounds in Seoul); a hammock made of sambe, with plants embroidered in gold thread in its bough (and surrounded by ceramics made from an admixture of Californian, British, and Korean clay). Like Beatriz, Kang prefers his gardens to be nomadic. Like me, Kang searches for family amongst the dead.



*A suitcase is a partition is a need.  
A tree branch is a cradle is a claim.  
A 'holy hole' is an heirloom is an Uncle.  
A photograph is a warning is a stain.  
A prize is a border is a stone.  
A thread is a sound is a name.  
A receipt is a token is a plane.  
A prohibition... is atmosphere...  
a desire ... is atmosphere*



*February—look around, when else could it be?*

Beatriz’s sculpture, Glacial Pothole, has haunted me ever since I saw it in November. I was immediately taken back to an “Introduction to Glaciology” course I took when I was undergraduate student. The class was taught by the husband of my Gender and Women’s Studies professor, and the class had an unfortunate nickname (one that I have come to learn is shared by many an introductory geology course): “rocks for jocks.” I wasn’t a jock, but I was raised by a father who was deeply embedded in the natural sciences, first as an environmental chemist and then as a teacher, so I was legit interested. Perhaps this is too personal to admit, and too tangential to the discussion at hand, but when my father became a teacher I think that is one of the moments in my life that I became more fully his son.

Anyway, this class. It gave me a new technical language of geological change, a lexical morphology to maneuver in my mouth: calving, ablation, foliation, arête, moraine, ogive, and moulin (which is also known as a glacial pothole).

A glacial pothole is formed as water rushes through a crevasse, creating a hole in the glacier and sometimes in the bedrock underneath. Beatriz is more interested in the hole, the absence in the wake of time’s work, and she inflates its volume against the organic grid that gives this sculpture form. Pock-marked from the inside-out this is no mere transcription of a geological process, but rather an encomium on becoming, a void in which one might fashion themselves. Beatriz often writes of how these forms have travelled over eons, giving ancient context to contemporary migrations. They are marked, in each place they exist, by the conditions, by the atmosphere, by the radiation of the place.



How time works on a seemingly immovable object is also at play in Beatriz’s earlier video work, *Childhood Bedroom*, in which the artist built a replica of her room and came back, day after day, to film a little of its changing. Over time the seeds planted in this miniature domicile grow, order is disturbed and then redistributed. Eventually the plants fall dormant or dead, I can’t tell which (... didn’t I tell you that I’m not the best plant person?). For Beatriz, who left El Salvador for the United States after living through the former’s civil war for a decade, the idea of leaving a place with the hope that what is left will change, is part of a profound and fluctuating equation of place, attachment, and becoming.

This change appears differently to everyone, just as the bright field of color of Derek Jarman’s film *Blue* appears differently to each that beholds it—to each that tries to reproduce it. This inconstancy is the rule that Kang and Beatriz’s works are figured around.

As the Italian/Austrian philosopher Rosi Braidotti reminds us: "It is urgent to explore and experiment with more adequate forms of non-unitary, nomadic, and yet accountable modes of envisaging both subjectivity and democratic, ethical interaction." There is a political dimension to this non-unitary mode of being, as various embroidery projects by Kang and Beatriz attest.

For example, a burial shroud bearing these gold-threaded words:

"They took us away from our grandmother and now we are all alone, we could only have one layer of clothing"

Another:

"The little boy that I am taking care of never speaks. He likes for me to hold him as much as possible."

A metal tombstone with lines in English and Spanish:

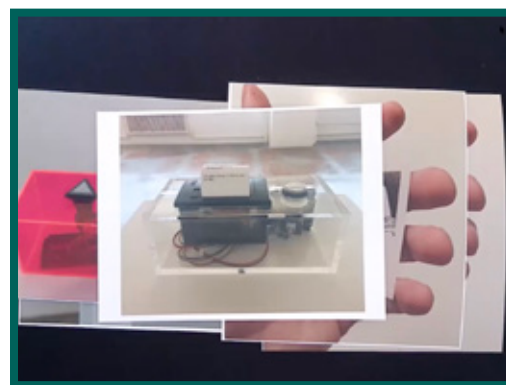
*I sleep on the floor*

*Tengo una cabeza de metal*

The materials confirm the moral obscenity of our nation. Of the last administration. And the one before that. And the one before that. It reminds me, too, of the conditions of capture and holding, that not only define the contemporary migrant experience in the US, but also the experience of exhibitionary display. Sometimes it is all we can do to make one small hole after another; and if thread can be sewn through, so then can a thousand voices. Our glacial pothole goes down, but does it go through? It is still too difficult to tell with any certainty. And my optimism is tied to the premonition that we may never know.

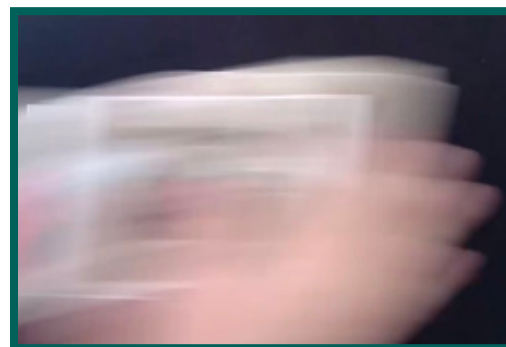
Yet Kang and Beatriz do not leave us in despair (in fact, this is not really a word I would use at all to describe their practices), but with generative possibility—rendered at the register of a whispered word. In the exhibition are two simple machines (which are actually not so simple), producing receipt copies of Kang Seung Lee's drawings of Tseng Kwong Chi's photographs, in one case, and statements in English, Spanish and Korean, all rendered in the future perfect tense, in the other. Statements like: "In the future we will have walked through walls." Although not otherwise visible, these receipts are solutions, or maybe consequences, to translation problems conjured by Beatriz and Kang's work, from the glitches that often accompany image translations of Kang's drawings of Tseng's photographs, to the necessity render the Korean translations as an image so that they might be accurately reproduced... all at the press of a button.

Like *Generosity*, these receipts travel outward from the exhibition. Their ink is not archival, and is intentionally made to disappear. ... as all texts and images invariably do.



One of the earliest examples of this kind of interactive work is a piece made by Beatriz in 2015, entitled *The Box of Generosity / La caja de la generosidad: To end I think it appropriate to hear and heed Beatriz's description:*

"The generosity box is made of transparent material, showing the mechanisms inside the box, and evoking transparency and fragility. Conceptually, it is based on Spinozian philosophy, particularly with regard to joy, but also on Deleuze's positive thinking and Braidotti's ideas about affirmation. Print positive messages received by email, statements of one who imagined to be another through friendship. In other words, resistance to transcendental identities - our disappearance - can happen without our having to die, it can happen through love and friendship as we imagine ourselves to be someone else, to be our friends and loved ones for brief moments each day."



5/20

#### Beatriz Cortez:

On that day the children who are in the detention centers today will still be traumatized.  
 On that day we will still be surviving our trauma.  
 On that day we will have understood that it is possible.  
 On that day we will have built a time machine. It will be made of stone.  
 On that day we will have built it together, even though we were apart.  
 On that day we will have forgotten all about the time when we didn't know each other.  
 On that day we will have moved mountains.  
 On that day we will have thought together of the meaning of planetary justice.  
 On that day you will have figured out the equation.  
 On that day we will have drafted a plan for the future distribution of seeds.  
 On that day we will have survived.

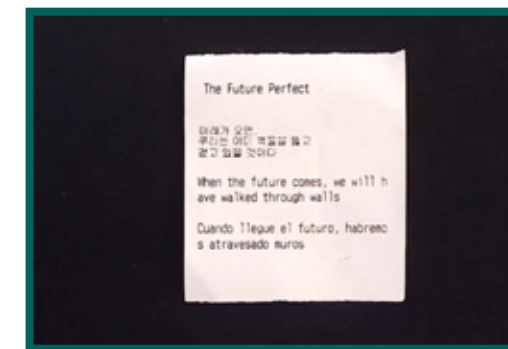
#### Kang Seung Lee:

On that day we will have seen "others" beyond fear.  
 On that day we will have apologized to the children at the detention centers.  
 On the day we will have seen their families reunited.  
 On the day we will have defined family differently.  
 On that day we will have known a world beyond division and confusion.  
 On that day we will have understood we were able to share this moment because of the people who came before us.  
 On that day we will have given hugs to people who we don't know yet.  
 On that day we will have offered Harveyettes, cuttings from the cactus Harvey, to people who we don't know yet.  
 On that day we will have seen Harvey flowering.  
 On that day we will have understood better what it means to be archived in dirt.  
 On that day we will have imagined the past beyond what is archived.

#### Andy Campbell:

On that day we will have been cleverly disobedient.  
 On that day we will have been together for most of an otherwise mundane afternoon.  
 On that day you will have laughed loudly, and often.  
 On that day we will have told each other how much we mattered to one another, perhaps not directly, but surely.  
 On that day we will have remembered this event, your questions.  
 On that day we will have continued our work.  
 On that day we will have made another life, one grown just beyond and through the boundaries of the one we live now.

On that day I will have been somewhat unrecognizable to myself. To you. Both of you.  
 On that day you will have teased me about me and my boyfriend's failure as non-reproductive "plant daddies," you will have said the word 'necropolitics' more than once in regards to this unfortunate fact.  
 On that day we will have felt free, if only for a few moments. And It will have been because we were together.  
 On that day we will have said each other's names too many times to count, in languages we are only now imagining.



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<sup>1</sup> Arik Friedman, "Proof our work-life balance is in danger (but there's still hope!)" *Work Life*, (Nov. 5, 2020), web. [www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/data-analysis-length-of-workday-covid](http://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/data-analysis-length-of-workday-covid).

<sup>2</sup> Byung-Chul Han, "Preface," in *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, trans. Daniel Steuer

[Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017].

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, "'You ask me what it means today...' an epigraph for Paragraph," trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Paragraph; A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 16, no. 2 (July 1993), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Ikkyo Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham,

NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Affirmation Versus Vulnerability: On Contemporary Ethical Debates," in Constantin V. Boundas (ed.), *Gilles Deleuze: The Intensive Reduction* (London: Continuum, 2009) 144.