

**THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN PRESENTS A GROUP EXHIBITION EXPLORING
NARRATIVE, IDENTITY AND POWER**



Adriana Corral, *Unearthed: Desenterrado*, 2018. Site-specific, stainless-steel flagpole and embroidered golden and bald eagle white cotton flag. Installed, flagpole, 60 feet; flag, 18 x 30 feet. Installation view, Rio Vista Processing Center, Socorro, Texas, 2018. Artwork © Adriana Corral. Courtesy the artist and Moody Gallery, Houston. Image courtesy the artist.

IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY
September 17, 2022 – February 12, 2023

The Contemporary Austin
700 Congress Avenue / Austin, Texas

July 12, AUSTIN, TEXAS – This fall, The Contemporary Austin will present works by eight artists in a group exhibition exploring how narratives and storytelling shape our senses of self, community, history, and identity. Entitled ***IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY***, after a text by Jenny Holzer, the exhibition features works by **Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Adriana Corral, Ellie Ga, Juliana Huxtable, Tala Madani, Danielle Mckinney, Wendy Red Star, and Clare Rojas**. Running **September 17, 2022, through February 12, 2023**, the project includes an exhibition that will occupy the entirety of The Contemporary's downtown museum, a newly commissioned site-responsive work at the museum's sculpture park at Laguna Gloria, and a full calendar of public programs.

Using a wide variety of mediums and modes of presentation, the exhibiting artists approach storytelling in ways that create space for underrepresented narratives and subjects. In doing so, they examine the forms of representation and exclusion generated within dominant cultural narratives and challenge the conditions of

privilege those narratives both derive from and perpetuate. Together, the works on view aim to provoke reflection on the social and historical conditions underpinning our society and ways of being in the world, and they may inspire us to imagine and create more equitable, joyful futures.

The exhibition's title, *IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY*, comes from Jenny Holzer's series *Survival* (1983–85). The evocative phrase, which itself is a story, suggests a strategy for thinking about the wide-ranging contributions of the exhibiting artists. One can always ask *who*, under what conditions, must concern themselves with the nuts and bolts of survival. In this way, the phrase recognizes inequitable power structures even while it also sees an alternative path. As the title suggests, the artists in the exhibition adopt various modes of storytelling in ways that reflect on power dynamics and survival tactics with humor, optimism, and joy.

The artists in the exhibition adopt varied strategies to question and rewrite prescribed narratives. Some play with and contest tropes of gender, the body, and self-representation, while some invoke alternative forms of personal, collective, or intergenerational knowledge. The ground floor gallery gathers works by four artists using figural representation to address social constructions of selfhood alongside reflections on the inner life. **Danielle Mckinney** portrays solitary female figures in states of reverie, while **Clare Rojas** explores varieties of female companionship and communions with the natural world. **Juliana Huxtable** destabilizes restrictive societal categories around race, gender, sexuality, and species, while **Tala Madani** confronts power dynamics and cultural taboos through images that excavate the psyche.

The upstairs gallery presents works by four artists whose research-based practices employ counter-storytelling to confront systems of domination alongside constructions of history and knowledge. **Wendy Red Star** counters colonial narratives about Native Americans through works celebrating the knowledge and traditions of her Apsáalooke heritage, while **Adriana Corral** examines human rights abuses and unwritten histories, including within the U.S.–Mexico border region. **Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley** centers the lived experiences of Black Trans people through interactive works blending research and fiction, while **Ellie Ga** elicits images of power and resistance through nonlinear narratives approaching stories threatened with loss or that cannot fully be known.

Borrowing Jenny Holzer's phrase as the exhibition title also suggests a frame for articulating questions about how art can intersect with today's social and political realities. For decades, Holzer has presented her work in the public arena through texts that reflect the implications of power within public discourse, including political speech, government accountability, and the media. Her work prompts people to revisit the ideas they hold and invites them to act for change. Valuing this ambition—believing in the power of art to inspire critical and creative perspectives, open hearts and minds, and encourage change—this exhibition asks: What role might artists play as visionaries and cultural watchers whose work can help to articulate who we are, where we come from, and where we can go as a society? How can museums galvanize publics around common questions and concerns? To what degree can art, and the activities and discourses surrounding it, reshape beliefs and inspire action?

“Today as much as ever, our society needs artists to stimulate dialogue,” says curator Robin K. Williams. “With right-wing populism and social conservatism moving into the mainstream of national politics and the judiciary—and with Texas leading the way—oppressive agendas jeopardize many people in this country and around the world. It is not coincidental that as museums emerge from the dramatic events of 2020–21, we have seen many exhibitions, including the 2022 Whitney Biennial and Venice Biennale, reflecting on narrative and identity while posing alternative visions for society and the future of humanity. This focus may result not only from reflections on issues at the forefront of the national consciousness in that short but tumultuous time frame but also from broader distress over the white supremacy, misogyny, and transphobia endemic in our

society. Narrative analysis and the craft of storytelling offer powerful tools to identify and reshape the structures of discourse.”

Occupying the entirety of The Contemporary’s downtown museum, located seven blocks from the Texas Capitol, the exhibition project also includes a full calendar of public programming. Seeking to generate conversations around the artworks and to inspire civic engagement, programs will include conversations with exhibiting artists and invited speakers and a series of films curated in conjunction with the exhibition. In addition, this fall the museum will unveil a new sculptural commission, *Swan Mother*, 2022, by artist Clare Rojas at the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria.

“The Contemporary Austin seeks to serve as a platform for critical conversations and meaningful exchange,” shares Executive Director and CEO Sharon Maidenberg. “We believe that art—and the artists who produce it—are essential ingredients in that effort, and we look forward to bringing the artists in this show, their practices, and the issues manifest through their work to Austin. Using this project as a jumping off point, we hope audiences will join us in real time—and in some cases virtually—to share ideas, learn from each other, and explore the tough issues that face our community.”

IN A DREAM YOU SAW A WAY TO SURVIVE AND YOU WERE FULL OF JOY is curated by Robin K. Williams, Curator, with Julie Le, Assistant Curator, The Contemporary Austin. The exhibition is made possible through generous support from Rachel and Jeff Arnold, Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, Carly and Clayton Christopher, Suzanne Deal Booth, Deborah Dupré, Deborah Green and Clayton Aynesworth, Kathleen Irvin Loughlin, Suzanne McFayden, Chris Mattsson, Fredericka and David Middleton, Guillermo Nicolas and Jim Foster, Topo Chico, Zarmeena Vendal, and Melba and Ted Whatley. This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

As Austin’s only museum solely focused on contemporary artists and their work, The Contemporary Austin offers exhibitions, educational opportunities, and events that start conversations and fuel the city’s creative spirit. Known for artist-centric exhibitions and collaborations, The Contemporary invites exploration at both its urban and natural settings—downtown at the Jones Center (700 Congress Avenue) and lakeside at the Laguna Gloria campus (3809 West 35th Street), which includes the museum’s Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, with a growing program of commissions, temporary projects, and a permanent collection of outdoor sculptures by artists including Ai Weiwei, Terry Allen, Carol Bove, Sarah Crowner, Tom Friedman, Anya Gallaccio, Ryan Gander, Liam Gillick, Nancy Holt, Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler, Paul McCarthy, Wangechi Mutu, Tom Sachs, Monika Sosnowska, Jessica Stockholder, SUPERFLEX, Marianne Vitale, and Ursula von Rydingsvard.

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