



View of “Intergalactix: against isolation/*contra el aislamiento*,” 2021. Background: Tanya Aguiñiga, *Línea Pak*, 2020–21; Tanya Aguiñiga, *Memoria*, 2020–21. Foreground: Tanya Aguiñiga, *Metabolizing the Border*, 2020.

“Intergalactix: against isolation/*contra el aislamiento*”

LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS (LACE)

In August 2020, immigrants hoping to cross from Tijuana, Mexico, into San Diego over the San Ysidro border had to queue in *la línea* (the line) for up to ten hours. The temperatures in San Ysidro that month reached the mid-nineties, and, according to local news stations, people became “desperate” for bathrooms. On the twenty-third of that month, an eighty-nine-year-old woman died, apparently of cardiac arrest, while enduring the wait in her car.

Such tragedies of the United States immigration system inspired “Intergalactix: against isolation/*contra el aislamiento*,” a startling and brilliant group show at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Two years in the making, “Intergalactix” featured the work of several individual Latinx artists and artists’ collectives who seek to counter the border’s “necropolitics” and “nullification of the body” with a “coalition of the struggle of life, activating as a defense of humanity,” according to the show’s accompanying texts. Entering LACE’s welcoming space, one encountered homemade instruments of this resistance, such as Tanya Aguiñiga’s *Línea Pak*, 2020–21, a wooden stand strung with snack packs, such as one might find at a 7-Eleven. But these are no mere convenience foods. When Aguiñiga heard of the elderly woman’s death, she investigated San Ysidro’s conditions and determined that migrants need liquids, nutrition, and an opportunity to

relieve themselves if they are to survive the experience: Thus, each_ *Línea Pak* *contains not only a bag of purified water, an escusado portátil (a wallet-size Porta-Potty), and a granola bar, but also two saladitos_*, the salted dried prunes that Tijuanaans eat to withstand dehydration. When “Intergalactix” finished its run at LACE, artists and activists distributed Aguiñiga’s survival kits to people languishing at the crossing.

“Intergalactix” was full of such revelations, which emerged from the artists’ studies of how immigration policy not only kills but also causes long-lasting trauma. Ernesto Bautista, a member of the Fire Theory collective, offered *Teatro del desencuentro* (Theater of Missed Encounters), 2018–21, a searing video of Honduran children placed on padded floors and within open cages so that they can playact the experiences of minors held in border detention cells. Inside these simulacral prisons, the young ones roll around on their stomachs and frolic with each other, but their recorded conversations reveal the anguish caused by their knowledge that US officials have captured and isolated kids just like them. “Who of you remembers your name?” someone asks. “I do not know,” comes the answer. “Who of you remembers your mother, your family?” . . . “I do not remember.”

A number of artists in “Intergalactix” presented artworks that strive for healing and wholeness in the face of this destruction. The Fire Theory’s Crack Rodriguez organized a jubilant soccer match at LA’s MacArthur Park and handed out fancy medals afterward. His installation, *Dream Team* 2020–21, featured the game’s goalie nets, which he had resculpted and studded with soccer balls, footballs, and feathers, so that they morphed into dream catchers. Beatriz Cortez, along with the Kaqchikel Maya collective Kaqjay Moloj and the Latin American editorial project FIEBRE Ediciones (FEVER Editions), constructed an altar—*cum*—time machine out of hammered steel with forged images of serpents and alligators on all of its sides. This work, titled *Altar of Kaqjay*, 2020–21, is anchored by small stone figurines that the Kaqjay Moloj crafted in Guatemala and struggled to bring over the border. US agents suspected the statuettes were being used to smuggle prohibited items, and they were nearly destroyed. The Altar creates a space for the contemplation of better times and places. But mourning remained ever present in this exhibition: At the back of the gallery sat Mauricio Esquivel’s *Freezer Containers*, 2020–21, an intricate model of the units that Esquivel, a Salvadoran resident of Brooklyn, watched health officials use for the storage of corpses during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in New York. While this

object did not map precisely onto the show's border-policy brief, it did intimate the fraught conditions under which the artists labored to create these installations. The work reminded viewers that Latinx and Black people with Covid are hospitalized at 2.8 times the rate of white people, and Native American people are hospitalized at a rate of 3.4 times that of whites. Esquivel's piece thus ushered death and inequality into the gallery, summoning the woman who might have survived if US officials paid half as much attention to the subjects of lethal immigration laws as the artists in this exhibition did.

— Yxta Maya Murray