

The background of the poster is an abstract composition. It features a blurred, horizontal band of colors in the center, resembling a rainbow or a sunset, with shades of orange, yellow, and green. This central band is set against a dark, textured background that appears to be a starry night sky or a dense field of small dots. Overlaid on this background are several thin, white, diagonal lines that intersect to form a series of triangles and other geometric shapes, creating a sense of depth and structure.

THE OTHER SIDE

CHINESE AND MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

FEBRUARY 7 – JULY 20, 2014

FROM 1882 TO 1943, THE U.S. CONGRESS ENACTED AND ENFORCED A SERIES OF LAWS KNOWN AS THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT, PROHIBITING PEOPLE OF CHINESE ANCESTRY FROM BECOMING NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZENS. IN 2012, A FORMAL APOLOGY WAS ISSUED BY CONGRESS TO THE PEOPLE HARMED BY THE ACT. ONLY FOUR OTHER MEASURES OF THIS KIND HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY CONGRESS. THEY DEALT WITH THE INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE-AMERICANS, THE COLONIAL ANNEXATION OF HAWAI'I, THE VIOLATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN SOVEREIGNTY AND RIGHTS, AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF AFRICANS AND AFRICAN-AMERICANS. THIS UNUSUAL GESTURE OF LEGISLATIVE CONTRITION SUGGESTS THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMITTING AND EXAMINING THE TRAUMAS OF OUR NATION'S IMMIGRANT HISTORY AND BECAME THE CATALYST FOR THE EXHIBITION, *THE OTHER SIDE: CHINESE AND MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA*.

The Chinese Exclusion Act and Mexican Immigration

After the Gold Rush of 1849, Chinese workers streamed into the United States, finding work in the mines and on the transcontinental railroad. As their numbers grew, government agencies, civic leaders, labor unions and nativist citizens feared the corrupting effects of the Chinese on the moral, cultural and economic underpinning of mainstream, Euro-American society. By the 1880s, this led to the first of several legislative acts that would severely restrict the immigration and naturalization of the Chinese and influenced future prohibitions on large-scale immigration into the U.S. *This was the first law to restrict immigration to the United States, and it served as a model for later acts restricting immigration to America.*

In the nineteenth century, the U.S. federal government saw the influx of Chinese workers as a danger to local economies and employment. The Chinese Exclusion Act permitted Chinese laborers who were already in the U.S. before November 17, 1880 to travel abroad and return, but prohibited any new immigrants from coming into the country. A few were exempt from the Act: students, teachers, travelers and merchants. Many Chinese found it difficult to prove they were not laborers; therefore, few Chinese entered the United States after 1882.

The Act expired in 1892 but was quickly extended for another ten years pursuant to the Geary Act, which also added further requirements for Chinese residents. When the Geary Act was set to expire in 1902, Congress made the law permanent and added more restrictions forcing



Hung Liu, *In the Garden 1*, 2005, Oil on canvas, Courtesy of the artist and Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles © Hung Liu



Andrea Bowers, *Immigrantes Unidos* (May Day March, Los Angeles, 2012), 2012, Single-channel video with color and sound_2:16, looped, Editor Fil Rütting, Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects © Andrea Bowers

Chinese residents to obtain a certificate of residency or face deportation. In the 1920s Congress adopted broader quotas and national origin requirements in response to an increase in post-World War I immigration. In 1929, the National Origins Act was created to replace previous immigration laws. It set a limit of 150,000 immigrants annually but barred immigrants from Asian countries. The Magnuson Act in 1943 replaced the National Origins Act and all other exclusion acts, but allowed only 105 Chinese immigrants per year, continuing their drastic restriction. The Federal Immigration Act of 1965 raised the overall immigrant limit to 170,000 per year with a maximum of 20,000 immigrants from any one country including Asian countries. After more than eighty years, large numbers of Chinese immigrants were finally allowed into the United States.

As a concession of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War, the United States was ceded a large amount of territory, in what is now California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and parts of Wyoming and Montana. Mexicans living in that area prior to the treaty were offered U.S. citizenship, but their personal and property rights as citizens were routinely trampled upon. Prior to the 1920s, Mexicans were exempt from U.S. immigration laws and were admitted as guest workers during World War I. Catalyzed by the revolution in Mexico and a growing U.S. economy, Mexican immigration to the U.S. surged to 600,000 between 1910-1930. Echoing the earlier nativist fears towards Chinese immigrants, many Americans felt that Mexicans would corrupt American cultural values and threaten the livelihood of white American workers. However, with so many Mexicans already living among them, Americans used aggressive ideological strategies to Americanize young Mexicans through educational and social programs.



Hung Liu, *China Mary, Wyoming 1*, 2006, Oil on canvas,
 Courtesy of the artist and Walter Maciel Gallery, Los Angeles
 © Hung Liu

Once the Great Depression hit, resident Mexicans were scapegoated. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants, along with their U.S. born children, were sent back to Mexico in the 1930s. However, with the advent of World War II, the need for low wage labor to increase agricultural production led to a turnaround in official U.S. policy. From 1942, over 4 million temporary work visas were issued to field workers recruited through the cooperative, bi-national Bracero Program. This second surge of immigration did not last long because the U.S. again changed its attitude as the need for labor diminished in the late 1950s and 1960s. More than four million immigrants, and many U.S. citizens as well, were sent back to Mexico. But the pattern of U.S.-Mexican economic interdependence was irreversible: the U.S. demand for low cost manual labor was met by an equal need for jobs among poor and working-class Mexicans, and this led to a continuous northward migration that is the largest trans-national stream in the world. The present wave of immigration includes more than twenty million people of Mexican origin living in the United States.

The influence and legacy of Chinese immigrant restrictions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had parallel consequences for Mexican immigrants: a series of the immigration acts in the twentieth century imposed numeric limits on immigration to the U.S. This prohibited unskilled workers from being issued work visas, dealing a particular blow to Mexican immigrants, who were overwhelmingly manual laborers. As a result, the volume of undocumented Mexican immigration steadily increased. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed by Congress to attempt to definitively address illegal immigration to the United States. Congress has passed additional laws to control border enforcement and migration after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Homeland Security initiatives have dramatically raised the bar and the budget on border protection and immigration control. The current rancorous debates in Congress over immigration reform reflect the exacerbation of this issue.

Artists' Responses to Immigration to the U.S.

In trying to represent the effects of the exclusionary programs of American immigration, the five artists in the exhibition, Hung Liu, Zhi Lin, Andrea Bowers, Margarita Cabrera and Tony de los Reyes, visually recount some of the personal stories and hardships experienced by Chinese and Mexican immigrants to the U.S.

While most of the Chinese immigrants to the U.S. in the nineteenth century were men, some women made the journey to live in Gum Shan, or Gold Mountain—as North America (particularly California)



was known. Hung Liu's paintings celebrate the lives of two of these women, Polly Bemis and China Mary. Born in Taishan, Guangdong, China, Polly Bemis (1853-1933) was sold by her father to become a concubine for a wealthy Chinese man in Idaho. She later married Charles Bemis in 1894, later living alone as a widow on a tiny homestead near the Salmon River. From her humble beginnings, Polly overcame tremendous odds to become a respected and beloved member of the pioneer community. Less is known about the early life of China Mary (1836-1906), but like Bemis, she was well respected in her adopted home of Tombstone, Arizona. She was an astute businesswoman—a money lender who also owned a laundry, restaurant and gambling hall.

Zhi Lin, *Bloody Summer*,
Cape Horn, California, 1865,
*Building of the Central Pacific
by Chinese Workers*, 2013,
Chinese ink and colors on
Chinese paper, Courtesy of
Koplin Del Rio Gallery,
Culver City © Zhi Lin

Hung Liu's dripping paint in these large scale portraits suggests the passage of time, and embedded images such as birds, flowers and a bat motif refer to the Chinese origin as well as the adversities these women went through in the new world. Liu was born in Changchun, China, and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing. She emigrated from China to the U.S. in 1984 to attend the University of California, San Diego, where she received an MFA. She currently lives in Oakland and is a tenured professor in the art department at Mills College.

Zhi Lin, working for ten years on his series about Chinese railroad workers in the U.S., has created a series of large-scale paintings. In contrast to his earlier realistic and representational works that are a memorial to the workers, these abstract landscapes express the natural beauty of America that the workers witnessed along their journey. Underlying the beauty, however, one can still feel the pain and suffering of the Chinese laborers: the striking landscapes, embodying a quiet abstract quality, gently guide the viewer to the experience of the Chinese laborer who endured hardship without proper recognition. Zhi Lin was born in Nanjing, China, and graduated from the China National Academy of Fine Art. In 1987, Lin attended the Slade School of Fine Art at University College, London where he later completed his MFA. Lin is a Professor in the Painting and Drawing Program at the University of Washington, Seattle.



In her monumental drawings *No Olvidado (Not Forgotten)*, Andrea Bowers has created a memorial honoring those who have died crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. Unlike most memorials, this is an incomplete list and will always remain so no matter how many names are added. In contrast to the contentious political issues referenced by these drawings, Bowers delicately articulates them with gentle touches of graphite powder. In her video *Immigrantes Unidos*, Bowers focuses on banners and signage that she documented at the 2012 Los Angeles May Day March, calling for immigration reform and workers' rights. Andrea Bowers was born in Ohio. She received her BFA from Bowling Green State University and her MFA from California Institute of the Arts. She currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

In Margarita Cabrera's soft sculpture series titled *Space in Between*, she uses Border Patrol uniforms to form cacti, leaving threads exposed to serve as a reminder of the labor involved in manufacturing. Sagging vinyl imbues the work with an anthropomorphic quality that references the harsh nature of worker's realities. In another set of cacti, Cabrera collaborated with people who had actually walked across the border, stitching these personal immigration experiences on to the plants. The plants and uniforms in this elegant hybrid formation create a marriage between something beautifully natural and uninhibited in growth, and something that is awkwardly powerful, seemingly cold, negative and restrictive. Margarita Cabrera was born in Monterrey, Mexico and received her BFA in Sculpture and MFA in Combined Media from Hunter College of the City University of New York. She currently lives and works in El Paso, Texas.

Since 2012, Tony de los Reyes has developed his *Border Theory* series, combining the attributes and implications of abstract painting with the demarcation between the United States and Mexico. De los Reyes addresses the border, the Rio Grande (termed "Rio Bravo" in Mexico), as a site of abstracted politics, which, like painting, utilizes specific processes and ideologies to organize otherwise incoherent spaces. These paintings are not maps, but abstractions of maps that take into account the foremost elements of polarity inherent in the border, namely the push-pull of attraction and repulsion. By definition, alternate "sides," like magnets, create tension through a unique kind of interference.



Top: Andrea Bowers, *No Olvidado (Not Forgotten)*, no. 11, 2010, Graphite on paper, Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Photo credit: Robert Wedemeyer

Above: Margarita Cabrera, *Barrell Cactus #3*, 2006
Border patrol uniform, thread and terra cotta pot
Courtesy of the West Collection © Margarita Cabrera



Tony de los Reyes, *Border Compression #1*, 2012,
Dye and oil on linen,
Courtesy of the artist and
Heather James Gallery
© Tony de los Reyes

In *Border Theory* (*black/indeterminate zone*), it is possible to imagine the border as a site of transference, with the linearity of the vertical marks pushing against, over and through a border zone of neutrality as shown in the raw linen. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Tony de los Reyes received his BFA from California State University, Northridge, and his MFA from San Francisco Art Institute. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

Shared suffering of individuals searching for better lives, including the deaths of Chinese railroad workers and migrants crossing the border to the U.S., draws these artists together, albeit in distinct experience. In both cultures the United States has been idealized as the land where gold lines the streets. Enduring poverty and the scarcity of jobs in their countries, immigrants dream of a better life for themselves and their families—dreams that drive them to risk everything. The title of the exhibition comes from the reference in Latin American communities to the U.S. as *El Otro Lado*—the other side. While one may think of the euphemism of “the grass is greener on the other side,” one also cannot help but feel the ominous overtones of death, or passing to the other side.

–Chip Tom, guest curator

Related Programs

Saturday, March 1, 10:30 a.m. • SILK ROAD STORYTIME

Join storyteller Sunny Stevenson for stories about new places and new friends, followed by a fun craft and snacks. Free and open to the public.

Saturday, March 8, 2 p.m. • CURATOR'S TOUR

Join guest curator Chip Tom for a closer look at the poignant and engaging works featured in *The Other Side: Chinese and Mexican Immigration to America*.

Friday, March 14, 6-10 p.m • ARTNIGHT

Join USC Pacific Asia Museum for a free evening of art, music and entertainment as Pasadena's most prominent arts and cultural institutions swing open their doors. In celebration of *The Other Side: Chinese and Mexican Immigration to America*, enjoy performances by the Gerardo Morales Latin Ensemble.

Sunday, April 6, 2 p.m. • LECTURE

Dr. Shelley Fishkin, Co-Director of Stanford University's Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, will examine how contemporary artists and writers have transformed the U.S.-Mexico border and the landscape of the Transcontinental Railroad—iconic sites of violence, erasure and invisibility—into sites of creativity.

Friday, April 11, 4 p.m. • ART AND COFFEE

A series of informal Friday afternoon get-togethers gives visitors additional insight as curatorial staff discusses selected works from *The Other Side: Chinese and Mexican Immigration to America*.

Friday, May 16, 7:30-10:30 p.m. • FUSION FRIDAYS PREMIERE

It's time for a new season of our signature summer series; enjoy a dynamic mix of art, conversation, DJs, drinks and dancing in the courtyard, plus unique performances and L.A.'s best food trucks. We'll be kicking off the season with a celebration of China and Mexico in honor of the special exhibition *The Other Side: Chinese and Mexican Immigration to America*. Free for members, \$15 general public.

All events are free for members, included with museum admission for non-members, unless otherwise noted.

Guest curator Chip Tom would like to thank the staff at the U.S. Asia Institute, Mary Sue Bissell, Yuchia Chang, C.J. Alvarez, Alma Ruiz, Eleana Del Rio, Sasha Drodick, Christopher Erck, Stephanie Hanor, Walter Maciel, Jake Martinez, Bake Phouikham, Lee Stoetzel and Suzanne Vielmetter. He also thanks all the lenders and especially the artists: Hung Liu, Zhi Lin, Andrea Bowers, Margarita Cabrera and Tony de los Reyes. Finally, he would like to thank all the staff at USC Pacific Asia Museum, and especially two people who made this exhibition possible, Bridget Bray and Nancy Tom. The museum would like to thank Professor Raul Villa of English and American Studies at Occidental College.

This exhibition was conceived by Nancy Tom and is guest-curated by Chip Tom with support provided by Columbia College Chicago, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

USC Pacific Asia Museum

46 North Los Robles Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101
626-449-2742 www.pacificasiamuseum.org

Cover: Tony de los Reyes, *Border Theory (indeterminate zone/black)* (detail), 2013, Dye and oil on linen, Courtesy of the artist and Angles Gallery © Tony de los Reyes