

*Shelter/Refugio* (June 2, 2017 – August 13, 2017)

### Curatorial Statement

The history of the United States has been one of migration, of refuge and shelter. To commemorate this, in 1885, famed author Emma Lazarus dedicated her poem “The New Colossus” to the Statue of Liberty raised on Ellis Island that same year: a towering emblem of freedom and welcoming for immigrants hailing from Europe.

This contrasts with now-president Trump’s speech at the beginning of his presidential campaign in 2015 where he famously stated, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best... They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

While not new, since, tensions between and within communities throughout the country have run high and everywhere what appeared to be a fundamental American value, has been tested and questioned. With increasing anti-immigrant rhetoric, rising housing costs, gentrification, and homelessness affecting communities throughout the country, Americans are being forced to examine and reassess their ideas of place, home, belonging, and community. The following 6 artists allow us a glimpse into their own perspectives.

Using Lazarus’s poem, the interdisciplinary artist, Nery Gabriel Lemus, shifts the historic conversation on immigration from Ellis Island to U.S. – Mexico border. Like Lazarus’s poem that stands to welcome immigrants on plaque on the island, Lemus notes the signs that greet migrants on the border. He reinterprets these with lines from the poem, pointing to contradictions in the narratives about migration to the country, acknowledging contributions immigrants make today.

His *alfombra* (rug), *Memorial to Three Unknown Females*, piece serves to commemorate the lives of the migrants, many of whom are women, who, during this treacherous trek, oftentimes do not survive the journey.

The collaborative work of Sergio De La Torre and Chris Treggiari point to the divisions that heightened tensions have brought to communities even in the most intimate and safest of environments, our homes and neighborhoods. Their work also points to heightened fear, especially within marginalized communities, pointing to a double optical in security and surveillance.

Adriana Monsalve continues the conversation around place and home highlighting the irrationality oftentimes contained in development and displacement. Her work pays homage to the church, a sanctuary, of youth that appears to contradict itself in the undertaking of its own projects.

Elena Guzman is no stranger to this type of experience. As a young anthropologist, she utilizes her expertise on data to tell stories of thousands of homeless people living in constant transition throughout the country. In the *Bronx Lives* she returns to her own experience and that of others that intersect in a state of constant flux.

Monica Martinez challenges spectators to think critically about the idea of home, shelter, and mobility. Her works points to a seemingly banal object, the water cooler, which becomes a cherished commodity within homeless communities in large urban centers. She seems to ask, are shelter and home physical locations or something we carry with us wherever we go?

These conversations are not new, but our current times have re-heightened the tension around them. *Shelter/Refugio* invites us to re-think what we consider these values in our society to look like as we grapple to agree on where they are practiced and for whom they are for.