

WOMEN AND MIGRATION(S) II



EDITED BY KALIA BROOKS, CHERYL
FINLEY, ELLYN TOSCANO AND
DEBORAH WILLIS



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Cover image: FIRELEI BÁEZ for Marie-Louise Coidavid, exiled, keeper of order, Anacaona, 2018. Oil on canvas. Installation view: 10th Berlin Biennale, Akademie der Künste (Hanseatenweg), Berlin, 9 June 9-September 2018. Photo: Timo Ohler. Cover design by Anna Gatti

10. Of Bodies and Borders

*Essay by Maria Elena Ortiz on the work of Ana
Teresa Fernández*

In her artistic practice, Ana Teresa Fernández questions borders, citizenship and immigration, issues central to her own biography. She explores contested sites, like the Mexico-US border, using several recurring symbols to create elegant compositions that appear both fantastical and real. Fernández features bodies of water as frequent characters in her works, where she has attempted to swim while wearing stilettos, or tame a horse. She is committed to questioning stereotypical female gender roles; heels and her own body are central motifs in her performances and paintings. Her practice is indebted to performance art. Her two- and three-dimensional works emerge from site-specific performances, which are documented, edited, and result in videos. The paintings are images extracted from these performances, thus serving as another interpretation of the themes at hand. Through her visual metaphors, Fernández's works explore the relationship between life, politics and poetics, inspired by magical realism, surrealism, and complex contemporary realities.

In this body of work, *Of Bodies and Borders*, Fernández focuses on one of the world's most deadly borderlands, the Mediterranean Sea. Her intentions were to encounter the site firsthand, bringing forth real human issues through art. She traveled to Greece to create a performance on the Greek coast, in which she would go into the water for a couple of hours in the mornings and evenings, wearing a black dress, black heels and a 6 kg (13.23 lb) belt. She covered her body with a white piece of fabric that resembled a burial shroud. Fernández submerged herself underwater, in cold and ungovernable currents.

The Mediterranean Sea is the site of a massive exodus of people fleeing wars, environmental and economic hardships in impoverished boats. In 2015, over 3,000 deaths were reported in the Mediterranean. Like the US, immigration in Europe is a complex issue involving religion, race and racism, and heavily contested ideas of what it means to be European. In Europe, immigration principally involves Africans and Middle Easterners, while the US is experiencing significant immigration from Latin people.

Ana Teresa Fernández explores the complex dynamics of border sites to question the social barriers that affect human beings. Known for creating works addressing the complexities of the Mexico-US border, Fernández represents the unsettled issue of immigration, borders, and bodies at a global scale, pointing to how borders are politicized in contemporary Western society. She is interested in using the political to create poetics that can help us connect with situations that seem far away from our realities, but share similar dynamics.



Fig. 1 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 1* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 54x94". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 2 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 2* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 60x72". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 3 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 5* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 54x94". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.



Fig. 4 Ana Teresa Fernández, *Of Bodies and Borders 6* (Performance Documentation Mediterranean Sea), 2017, oil on canvas, 60x72". Courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco.