

BALLROOM MARFA
presents

THE
BLESSINGS
OF
THE
MYSTERY

| **CAROLINA CAYCEDO**
| **DAVID DE ROZAS**
| **05. 26. 22 – 09. 04. 22**

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Carolina Caycedo (b. 1978) is a multidisciplinary artist known for her performances, video, artist's books, sculptures, and installations that examine environmental and social issues. She has held residencies at the DAAD in Berlin and The Huntington in San Marino; received funding from Creative Capital and Prince Claus Fund; participated in the Chicago Architecture, Sao Paulo, Venice, Berlin, and Whitney Biennials; recent solo shows include ICA Boston and MCA Chicago. She is a 2020-2022 Inaugural Borderlands Fellow at the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands, Arizona State University, and Vera List Center for Art and Politics, The New School.

David de Rozas (b. 1979) is a multidisciplinary artist and award-winning filmmaker whose practice merges experimental documentary and contemporary art forms, revisiting and relocating the politics of memory. De Rozas films have been screened in festivals and film curated series worldwide, such as Visions du Réel, Sheffield Doc/Fest, True/False, and Kassel DocFest. His recent film 'GIVE' was nationally broadcasted on POV, and won Best Short Documentary at FullFrame and Best Experimental at the Smithsonian African American Film Festival. He is a 2021 Artist in Residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts.

THOUGHTS ON THE EXHIBITION

In *The Blessings of the Mystery* artists Carolina Caycedo and David de Rozas present new work made in and about West Texas. The project began with a conversation about dams: I was familiar with Carolina's ongoing project *BE DAMMED*, which investigates the socio-economic and environmental effects of dams across the Americas, and was eager to talk to her about the Amistad Dam in Del Rio, the largest dam on the Rio Grande that is managed jointly by the United States and Mexico. The seed of this conversation blossomed into a body of work that looks at Amistad and other contested sites across the region, unspooling histories and forging connections within *Somi Se'k*, which translates to "Land of the Sun" and is the way the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe from the Rio Grande delta refers to the land known as Texas.

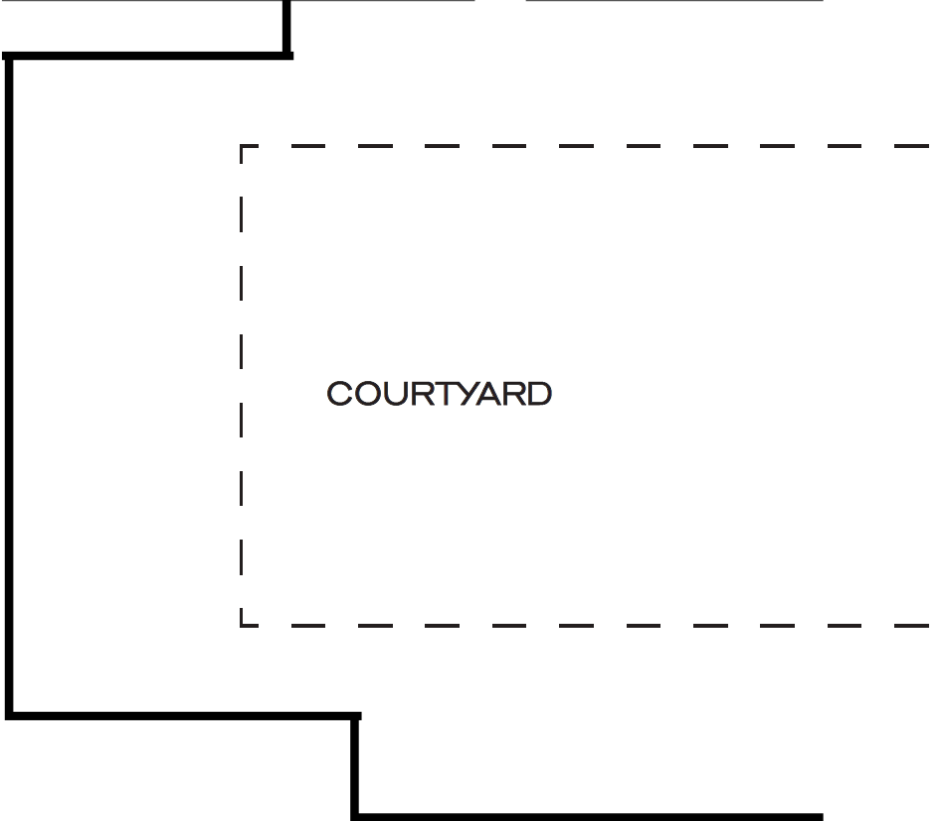
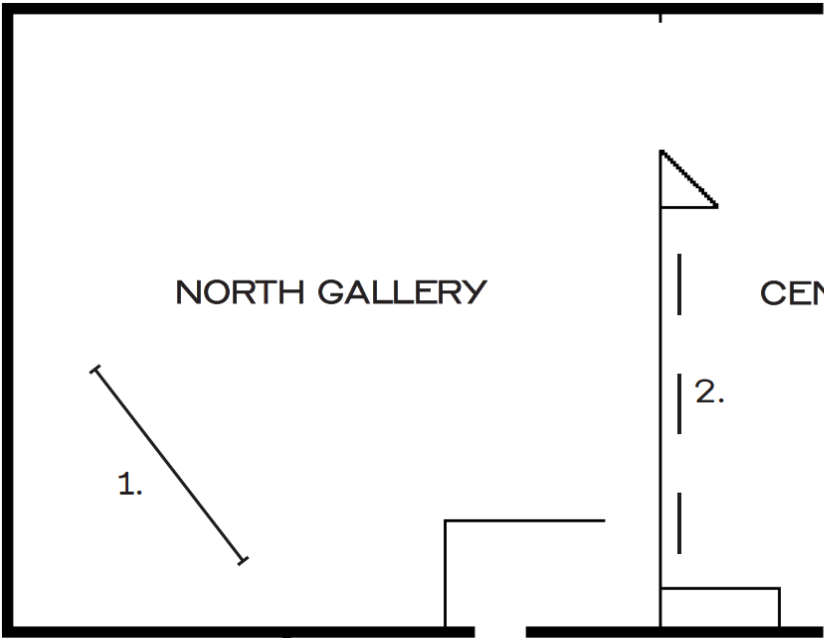
Together, Carolina and her partner David, a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker himself, collaborated on a series of major new commissions for Ballroom. The two artists embarked on many trips to Texas where they researched and filmed, forming countless connections and relationships across the region. They spent time with scientists at the McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis, visited the Permian Basin Oil Fields and the Petroleum Museum in Midland, dove into the archeological archives and biological collections at The University of Texas at Austin, and witnessed what remains of the ancient Lower Pecos rock art near the Amistad Dam. On their journey they met Juan Mancias, the Chairman of the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe, who became the voice and heart of their film, *The Teaching of the Hands*.

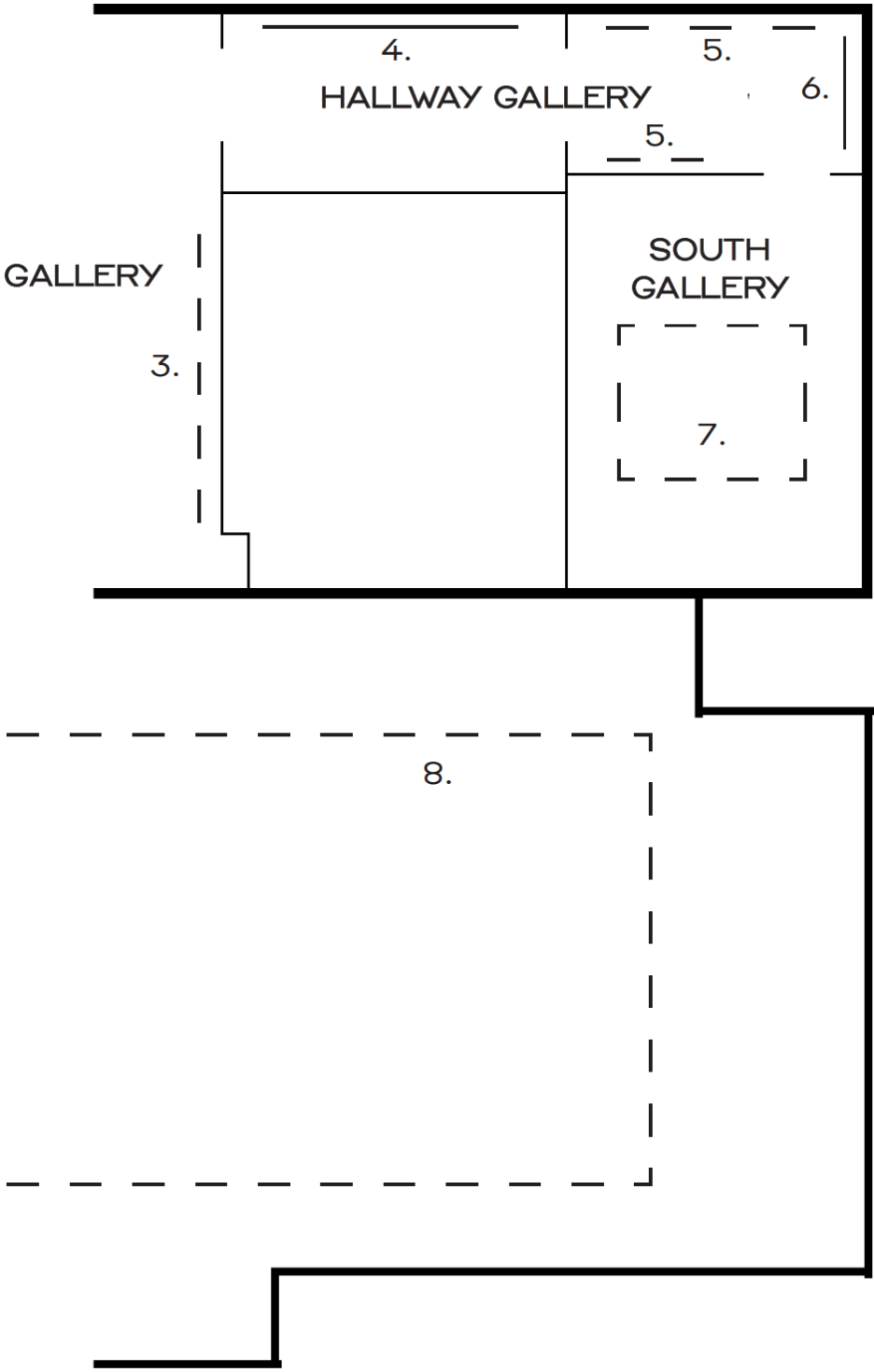
The Teaching of the Hands is the center point of the exhibition, stretching like the horizon across Ballroom's former dance floor. In this film the artists synthesize their research to create an experimental meditation on the region's histories of colonization, migration, and ecological disaster. The piece, narrated by Chairman Mancias, layers oral histories, speculative reenactments, observational and found footage, weaving together scenes from the present day to thousands of years in the past. *The Teaching of the Hands* highlights the environmental memories and divergent cosmologies within *Somi Se'k*, where both Indigenous and settler knowledge coexist.

Rippling out from the film, drawings, collages, installations, and sculptures expand on elements of the narrative. Diagrammatic drawings of fence patents and installations like *Measuring the Immeasurable* and *Halving and Quartering* investigate the practices of land surveying, which led to the displacement of people and the privatization of vast swaths of land. The series *Los Nudos Fuertes* ("The strong knots") and the large drawing *Somi Se'k* counter typical forms of mapping by connecting diverse species and stories through collage or lush illustration. And original watercolors from the 1930s by artists and amateur archaeologists Forrest and Lula Kirkland offer a record of Lower Pecos pictographs before many were lost to flooding or erosion caused by the building of the Amistad Dam.

The artists have conceived of an expansive body of work that constellates unexpected relationships among stars and galaxies, rivers and aquifers, oil and gas infrastructure, invasive and native species, flooded pictographs and rock shelters, and a state of the art observatory. Taken together, the works speak to the multidimensional confluence of cultures and cosmologies held by the surrounding land.

~Laura Copelin, Exhibition Curator





EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Unless otherwise noted, all works are by Carolina Caycedo and David de Rozas and are commissioned by Ballroom Marfa, with major support from VIA Art Fund

North Gallery

1. ***The Teaching of the Hands*, 2020**
Panoramic digital video installation with surround sound,
46 minutes

The Teaching of the Hands presents ideas, imagery, and histories that are expanded upon throughout the exhibition. Weaving together archival footage, re-enactments, archaeological artifacts, and observations, the video centers Carrizo Comecrudo philosophies, their knowledge and relationship to the land, and their struggle against ongoing forms of colonization and erasure to maintain their culture and lifeways. The voice of Juan Mancias, Chairman of the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas, gives an account of contemporary and historical Indigenous resistance.

Film credits:

Juan Mancias, Esto'k Gna ~ Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas

Terry Ashcraft, Molly Barker, Rachel Barrett, Nicolas Bustillos, Vicente Celis, Adam Cohen, Jonah Emerson-Bell, Christopher Gonzales, Dean A. Hendrickson, Patty Huerta, Marina Magalhaes, Juan Mancias, Oscar Meraz, Elton R. Prewitt, Christina Pryor, Matilda 'Tilly Hawk' Rocone, Jerram Rojo, Una Santiago-Caycedo, Walt Senterfit, Adriana Serrano, Mike Shurley, Martin Terry, Marybeth Tomka, Marianna Trevino-Wright, William R. Wren, George Yatskievych.

Center Gallery

2. ***Los Nudos Fuertes series***
(left to right)

9 Cielos, 2020

Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle paper and raffia cord

The Blessings of the Mystery, 2020
Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle paper and jute cord

There Are No Lone Stars, 2020
Inkjet print on Hahnemuhle paper

This set of works is from a series which translates to “the strong knots,” and combines archival photographs from the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory of excavations at the Amistad Reservoir before it was flooded with images from the Harvard Astronomical Photographic Plate Collection.

3. ***Texas Improvements: Facility, inexpensiveness, durability, and efficiency (I - V), 2020***
Ink on paper
(left to right: IV, II, III, I, V)

Hallway Gallery

4. ***Greetings From West Texas series***
Collage
(left to right)

Boom Bloom, 2020

A Summer Camp for Girls, 2020

Hand Colored Nature, 2020

Favorite Places, 2020

The Hunting Place, 2020

La Amistad del Diablo, 2020

Solaris, 2020

Ocotillo in Bloom, 2020

This Space for Writing, 2020

The Window at Sunset, 2020

The Border was Dropped on Top of US, 2020

Bloom Boom, 2020

South Gallery

5. Forrest and Lula Kirkland

Kirkland Watercolors series

Watercolor on paper

Collection of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory

The University of Texas at Austin

(East wall, clockwise from top left)

Browns Ranch, 1936

Paint Rock, 1934

Pecos River Site 14, 1936

Black Cave, 1937

Paint Rock, 1934

Meyers Springs, 1935

(West wall, clockwise from top left)

Rattle Snake Canyon, 1936

Rattle Snake Canyon, 1936

Seminole Canyon Shelter 4, 1936

Pressa Canyon, 1937

Artists Forrest and Lula Kirkland began painting ancient pictograph sites in West Texas in the early 1930s after becoming fascinated by their complexity and beauty, and moved by a desire to record and preserve them. Over the course of a decade they compiled an archive of watercolors and drawings that remain the best evidence of how the Lower Pecos rock art looked almost a century ago. The small watercolors displayed here are scaled copies of large murals—some that are no longer in existence—located in rock shelters and cliffs along the Lower Pecos and the Rio Grande canyons and creeks.

Many of the murals recorded by the Kirklands have been destroyed or severely damaged by harsh climate conditions arising from damming, erosion, and humidity, as well as a lack of protection from local authorities and property owners. Only a few of these murals are currently open to the public. These sacred paintings are evidence of Indigenous written languages, prophecies, cosmologies, and millenary presence in the area.

6. *Somi Se'k (The Land of the Sun – La Tierra del Sol)*, 2020

Color pencil on paper

Somi Se'k is how the Estok Gna, the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe, refer to the lands on both sides of the River of Spirits (Rio Grande), comprising the Chihuahuan Desert, the Rio Grande Valley and its delta. *Somi Se'k* is not just a name or a neutral place, but a multilayered net of universes where the region's present, past, and future are still in conversation. The drawing functions as a counter-geography that visually represents the stories of some of the human and non-human relatives that inhabit these lands. *Somi Se'k* is crossed by several major bodies of water: The Rio Grande, the Pecos, the Devils and the Conchos rivers as well as numerous natural and hidden springs, such as Balmorhea, where endemic and unique pupfish live, which are represented in the map among other animal and plant species. The drawing shows the presence of another rare fish—an endangered eyeless catfish recently encountered in a deep limestone cave at the Amistad National Recreation Area near Del Rio. These blind catfish inhabit the Edwards-Trinity Aquifer, a massive underground body of water that traverses both Texas and Mexico.

Amid the rich biodiversity of the Chihuahuan Desert, the Trans-Pecos, and along the Rio Grande, the drawing illustrates Indigenous and settler landmarks that represent diverse relationships with the land that continue to collide today. The sacred and prophetic millenary pictographs of Paint Rock, Hueco Tanks, Seminole Canyon or Meyers Springs, are depicted alongside the Permian Basin, the McDonald Observatory, the Falcon dam, La Boquilla dam, and the binational Amistad dam built on these bodies of water. The moon phases and the River of Stars (the Milky Way) on the upper part of the drawing speak about Carrizo Comecrudo conceptions of time and the afterlife, while other vignettes render the processes of religious colonization, Manifest Destiny, and westward expansion; the cattle, agriculture, and oil industries; and ongoing humanitarian and ecological catastrophes at the border.

7. *Measuring the Immeasurable*, 2020

Land surveying tools and artifacts

All of the objects in *Measuring the Immeasurable* are tools used to measure and map land. To measure means to delimit, to reduce. Exactitude and perfection is opposed to looseness, wrongness, or roughness. This work invokes questions such as: What is the exactitude of a science that reduces the land to straight lines, numbers, and economical value? What is missed or lost through this process? Whose rights are forgone when this happens? What are the rights of Grandmother Earth and of the non-human beings that live above or below the surface? *Measuring the Immeasurable* opens onto these questions and suspends these measuring objects in mid-air, floating above our heads like a collection of useless relics.

Courtyard

8. *Halving and Quartering*, 2020

Survey flags, stakes, tape, spray paint

*Please take care to avoid treading on this piece.

U.S. Western territories were split into sections to facilitate the sale of land. This system divided states into township grids of six square miles, which were further divided into sections of one square mile segments, and then into fractions of sections. The townships were intended to be sold whole, or in lots, for the price of one dollar per acre. The Land Survey System was an organized and profitable structure fundamental to the occupation and privatization of Indigenous lands during U.S. Westward Expansion starting in the early 1800s. The fact that 95% of Texas is private land is testimony to the power of this system.

What is known as the U.S. Westward Expansion was a designed process of land appropriation, profit, and settlement that displaced most tribes into reservations. The government's call for efficient distribution of lands meant that Indigenous people were forced to abandon their ancestral territory, while settlers were promised individual land ownership and economic opportunity through the Homestead Act & Process. Field surveyors were instrumental to the process of documenting and mapping the lands prior to being sold. No towns or cities were platted, no railroads, canals, irrigation channels, roads constructed or mines developed without them.

Halving and Quartering renders a map of Marfa and the surrounding landscape in the language of contemporary forms of surveying with color-coded flags and tape. The grid division highlights the implementation of square townships, sections, and segments plotted to privatize land, while flags point to the current path of natural resources. These color-coded flags denote the presence of so-called "utilities," with blue indicating waterways; yellow denoting oil and gas pipelines; and black and white flags representing railroads. The installation's title refers to the repeated partitioning of sections into smaller and smaller squares, illustrating the past and present use of Indigenous lands in Texas, first by profitable division, and second by the extraction of natural resources.

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Free and open to the public
Gallery hours are Thursday-Sunday, 12-6PM
Reservations are required for admission
Book an appointment at ballroommarfa.org/visit

This exhibition traveled to the Visual Arts Center (VAC) at The University of Texas at Austin in September 2021 and to the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at The University of Texas at El Paso in January 2022. The VAC presentation was organized by MacKenzie Stevens, Director, and the Rubin Center for the Visual Arts presentation was organized by Kerry Doyle, Director.

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And to our friends at the A. Michael Powell Herbarium, Sul Ross State University; Astronomical Photographic Plate Collection, Harvard College Observatory; The Blackwell School Alliance; La Calera Chapel Foundation; Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe of Texas; Cave Without a Name; International Boundary and Water Commission, Amistad Dam; Marfa Public Radio; The University of Texas McDonald Observatory; National Butterfly Center; The Paisano Hotel; Permian Basin Petroleum Museum; Rattlers and Reptiles; Shumla Archeological Research and Education Center; Shurley Ranch; Texas Bison Association; Texas Parks and Wildlife; Theater Department, Sul Ross State University; Two Rivers Camp; The Witte Museum; and to the following organizations within The University of Texas at Austin: Billie L. Turner Plant Resources Center; Herpetology & Ichthyology Biodiversity Collections; Texas Archeological Research Laboratory; and the Visual Arts Center.

