

Time and Place: Speaking Through the Arts

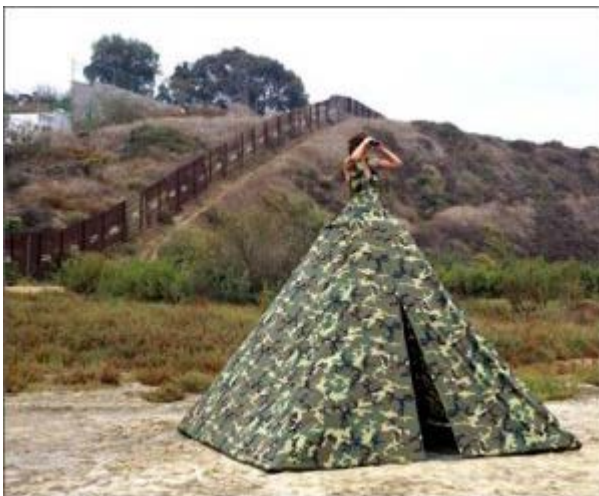
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Time and Place: Speaking Through the Arts

The College of Humanities and the Arts is thrilled that Professor Robin Lasser has been awarded a Eureka Fellowship for 2019. Sponsored by the Fleishhacker Foundation, Eureka Fellowships support projects by Bay Area artists. Unlike many monetary awards, the Fellowship is not restricted to a specific project, allowing artists more freedom to pursue the work they want to create to make a difference in the world.

Joining the ranks of those Bay Area artists who have been awarded the Fellowship presents a unique distinction. "I'm really grateful and honored," Lasser states. "Some of the other awardees, like Guillermo Gómez-Peña, I have personally admired for most of my career as an artist. So I feel like I'm in great company." The upcoming Fellowship presents Lasser with an opportunity to continue doing what she does best — making art that explores issues of identity, culture, and borders. By addressing topics through artistic means, Lasser allows people to connect with the larger issues around them, giving them more intimate glances into stories from around the world.

Lasser's work focuses on time and place, the movement and flow of human migration, and the traces that are left behind when people migrate. Her art is characterized by an interdisciplinary, collaborative process that encourages viewers to participate in the creation of art. *Dress Tents* provides one example of Lasser's typical process. This ongoing series is a collaboration with Adrienne Pao, a former SJSU graduate student who currently teaches at the Academy of Arts in San Francisco. Built for a specific place, the Tents serve as social sculptures, combining photography and architecture, as well as fashion and performance art.



One such sculpture, [Ms. Homeland Security](#), was built and performed by Lasser herself at the border between San Diego and Tijuana, a place which holds specific significance to Lasser, who was raised in San Diego. Visitors who happened by the sculpture were invited into the tent itself, which contained only an army cot. Lasser explained, "If you're a visitor, you're encouraged to do graffiti on the cot, prompted by the question: 'How do you feel about border issues?'" Sometimes people answered that question around their own identity and sexuality, and where that border lies, and others dealt directly with the scene at hand — the

border between Mexico and the United States. All the dress tents are created for a particular place, and they playfully and open-endedly prompt all of us to engage in our own reactions to the geopolitics of place.”

In another collaboration, this time with SJSU artist G. Craig Hobbs, Lasser produced *Migratory Cultures*, a project that uses large-scale video in public spaces to celebrate and share unique stories of migration. Iterations of this project have been presented around the Bay Area, including onto the San José Museum of Art in July of 2016. Most recently, the project has gone global as Lasser and Hobbs traveled to India to work with students from the Srishti Institute to create six installations in the Bangalore metro station. Those whose stories were being told were closely tied to the metro station, as they worked there in an effort to better their lives. “It was an honor to be able to map and project their stories onto the station itself, and to have those that labor at the station be celebrated and have their voice heard,” Lasser said.

“The students at [Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology](#) are much like our students at SJSU,” Hobbs elaborated. “They are global citizens, and are remarkably talented young artists, representing the future of India. The students were committed to working with us as international visiting faculty, but also as young artists willing to work diligently as collaborators to make sure our project presented in the [Art in Transit Festival of Stories](#) exhibition at Cubbon Park Metro station was a resounding success.” *Migratory Cultures* is to be exhibited again both locally, in San Francisco, as well as internationally, in Goa, India at the *Story of Space* Festival in 2017. “Every single person who migrates has a story. As artists we are interested in hearing and sharing those stories as an antidote to the fear, xenophobia, and emerging strains of fervent nationalism.”



Lasser is currently working on creating a project entitled *Project Iceships: Love Letters in the Time of Climate Change*. Speaking to the all-encompassing phenomena that is climatic change, *Project Iceships* aims to bring a monumental issue to a scale that people can relate to by asking students and members of the community to draft love letters to the Earth. Lasser elaborated, pointing out, “When we love, ultimately we care. So if we thought about the Earth and everything on it as a place we love, and about creatures that we care about, this brings this issue, which is so large and so scary for so many of us, one step closer. Then we’re provided an opportunity to look towards it, and reflect upon it, and potentially make the changes that we all need to make as a global race in order to continue the human presence on this Earth as we understand it now.”

Like much of her art, *Project Iceships* provides a space for audience members to collaborate in the creation of art. The nature of the art, and the act of co-production, opens an internal space for reflection, compassion, and love. Lasser’s generous approach to her art reflects her fundamental belief that art can bring people together in ways that promote social change. “Ultimately I think when we share each other’s stories, it’s like walking a mile in somebody else’s shoes. It’s almost impossible not to relate to them differently than if we had never sat down at a dinner table with them and shared a meal. And that meal is their story.”