ARTLINES

Women's Caucus for Art • 2019 Summer Edition

Liberal Democracy and Social Practice

The essays in this edition of Artlines reflect ideas the authors presented at the Women's Caucus for Art's Liberal Democracy and Social Practice panel during the College Art Association annual conference in New York City in February 2019. To open the panel, I defined the fraught and over-used term liberal democracy as a form of democratic government determined by the free will of the people. In a liberal democracy the rule of law limits the exercise of political power. The government is expected to protect free speech and human dignity, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, political beliefs, religion, or socio-economic status. As a child, I mistakenly thought that because liberal democracy was the UN worldview, it was the universally accepted view of how a government ought to be run. Today this is hardly the case.

Nationalism, authoritarianism, and reactionary politics—all anethema to human rights, because they are variously fueled by xenophobia, those seeking power, and racism—have only escalated in recent years. Examples include the rigged re-election of President Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, the swell of support in Brazil for the authoritarian Jair Bolsonaro who lacks concern for indigenous people and their rain-forest habitats, and Angela Merkel's tenuous handle on power, given her generous views on immigration. I could name many more.

As the UN so eloquently explained over 70 years ago when making their Universal Declaration of Human Rights—people are not born with human rights—for example the right to a fair wage and the ability to care for themselves. Human rights are aspirational goals that we must work hard to

support and defend. To say they are inalienable is to deny that on a daily basis, governments strip their citizens, and even more often, their enemies and outsiders, of basic human rights. In an ideal world, we look to government to protect our rights, but history and reality tell a much harsher story. While governments are often reluctant to be accountable for their historic transgressions, art activists like our panelists—Karen Frostig, H. Uzunkaya, elin o'Hara slavick, and Michele Jaquis—make these connections explicit. As you will see from their essays, these artists practice a form of social documentary art.

In cases where liberal democracy broke down, each considers:

Who was a victim?
What happens when we forget to remember?
What do we accomplish by reigniting memory and expanding our imagination?

Susan M. King, PhD
Faculty, MFA Program, Laguna College of Art and Design

A transcript of the panel session is available from the College Art Association. The session titled Liberal Democracy and Social Practice *was held Friday, February 15, 8:30 AM.*

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WOMEN'S CAUCUS for ART

The mission of the Women's Caucus for Art is to create community through art, education and social activism.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO:
Recognizing the contributions of women in the arts
Providing women with leadership opportunities and professional development
Expanding networking and exhibition opportunities for women
Supporting local, national and global art activism
Advocating for equity in the arts for all

The Vienna Project and its Sequel in the Midst of a Major Political Upset: Adaptations and Surprises

by Karen Frostig

Public memorials are fresh forums for stimulating public discourse about national narratives, framed by conversations about patriotism, collective memory and the meaning of citizenship. My work as a memory artist and art activist in Vienna and Riga grows out of my history as granddaughter of Holocaust victims. I also hold dual citizenship in Austria.

I conceived the *Vienna Project* in 2013, and it became an ambitious, interactive, multimedia, yearlong temporary memorial project, funded by Austria's liberal, social democratic government. The *Vienna Project* was the first naming memorial in Vienna dedicated to multiple groups of persecuted Austrian victims, murdered between 1938-1945. I began with stencil sprays at 38 sites and institutions complicit with Nazism, located in 16 districts where crimes of aggression, exclusion and humiliation and acts of rescue took place under National Socialism. This project dispelled Austria's longstanding myth of claiming to be "Hitler's first victims." Closing ceremonies occurred at Austria's National Library at the Hofburg palace. *The Naming Memorial* in the outer courtyard followed, displaying more than 85,000 names of murdered victims from seven different victim groups, using different fonts to signify their various affiliations.

In 2015, I developed plans for a permanent naming memorial project situated at Austria's War Memorial at the Hofburg Palace. I hoped to work with Vienna's new House of History Museum (also at the Hofburg Palace) to produce a naming memorial that would replicate interactive aspects of *The Vienna Project* with digitized lenses. Lenses would assist visitors searching for names and choosing to access biographical data. The lenses were meant to remind users that perspective-taking is a personal matter. The lenses became a precursor to thinking about Augmented Reality lenses, which were slowly appearing in museum settings.

In 2017, Austria elected a conservative, right-wing government. The government immediately reduced the budget and downsized the House of History into a temporary exhibition. Standing in the courtyard of the Hofburg Palace on March 15, 2018, a few feet from the balcony where Hitler delivered his infamous speech about Austria's annexation into Greater Germany, I watched the new Chancellor, Sebastion Kurz announce plans for a new naming memorial to honor 66,000 Austrian Jews murdered in the Shoah. It was at this moment, that Jewish memory in Vienna became overtly political, not in terms of Holocaust denial, but in the way that right wing politicians would solicit Jewish support, using Holocaust memory to discount current claims of their neo-Nazi affiliation. In fact, populist regimes in many parts of Europe patiently explain that their hostility is now directed at Moslem populations, representing the "real threat of anti-Semitism" for today's European Jews.

In the Chancellor's speech, he attempted to unify his base with a new trope, claiming "we are the perpetrators and the victims," aimed at appeasing the old hardliners, while inviting a new generation of Jews to join their ranks. This rewriting of history is presumably aimed at reviving the image of Austrians as legitimate victims.

Having invested three years of planning in a permanent memorial using advanced technology, I revisited an earlier idea for a memorial project in Latvia, where my grandparents were deported and murdered. I contacted historians I had met on previous trips to Riga, and shared my ideas for a new memorial project to be situated at the Jungfernhof concentration camp on the outskirts of Riga. Interest turned into progress. With partnerships and permissions in place, the project is advancing.

The project will be designed as a site specific, blackened steel vertical memorial box that is paired with a museum-based model, enhanced with AR and X-Reality technologies. Victims' names will be engraved onto the panels and animated with recovered artifacts. The inner space will house four videos projected onto interior screens, telling four compelling stories about the deportations, the camp, the forests and post-war justice.

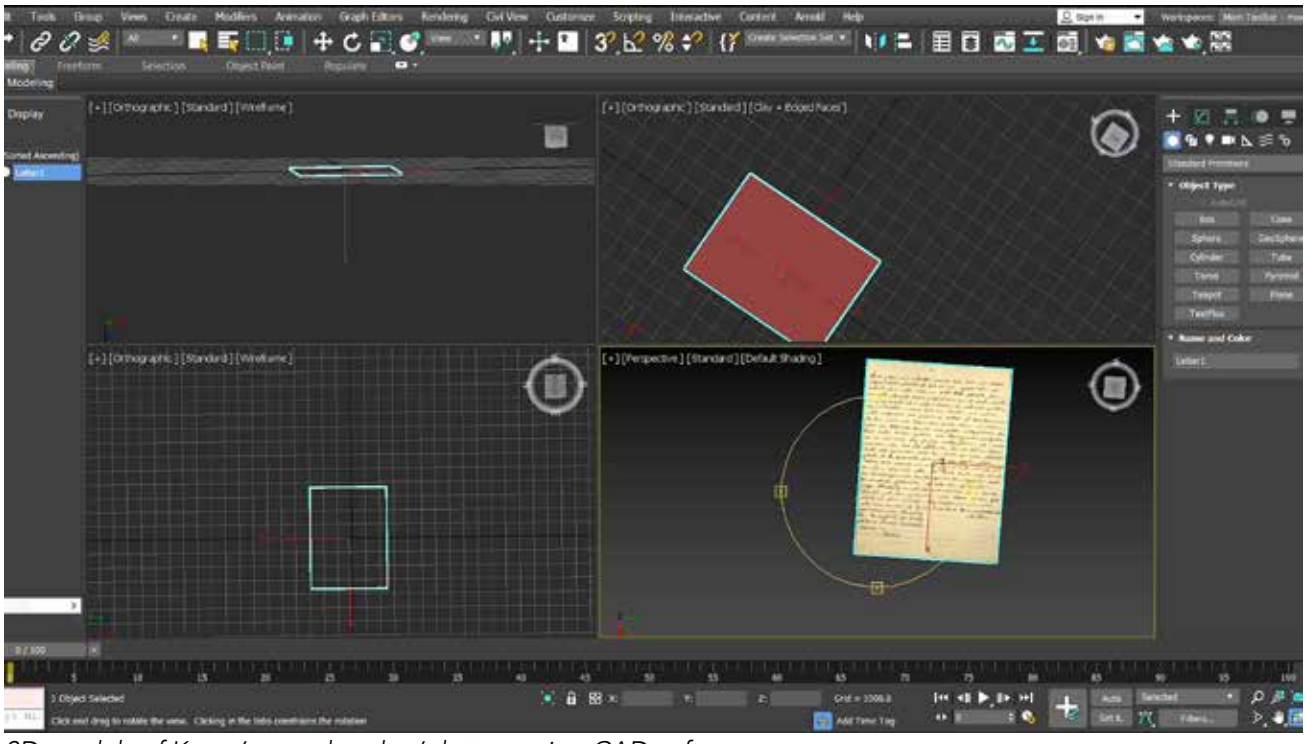
Working with H. at Brandeis University's MakerLab, we are combining gaming technologies with educational programming in an effort to stimulate new conversations about memory with the next generation. Beyond the videos, we plan to create two immersive environments with two narratives about the train station and the forest, designed to capture haunting experiences of survival before murder. These visual narratives will be paired with an audio tape. One will capture the mass confusion of disembarking from the cattle car transports. The second will be developed as a nighttime wooded environment, populated with shadowy figures whispering muted prayers in different tongues. Latvia's dark forests held competing narratives as sites of murder for thousands of victims and sites of refuge for the few survivors able to escape from neighboring camps. Using unity software, the two immersive environments will touch upon a variety of sensitive issues and address the underlying tensions between art, technology and history.

Karen Frostig with Elisabeth Wildling (2014). The Vienna Project's Naming Memorial *at National Library at Hofburg Palace*
(Photograph © Christian Wind, Vienna).

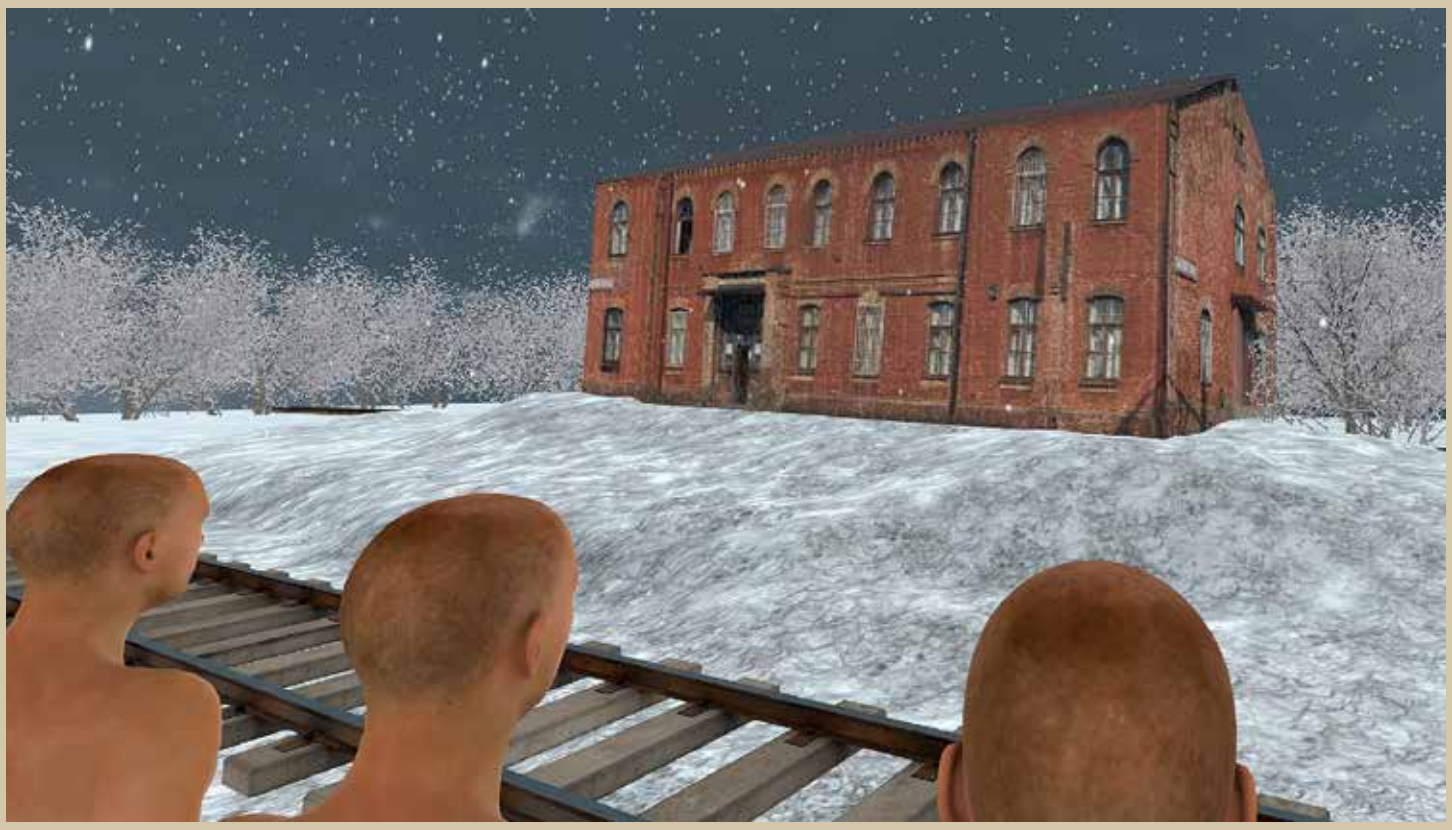
In coming to terms with difficult histories, it is important to not stray from the historic narrative. Too much imagination can lead to Holocaust denial. Using digital software, there are additional concerns at stake. For example, applying the appearance of ethnicity to stock digital figures becomes a dangerous task, fraught with disingenuous choices. Inserting Semitic stereotypical details onto the non-descript faces and bodies of digital players raises ethical questions about cultural exploitation. We are mindful of the gap between real people experiencing real trauma and virtual players impersonating pain. Are these differences too vast and unregulated, too problematic and unconvincing, to choose VR as a responsible medium for historic narration? Can these tensions be resolved through advances in technology? Do these kinds of screen encounters with the past have the surreal capacity to instill in viewers the actual terror, fatigue, hunger and vile stench victims experienced? Can this be the next step in authenticating victims' experiences? Must we rethink the goals of representation with the goals of remembrance? Are "Never Again" deterrents or "this could happen to me" scenarios still viable with new media in the 21st century? Do we also need to construct a new rationale for representing the past? These are just some of the challenges that we hope to address in the *Locker of Memory* memorial at Jungfernhof.

by H. Uzunkaya

To add to what Karen has stated about the project, to show events as accurately as possible, we need to render our subjects with as much realistic detail as possible. While this is relatively easy with scans of objects, like a letter from Karen's grandmother, it becomes much more difficult when creating characters. For example, Karen asked me to make a group of Jewish people. Each must appear as a unique individual, including the clothing and aspects of the animation, a very tedious and graphics card intensive task. Adding to the challenge, Virtual Reality stock characters look completely different from Jewish people from that era. During her last visit, Karen took pictures of the surrounding area. The lighting and shadows from that real location were difficult to turn into simulated textures. In Photoshop, I needed to distort the images so that they would look more realistic in Virtual Reality. For this project every detail needs attention and care, especially the characters.



3D models of Karen's grandmother's letters using CAD software.



Model of the Skirotava train station in Virtual Environment with stock characters.

Karen Frostig, PhD *is an interdisciplinary public memory artist, writer, activist and Associate Professor at Lesley University's Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, teaching "Trauma, Memory and Public Art," "Art Activism in the Community," and "Interactive New Media." Karen is also a Resident Scholar at Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Center.*

Hazal (H.) Uzunkaya *is a Research Technology Specialist at Brandeis University, specializing in Extended Reality and Brain Computer Interface. She is from Istanbul, Turkey and has worked as a translator for Asahi Shimbun in conflict area in Turkey before finishing her Neuroscience degree. While H. was a student worker at Brandeis University, she was an essential member of the team that founded the MakerLab.Today she is the service coordinator and oversees the day to day operations of the space, as well as running the Maker in Residence and Community Volunteer programs.*

Bombing Liberally to Destroy Possibilities

by elin o'Hara slavick

I will address two projects: *Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography*, a monograph of drawings of places the United States has bombed (with a foreword by Howard Zinn and essay by Carol Mavor) and *After Hiroshima*, a monograph of cyanotypes of artifacts from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum archive (with an essay by James Elkins).

The first drawing I did in the bomb series was of Baghdad. I was in Fayetteville, NC—home to one of the largest military bases, Fort Bragg—making photographs for anthropologist Catherine Lutz's book *Homefront* when I heard that Clinton would bomb Baghdad again. I had to respond in protest. The drawing took as its reference a newspaper map showing the targets hit during the first 24 hours of the first Gulf War in 1990. During that war, the U.S. dropped 177 million pounds of bombs on the people of Iraq. In 2004, the British medical journal *The Lancet* reported that up to 100,000 civilians had died as a result of the war.

Having grown up remembering Hiroshima Day in my town square every August 6, I thought I knew everything. But I had never heard of the times we bombed ourselves. I never knew the U.S. did three underground nuclear tests in Alaska—tests 385 times more powerful than Hiroshima. Nor had I heard of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico and how the U.S. had dropped bombs there for five decades, including over 267 depleted-uranium tipped bombs. Vieques is contaminated with radioactivity that has contributed to a cancer rate twice the national average.

Zinn writes, "When you bomb a country ruled by a tyrant, you kill the victims of the tyrant. Since the ratio of civilian deaths to military deaths in war has risen sharply with each subsequent war of the past century (10% civilian deaths in WWI, 50% in WWII, 70% in Vietnam, 80-90% in Afghanistan and Iraq) and since a significant percentage of these civilians are children, then war is inevitably a war against children." Zinn wrote in *Hiroshima: Breaking the Silence*, "The atomic bomb Little Boy dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 turned into powder and ash, the flesh and bones of 140,000 men, women and children. Three days later, a second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki killed 70,000 people instantly."

I had no idea when I made a drawing of Hiroshima that I would go to Hiroshima years later. The first time I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, I did not make it past the first-floor room in which documentary films are shown. Shadows of plants, ladders and people burned onto surfaces stunned me, as did the footage of a little girl fanning the ashes of her cremated father in a desire to cool him.

Lone Blue Bottle, *cyanotype of an A-Bombed Bottle from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum archive, 22"x30", 2008*

In her essay "Blossoming Bombs," Carol Mavor compares my Hiroshima cyanotypes to the shadows produced by bodies as they ignited with the bomb. Mavor states, "Marguerite Duras, in her screenplay *Hiroshima mon amour*, has referred to these shadow images, like the famous nebulous silhouette of the unknown person who sat on the steps waiting for the Sumitomo Bank to open, only to vanish with the light of the bomb, as 'deceitful pictures.' Duras refers to the Hiroshima shadows as photographs on stone. And indeed, the Hiroshima photograms do conjure up photography's early days of shadow prints, not on stone, but on light sensitive paper, like Anna Atkins cyanotype poppy."

I was fortunate to have had access to materials in the Hiroshima archive so that I could register them visually, but I was bothered by the incalculable absence that these things mark. I was elated and disturbed by the appearance of the milky silhouette of a round canteen amid the deep cyan blue. I use these cyanotype exposures to make visible the unseen, to reveal the denied or hidden results of military campaigns, scientific studies, and nuclear power.

In Jim Elkins' essay, "On an Image of a Bottle," he writes of my work, "Making images of ladders, bottles, combs, and leaves is a way of saying: I cannot represent what happened to people in Hiroshima, because I cannot re-present it as art. It's not that the people who suffered could not, cannot, or should not, be represented: it is that they cannot be re-presented in a fine art context. All that is left for art is to look aside, at other things, at surrogates, at things so ordinary and empty that they evoke, unexpectedly but intensely, the world of pain. I am not sure if this is ethically sufficient, but I think in this case it feels ethically necessary."

Grandchildren of Hiroshima is a cyanotype of my friends in Hiroshima. They took a break from their rehearsal of the play *Grandchildren of Hiroshima* to make this on the banks of a river once full of corpses. We all cried in the process. The mother is a third generation hibakusha (A-bomb survivor) and her twin daughters are fourth generation. They work against nuclear power and nuclear weapons and for peace. Thousands of people like these disappeared in a horrific burning and poisonous flash on August 6, 1945.

Grandchildren of Hiroshima, *cyanotype of 3rd and 4th generation Hibakusha (A-Bomb survivors), a mother and her twin daughters, Hiroshima, 90"x88", 2016*

elin o'Hara slavick *is a Professor of Studio, Theory and Visual Practice at UNC, Chapel Hill. Slavick has exhibited her work internationally, and her work is held in many collections, including the Queens Museum, The National Library of France, The Library of Congress and the Art Institute of Chicago. Slavick is the author of two monographs* - Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography *with a foreword by Howard Zinn, and* After Hiroshima, *with an essay by James Elkins and a chapbook of surrealist poetry,* Cameramouth. *She has held artist residencies in Canwada, France and Japan. Her work has been featured in the* New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Images Magazine, FOAM, San Francisco Chronicle, Asia-Pacific Journal, Photo-Eye, *and* Actuphoto: Actualite Photographique, *among other publications.*

by Michele Jaquis

I was raised by the Ashkenazi Jews on my mother's side of the family, but share a last name with and look like the French-Canadian Catholics on my father's side. As a third generation American, whose mere existence is predicated on the fact that my maternal great-grandparents escaped Eastern Europe before the Nazis rose to power, I have always felt an affinity with those who have experienced migration, immigration and displacement. The first time I expressed this was during the 2006 May Day March for Immigration Rights in downtown Los Angeles, during which I held a poster with an image of my Bubbie Pauline Zuckerberg proclaiming "My great-grandmother came here from Russia on a Fake Passport."

We Are All Americans: Countering Xenophobia and Fostering Empathy through Documentary and Social Practice

In the semester during which Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States, many of my students were angry, or worried about their student visa status, or their DACA status. And many of them were spending time going back and forth between LAX airport and campus so that in between classes they could translate for the people who were stuck due to the Muslim travel ban.

One of the courses that I teach at Otis College of Art and Design is "Community Radio," which partners with KXLU and KLMU, the student run radio stations at Loyola Marymount University. The course addresses several questions: How can we engage an invisible audience through sound? How can we disrupt the control and dissemination of mainstream information and cultural content? How can community radio give voice to those whose stories are not told through mainstream media outlets?

While sitting around the studios of KXLU the students discussed what they wanted to do about all this and collectively generated the following assignment: First they would collect a range of audio files: songs to set stuff on fire to, sounds of war, interviews about how people at Otis were feeling, and international music to build bridges. Students then worked in teams of three to select and edit sounds together into audio postcards that expressed their reactions to the events since Trump's inauguration.

In the following year (late Spring 2018) I began recording conversations about how family stories are passed down from generation to generation and what it means to be American in the contexts of multiculturalism, immigration, military service, black lives matter, white privilege, and indigeneity.

Michele Jaquis, Fake Passport, *inkjet print and tape on cardboard, May Day March for Immigration Rights, downtown Los Angeles, CA 2006.*

Michele Jaquis, We Are All Americans, podcast series, *duration variable, 2018 - present*

This was inspired by the fact that my Russian great-grandfather gained his US citizenship after serving in the US Army and my Lithuanian (or Austrian, or Russian, or Latvian--depending on who is telling the story) great-grandmother entered the US on fake passport. It started as an oral history workshop and has turned into a podcast series called *We Are All Americans*. Season one with twelve episodes was completed in December 2018 and season two will launch in June 2019.

We Are All Americans seeks to counter xenophobia through humanizing those who have experienced discrimination, migration, immigration and displacement, while also recognizing the complexity of the term "American," with regard to all nations in the Americas. Stories include those of an Iraqi refugee who came to the US on a student visa and later gained political asylum; two different second generation Americans whose grandfathers were Guerilla fighters in the Philippines before being recruited by the US military during WWII; a Salvadoran-Honduran-American who came to the US while in utero as their mother and siblings crossed the border on foot; a gender-non-conforming artist with mixed European, Native American and Mexican heritage who was adopted and raised by a Jewish family; and an African-American mother who struggles to tell her daughter how their ancestors were brought to the U.S. as slaves.

I continue this work as I am pulled between simultaneous impulses to hide my and my son's Jewish ancestry in case the evangelical Republicans decide to ship us all to Israel to start the second coming, and wanting to fulfill the white supremacists' fears by proclaiming my Jewishness and taking in every refugee and migrant that I can.

Instead I create art with a sense of urgency and the hope that my efforts may foster empathy and compassion.

***Michele Jaquis** is an artist who combines strategies of conceptual art, documentary and social practice to examine the complexities within personal and social relationships, identity, language and communication, resulting in a range of image-based, object-based, time-based and engagement-based projects. She is also an Associate Professor in the Creative Action Program and Director of Interdisciplinary Studies at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, CA.*

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February 13-16, 2020

The 2020 WCA Annual Conference on the theme "Intersectionality" will be held at Columbia College, Chicago. Highlights include a juried National Exhibition and the Lifetime Achievement Awards ceremony and ticketed gala reception. Days will be filled with Chapters Council and Caucus meetings, workshops and panels, and networking opportunities. From the convenient location on Michigan Avenue, you can explore great museums and galleries, enjoy exceptional dining and drinks, and take in world-class architecture and music.

Please join us for the Lifetime Achievement Awards celebration on Saturday, February 15 at Columbia College, Chicago. The 2020 honorees are Joyce Fernandes, Michiko Itatani, Judy Onofrio, Alison Saar, and Judith Stein. The President's Award for Art & Activism will be announced in September.