

Ana Teresa Fernández: Were You Invited?

“ I feel it is important for these clumsy cultural exchanges to be made; they open us up to new things and widen our view of the world and all it holds. ”

by **Chloe King**



Ana Teresa Fernández, *At the Edge of Distance* (2022)
Courtesy of the artist

VOL.7



On November second, I had the pleasure of immersing myself into the world of Ana Teresa Fernández during her lecture “Were You Invited?” The lecture was organized by CCA’s Architecture Division as part of the Architecture Lecture Series, and CCA@CCA as part of the Deborah and Kenneth Novack Creative Citizens Series. Seats filled and the lights dimmed. Introductions were made. Then, as Fernández took to the podium with a palpable air of confidence and casual kindness, the atmosphere within the lecture hall immediately transformed into one of anticipation and warmth. With contagious enthusiasm, she invited the audience to form a human wave, transforming the lecture hall into a sea of laughter, arm-flailing, and resonant “woos” echoing through the Nave. This spontaneous and lighthearted moment set the tone for an energetic lecture.

Amongst the giggling, now energized crowd, Fernández dove into her lecture. She spoke first of her interest in disrupting the male dominated canon of painting as well as more specifically, the Mexican muralist canon through a process she described as “performance documentation.” For Fernández, this is a reflexive process in which she paints or otherwise documents her experience making work that is extremely specific to the locations she travels through. Oftentimes the end result of her performances is a physical piece that remains with the community it was made for. The performance documentation is used to produce paintings, video, and text that is most typically shown within a gallery setting. Fernández cited her interest in painting’s ability to play with our literal and conceptual perspective and had a strong interest in utilizing historical architecture and pre-existing landscapes as key elements in her production process.

One example of this was her piece *Destroying the Border*, where Fernández painted a section of the border wall to match the ocean behind it. By essentially painting an optical illusion via trompe-l’œil style painting she proposes an alternate space or world without borders. I really enjoyed her mix of social practice, performance and painting in *Destroying the Border*. Fernández really pushes the boundaries of painting but also directly engaged with the community around her as she made the piece—inviting anyone who passed by a chance to paint, to destroy the border with her. Fernández spoke of a particular

instance in which a Border Patrol officer took up a paintbrush alongside her, which I found incredibly impactful.

What initially stood out to me about Fernández was her ability to dive into communities as a “stranger” or “outsider.” Fernández also showed us an exhibition of hers taking place in Haiti from 2010 titled *NanMitaNan: Haiti*. Each piece in this body of work is made from waste (plastic containers and metal cans) that Fernández found and collected in the streets of Haiti. She then sculpted these pieces of plastic into small figures that are light from behind in the dark gallery to create larger shadows on the walls. The figures in these ad hoc shadow boxes are all members of the Haitian community that Fernández encountered during her time there. The exhibition felt vaguely anthropological because of the observational nature in which Fernández made this work; however, her intentions were very clearly to make some kind of homage to the community that she had resided just outside of for the duration of her artistic residency in Haiti.

I think this kind of community work or social practice is really difficult to pull off with success due to Fernández residing entirely outside of this Haitian community. I’m still uncertain as to whether or not Fernández was successful in these more experimental works. There is always something incredibly uncomfortable, or perhaps implicitly colonial in the targeted observation or surveillance of others, especially from someone who is receiving some kind of monetary gain (in this case, a small residency stipend). On the other hand, I feel it is important for these clumsy cultural exchanges to be made; they open us up to new things and widen our view of the world and all it holds. My struggle with this body of work in particular is that the end result did not feel much like an exchange, but more so a documentation of a community from someone who has very limited interior access to said community. Fernández’s practice brought up a lot of questions as to whether she is speaking *for* or speaking *with* the communities she chooses to engage with and make art about. When asked about her stance on this during the Q&A portion of the lecture Fernández gave a bit of a non answer, stating that she was always excited to collaborate with others, but that the end result is always fairly unpredictable.

As Fernández’s lecture came to a close she mentioned that the work shown so far was predominantly work that existed

outside of the gallery and was much more experimental than her paintings— which are typically shown in a gallery setting. I left Fernández’s lecture still engaged with the larger conversation that this body of work puts forth and was quickly absorbed into a larger peer to peer discussion about the politics of collaboration as we all left the auditorium. Overall, Fernández’s lecture was engaging, challenging, and thought provoking and I’m interested to see where her collaborative process leads her.

Chloe King (b.1999, lives and works in Oakland) is a multidisciplinary artist, who works in between painting and photography. King received her B.F.A in 2021 from Cornish College of the Arts and is currently a Dual Degree MFA + MA Candidate at California College of the Arts.