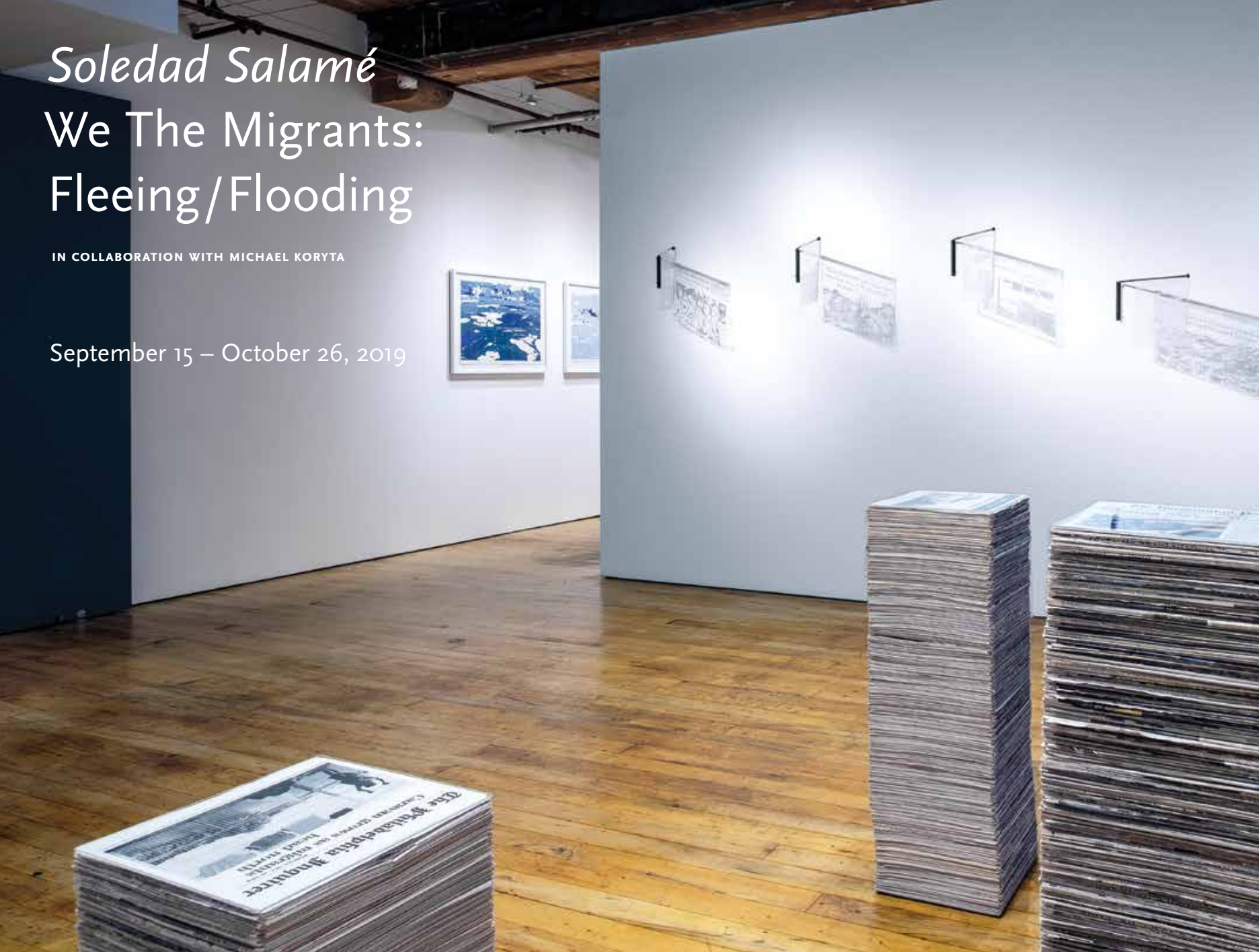


Soledad Salamé We The Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding

IN COLLABORATION WITH MICHAEL KORYTA

September 15 – October 26, 2019





NEWSPAPER,
ALMOST TRANSPARENT, 3 & 4
2019
Laser engraved and
sandblasted folded glass
12 x 12 x 12 inches each

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PORTIONS OF THIS EXHIBITION WILL TRAVEL TO
NAC Galería de Arte Contemporáneo
Santiago, Chile
April 2020.

Transart Foundation for Art and Anthropology
Houston, TX
September 2020.

**GOYA
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Soledad Salamé: *Precarious Work*

Ksenia Nouril

“*It is always easier to deny reality than to watch your worldview get shattered.*”

Naomi Klein¹

Climate change deniers beware. There is no escaping its reality – rising temperatures, surging sea levels, extinction of flora and fauna, mass migrations of people – in the work of Chilean-born, Baltimore-based artist Soledad Salamé. For decades, Salamé has focused on environmental issues by making the landscape and its increasingly depleted natural resources the subjects of her work. She has adopted as well as adapted scientific data, such as satellite imagery, into her prints, sculptures, and installations that address a range of global and local concerns from the deforestation of the Amazon to the erosion of the Mid-Atlantic coastline. Brought together under the title *We the Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding*, her recent works foreground the human element in climate change. This is a logical pivot for the artist as we are living in the Anthropocene, a new geological age dominated by human impact. The choices we make have immediate and indelible effects on quotidian experience.

As an artist and an activist, Salamé takes this responsibility very seriously in her conscientious use of both form and content through technique, material, and subject matter. *We the Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding* presents a multi-faceted portrait of our “precarious life,” which feminist philosopher Judith Butler describes as “a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”² Butler’s precarity is posited on our ability to recognize difference as well as affinity between the *Self* and the *Other*. While precarity can breed bias within the

NEWSPAPER,
ALMOST TRANSPARENT, 1
2019
Laser engraved and
sandblasted folded glass
12 × 12 × 12 inches



1. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 37.

2. Judith Butler, “Performativity, Precarity And Sexual Politics,” *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 4, 3 (September – October 2009): ii. This text is a transcription of a lecture based on her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006).



NEWSPAPER,
ALMOST TRANSPARENT, 2
2019
Laser engraved and
sandblasted folded glass
12 x 12 x 12 inches

gendered, racist, and classist hierarchies of our contemporary society, it can also be a driving force of unity. Something is precarious in so far as it depends on something else. If we – as communities, nations, and inhabitants of this planet – band together, we can support one another and garner the power to instate change. With such aspirations in mind, precarity is both the subject *and* the object driving Salamé’s work.

In recent years, the figure has taken on a greater presence in the artist’s practice, which has expanded with projects concerned with the 2015 death of Freddie Gray, a twenty-five-year-old African American man in the custody of the Baltimore Police Department during his demise, and the 2017 Women’s March on Washington. Reflecting on this period, the artist cites that it was “hard to continue the environmental work” when we must “defend democracy.”³ Heavily influenced by current events, Salamé continues this mode of expression in more recent prints and sculptures, which appropriate source imagery from the front pages of major metropolitan newspapers. Stacked at various heights, newspapers collected by Salamé over the course of several years are recycled as sculptural pedestals for high contrast black-and-white prints subtly enhanced by delicate patches of embroidery. Are these the pillars that uphold society? Or are they the bollards that protect but also separate us from each other and the world? Living in a state of emergency driven by counter-terrorist operations, Salamé’s work possesses multiple meanings.

We can trace the roots of this perceptible shift in her practice to several key events that mark the peaks and troughs of American democracy in the twenty-first century: the September 11, 2001 attacks, the hope embedded in the election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States, followed by the incessant and ongoing violations of human rights under the current President. Since the 2016 election, Salamé has traveled along the United States-Mexico border, where she has seen first-hand the effects of decisions made in Washington. The disparities between these disparate realities are shattering. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman makes a provocative parallel between the new global elite, including politicians, and migrants, writing that “[L]ike that elite, they [the migrants] are untied to any place, shifty, unpredictable. Like that elite, they epitomize the unfathomable ‘space of flows’ where the roots of the present-day precariousness of the human condition are sunk.”⁴ Whereas elites are

3. This is quoted from the author’s notes taken during a public conversation between Soledad Salamé and Jennie Hirsh. Entitled “Artist Perspectives with Soledad Salamé: Printmaking as a Democratic Medium,” it was organized by ArtTable in New York City on October 27, 2018.

4. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2004), 73-75.

protected, migrants are fully exposed, becoming targets for the larger population's displaced fears and anxieties.

The front pages of the newspapers are represented in the form of a laser printed and sandblasted sculpture comprising a folded sheet of unpigmented glass hung on a wall like a flag. When installed, each is tilted at a different angle and lit to project its text onto the wall. Their legibility is obscured through enlargement, which distorts both image and text, laying bare the impurities in the glass. Such glitches or interruptions in the composition echo the artist's earlier works, like *Gulf Distortions* (2011), which use barcodes as a visual metaphors for disasters, such as oil spills. Given Salamé's deep-seated interest in the environment, it is fitting that she would turn to work in glass, which is made by heating sand along with additives of lesser quantities to a temperature of over 2500°F, which permanently alter and modify the state of the material. Much like the planet, the artist describes her glass works as "strong but fragile" and finds beauty in the material's unpredictability and imperfection.⁵

The more overtly political works in *We the Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding* are complemented by a number of more nuanced, abstract, formally-driven compositions, which remain the foundation of Salamé's practice over the last three decades. *Antarctica, Ice*, and *Drought* are three spherical glass sculptures. They were hand-blown with the glass artist Tim McFadden and then sandblasted to create a double layer of texture and imagery. The inner layer comprises two colored glasses mixed to mimic the topography of floating ice while the outer layer adds a roughness to the underlying smoothness of each work. Salamé's choice of sandblasting evokes her deep roots in printmaking, as the pattern of Antarctic ice floes become the matrix impressed onto the surface of the crystalline glass. Together, they create depth, affording the viewer an aerial view of the landscape. Salamé heightens this perspective by mounting two of the three sculptures onto oval steel plates, which reference their cast of shadows. Intimate in scale, they poignantly remind us of how we hold the fate of the planet is in our hands.

⁵ Soledad Salamé in conversation with the author, June 8, 2019.



STACKS
2019
Embroidered prints
on Fabriano paper
Installation view

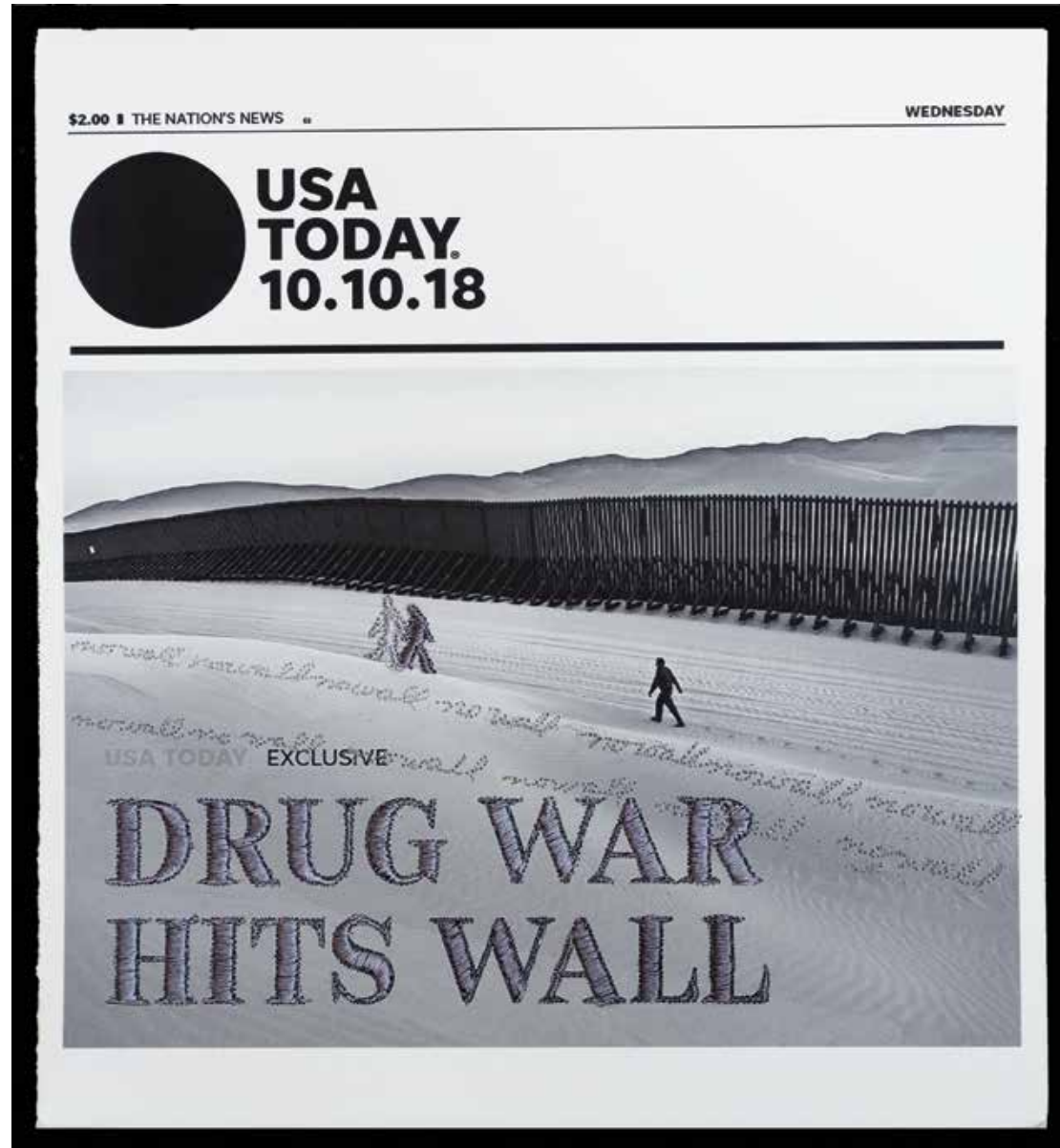


These glass table-top sculptures, along with her several silkscreens and fabric works, were inspired by her 2005 trip to the continent, where she spent a week engaging with the landscape alongside scientists and activists. While this is not the first time Salamé has been inspired by the Antarctic, it seems consequential that the production of these works coincided with a new and newsworthy study released in 2019, which found that Antarctic ice is melting six times faster than it did forty years ago. The planet, which has managed to exist for 4.543 billion years, is quickly disintegrating around us.

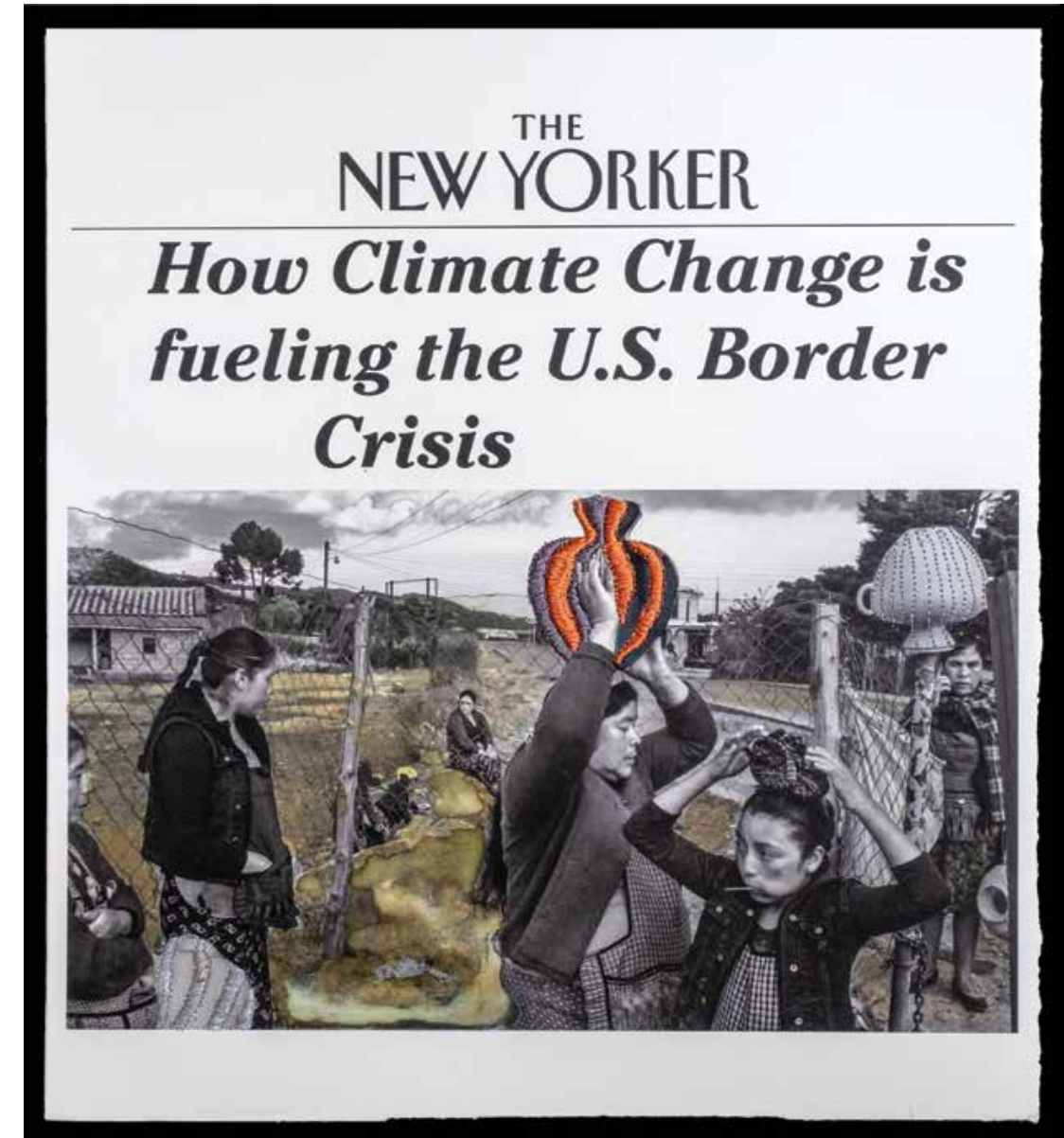
As an immigrant, a self-sustaining artist, and an advocate for social justice, Soledad Salamé embodies precarity, which she channels through her practice and into the works of *We the Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding*. This title serves not as a call to arms but to unity, as we all inevitably face the same future.

Ksenia Nouril is an art historian, curator, and writer specializing in global modern and contemporary art. Nouril is currently the Jensen Bryan Curator at The Print Center in Philadelphia. Previously, she worked at the Bruce Museum, Zimmerli Art Museum, and The Museum of Modern Art, where she co-edited and contributed to the book *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology* (2018). She holds a BA from New York University and an MA and PhD in Art History from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her writing is frequently published in exhibition catalogues and magazines, including *ARTMargins Online*, *The Calvert Journal*, and *OSMOS*.

LAYERED NEWS I
2019
Embroidered print
on Fabriano paper
12 x 12 inches



LAYERED NEWS II
2019
Embroidered print
on Fabriano paper
12 x 12 inches



Artist Interview: *July 2019*

with Jennie Hirsh

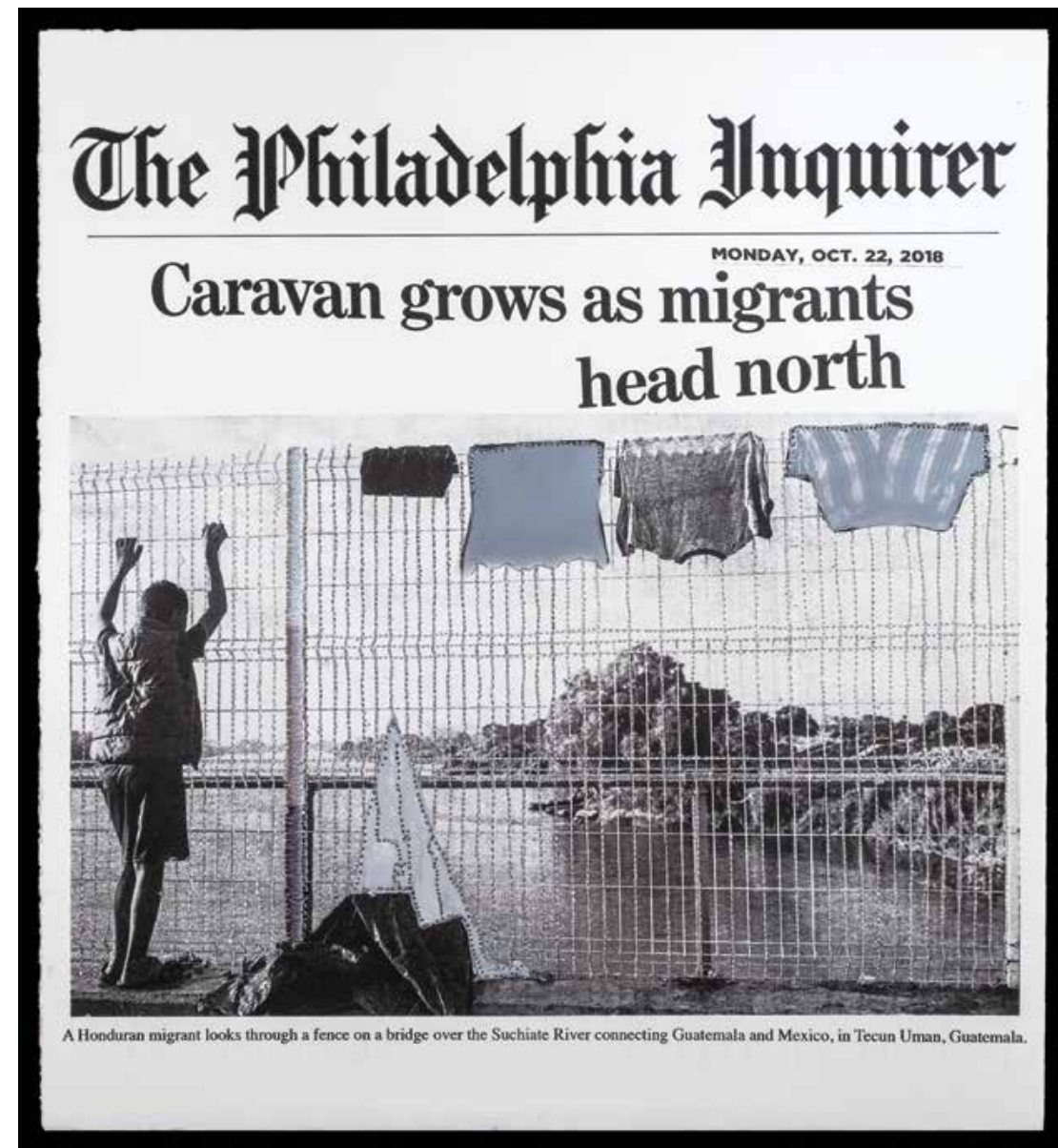
JENNIE HIRSH (JH): Soledad, I would like to begin by talking about the title of this show. At first glance, it feels both participatory and constitutional. How did you select it, and, more specifically, to whom does “we” refer?

SOLEDAD SALAMÉ (SS): It was really difficult to find the right title to connect migration with climate change. I am a migrant, like so many people in this country, so the “we” refers to all of us. Historically, people have migrated for myriad reasons. In my case, when I was eighteen, I migrated from Chile to Venezuela for political reasons, and I remember vividly how difficult it was for me to leave my country. My family was received with open arms, not cages.

JH: That makes a lot of sense. Can you say more about what we are fleeing from? And what flooding? Is this a reference to population along with global warming?

SS: Yes, I am playing on words here. I am thinking about the environmental flooding that has forced people to flee their home countries and, at the same time, about the “immigrants flooding” into “our country.”

JH: Let’s talk now about some of the shifts in your work. I am very excited about your installation practices and also emphasis on glass for this show. Can you talk about some of the advantages of working with the material? How do you see its qualities emerging in the aesthetic poetics as well as content of your work?





ss: Yes, glass has a relationship with transparency, an element that is sorely missing with the current administration. Working with the material's actual physical attributes proved to be quite challenging, but it was an opportunity to use a new medium to express concepts that I was exploring. Regarding advantages, well, in my relatively short experience, glass offers qualities that no other media provides despite the high level of difficulty involved in production. I have gained a lot of respect for the people that work with glass on a regular basis and appreciate what I have learned from them. You'll notice that there is also a lot of *distortion* projected where light is cast and shadows form: this recaptures and even resuscitates a specific moment in time as a kind of reminder of history.

JH: I can see that. Going further, can you talk about how both lies and truths can be "transparent" or "opaque"? How do these pieces allow you to think about the ways in which what we read and see (via mediated photographs) does and does not align with actual facts?

ss: So here we are dealing with the transparency of the glass, and, even though you cannot see the engraved news in the engraved glass, you are able see it on the wall where it plays with the idea of *distorted* news. I use my work to align with the facts presented to me. People have to make a choice about whether (and when) they agree with me (and not). By the way, I am not just pointing a finger at one entity; instead, I want the viewer to also consider the forms through which we encounter and digest information.

JH: For these newspaper works, how do you choose the headlines for the glass wall pieces as well as embroidered periodicals in the installation?

ss: For the glass wall pieces, I tried to focus on politically induced migration and climate change. And because they had to be changed graphically for projection, I wanted to print the newspaper images to appear as they were originally published in newspaper format with the appropriation of the image through embroidery or collage to highlight important elements.

JH: I see. Most of them hone in on difficult moments in contemporary history, with the exception, in my view, of Obama's being elected? Can you talk about why this is expressed as the only message of "hope"?

DROUGHT
2018
Sandblasted blown glass
and steel
8½ × 7 × 13 inches

ss: Obama's election and terms in office remain a beacon of joyful hope for this country, for the world really. For me, he is a symbol of integrity, transparency, vision, and, as he both articulated and embodied, hope. How do you not respond enthusiastically?

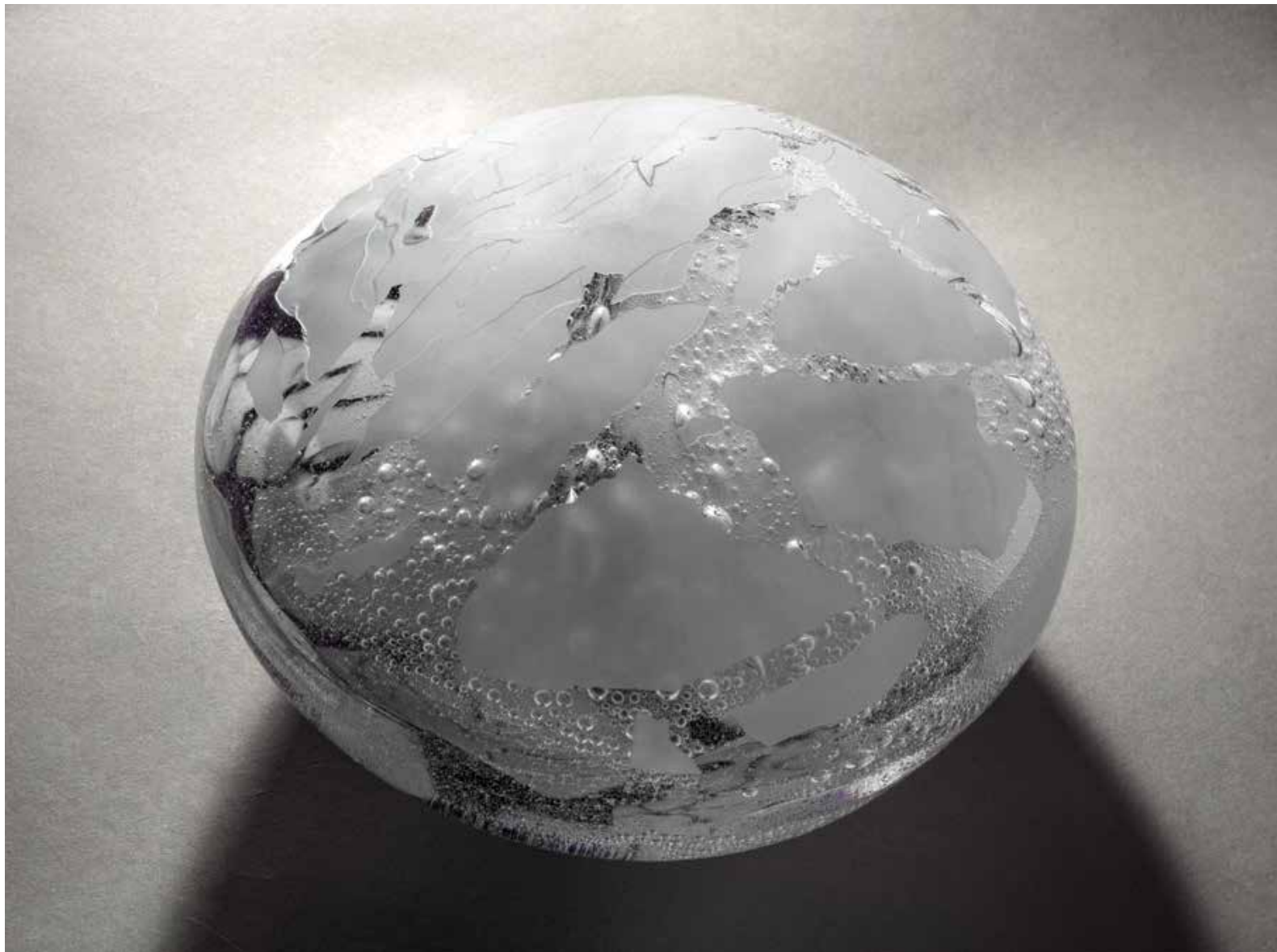
JH: Can you say more about the notion of media itself. You have engaged with local issues in the context of the tragic death of Freddie Gray in 2015, and then with the Women's March of January 2017, but, in both cases, you explored how those events appeared to you and those around you first-hand. For this latest body of work, you have turned to the language not of protester posters as captured by your own lens as well as those of close friends but, instead, by the media itself. Can you talk about that shift, both in terms of image and text?

ss: I wanted to show more than the physical signs – though they are wonderful – of protests; that said, one could consider newspapers a kind of sign, a situation. The reality in which we are living in the Trump era is alarming, a time when human rights and science, for instance, are so easily dismissed, granting unfettered power for personal gain to the few while willfully ignoring what I think of as the greater good. The media is also culpable, and what they focus on matters. They too can point a finger, but at what? This is an important time, when we may still be able to reverse the imminent consequences of what we have wrought. Many past civilizations have vanished. One example about which I often think is how deforestation collapsed the whole society of Easter Island and the similarities we are encountering today only on a *much grander global scale*.

JH: Yes, the stakes are higher than ever. I am interested in how this exhibition combines the face of the landscape with the face of the human subject, forcing the viewer to confront the human and not just the climatory face of migratory crises. Can you say more about addressing these two dimensions?

ss: I targeted migration through both sociopolitical and environmental aspects because what is coming will be a challenge for every nation in the world: The War on Natural Resources. I believe the Wall is not going to stop migration, as history has proven; self-preservation is a very powerful drive, and any rational person in dire circumstances will do what is necessary to stay alive. People move when they have to, and they take necessary chances.





JH: Can you comment on the ways in which even in light of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, a kind of ventriloquism-effect leaves speechless those individuals most directly affected by a crisis?

ss: Yes, we are not listening to people's voices; instead, we end up with an appropriation and displacement of voices. The media, social media, politicians, the legal system, ... Sometimes I wonder who are the parrots for whom. But it is easy to manipulate victims of crisis and duress or even just those that are generally disenfranchised into a kind of confused state of being.

JH: Sol, we have talked a lot over the years about your love of materials and the search to find the most appropriate process (or processes) for a given topic. How do you feel printmaking, sculpture, and fiber arts come together in this work?

ss: The medium is like a buffer zone. The concept of the work is most important, and it takes me a long time to figure out which materials to use to best highlight what I want to express. It is always a challenge to go in a different direction, but I am still engraving and printing, only on and through new surfaces with fabric, glass, and paper. How these materials individually and collectively push me in new directions always surprises me. That's one of the attractions. Paper, rock, scissors! (My husband and collaborator Michael Koryta has echoed these three words while watching me work!)

JH: What are some of the challenges and/or discoveries that you have encountered along the way in terms of these perhaps less forgiving materials?

ss: I am not a glass artist, but, as you know, I love experimenting with and embracing new materials. Blown glass was a serious challenge for me because of its unpredictability. I had a very specific vision for what I wanted, but temperature can dramatically change colors, design, and ideas. The best example is the piece called *Drought*: that was not what I expected, so that took me to words and engraving and this created a shadow *inside* the piece where I could read everything I wrote even if it was distorted. This led me to the inception of the newspaper glass pieces.

JH: Can you talk about what embroidery allows you to do to the surface of the objects as well as the topics with which they engage?

FRAGILE I
2005 / 2019
Drawing on mylar,
silk organza, embroidery
28½ × 15 inches

ss: Embroidery in Central America is an ancient tradition and represents their culture. It is not only decorative but also social, political, and environmental, as seen in mola works from South and Central America, and especially in Mexican textiles.

JH: When I look at these works, I see them in conversation with the work of artists ranging from Kara Walker, Jenny Holzer, and On Kawara to Alfredo Jaar, Robert Gober and the Yes Men. Can you share some of the artists that you see as relevant to these works, both in terms of their form and their content?

ss: These are all artists that I have watched with interest over the years, both for the messages they have delivered and for the activist energy that infuses their works. The simplicity of Holzer's text pieces and On Kawara's date paintings have provided wonderful models for me, reminding me of the importance of clarity and simplicity; Jaar, Gober, and the Yes Men have dealt directly with newspapers as a medium, and that too has been inspirational. My work engages with journalism too, but as a reader and spectator more than a generator. Walker of course has been so important for her incredibly astute use of shadow and projection, as well as paper, in raising consciousness about the ongoing trauma of the black body in this nation. Walker's incorporation of the silhouette within the moving image in media other than video has been critical in that I see my glass newspaper installations as similarly *in motion* with respect to the spectator who walks around them.

JH: Any others?

ss: In terms of photography, Emmet Gowin's aerial work in *Changing The Earth* has been incredibly important to me in recent years as I have considered mining, nuclear sites, and more in relation to topography. Matthew Ritchie's diverse installations that target the aftermath of flooding in a major metropolis like New York; when I traveled to MASS MoCA in North Adams, I was immediately drawn to the visual rhetoric of his mapping and diagramming in his *Proposition Player* show. And I discovered Christine Baumgartner's work after my *Gulf Distortion* series. I felt a deep affinity with her video stills that are visually similar to my own series.

JH: What do you see as the most pressing issues confronting us today? As a citizen of Baltimore? The u.s.? The world?





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WHITE IS BECOMING BLUE
2019
Silkscreen on silk organza
30 x 40 inches

ss: I don't think scale matters any more in this regard. We will all be confronted and impacted by a complex combination of socio-political, economic, and environmental events, along with how we as human beings handle them. I have spoken above about how my work addresses issues of this country and the world beyond it. However, I am invested most of all in thinking at the local level about how these issues can and should be addressed through public education and information. Opportunities in different categories, from neighborhood farming to technology, need to be greatly expanded. On a global scale, there are what seem to be obvious (yet overlooked) strategies: education, healthcare, and greater equality should and must be our priorities.

JH: Sol, your work calls our attention to issues that are so urgent and immediate. To me, these pieces and installations are both a wake-up call and a call-to-arms for action and empathy. How do you see them?

ss: Yes, climate change is urgent. Look what's happening with the deforestation in Brazil, or the large amounts of plastic being thrown in the ocean that is as big as some countries. I believe we are in a new and critical phase on this planet, and tragically people seem to be thinking very short term or remain in denial.

JH: What do you see next on the horizon?

ss: I will continue to be an advocate and engage in topics of human rights and environmental calls. I hope also to implement new artistic discoveries, through technological and more immediate, hands-on means. But how this will translate into specific works, I am not sure. It usually takes me three years to develop a significant volume of work. Hopefully, I will surprise myself and others.

JH: Well, Sol, as ever, it's been a pleasure talking with you about this new work, and I know I am not alone in saying that I look forward to seeing what comes next.

Jennie Hirsh (PhD, Bryn Mawr College) is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She has held postdoctoral fellowships at Princeton and Columbia Universities, as well as pre-doctoral fellowships from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, the u.s. Fulbright commission, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, and the Wolfsonian FIU. Hirsh has authored essays on artists including Giorgio de Chirico, Giorgio Morandi, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Yinka Shonibare, and Regina Silveira. She is co-editor, with Isabelle Wallace, of *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth* (Ashgate 2011), and she is currently completing *Reflections of the Self: On Giorgio de Chirico, Self-portraiture, and the Classical Tradition*. Along with Sid Sachs, she is co-curator of *Invisible City: Philadelphia and the Vernacular Avant-garde, 1956-1976* (January-April 2020). Since 2009, she has directed MICA's Summer program in Venice, Italy focused on international biennials. She was the editor of *The Graphic Unconscious* (2011), the catalog for *Philagrafika*, a city-wide triennial focused on contemporary print.



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WHITE
2019
Silkscreen on silk organza
30 x 40 inches

STILL WHITE
2019
Silkscreen and relief printing on
600g Fabriano paper with handwork
22 x 30 inches
opposite



Soledad Salamé: *Biography*

Soledad Salamé, American, born in Santiago, Chile in 1954, currently lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland.

After earning a BA at Santiago College in Chile (1972), Salamé completed her advanced studies at the CEGRA, Centro de Enseñanza Grafica, Conac in Caracas, Venezuela (1979). From 1973 to 1983 Salamé lived in Venezuela. During this time she was exposed to the rainforest, a pivotal experience in her artistic development that continues to be a source of inspiration.

The artist moved to Washington, DC in 1983 before establishing – in 2009 – a vibrant print studio in Baltimore. Salamé remains an active member of the Baltimore arts community, and a lifelong educator. As an interdisciplinary artist, she creates work that originates from extensive investigation into specific topics. In the pursuit of new ideas, she has conducted intensive field research in the Americas, Antarctica, and beyond. Her current project, *We The Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding*, is based on migration resulting from climate change, exacerbated by social political impact.

Soledad Salamé’s work is represented in private and public collections throughout the world, including those of the Deutsche Bank in New York, NY; National Gallery of Art in Washington DC; National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC; The Baltimore Museum of Art, in Baltimore, MD; the University of Essex, UK, amongst numerous others. Noteworthy exhibitions have been presented by the Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD; Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile; Katonah Museum of Art, Westchester, NY; The Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC; El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; Milwaukee Museum of Art, WI; Denver Museum of Art, CO; Phoenix Museum of Art, AZ; Miami Art Museum, FL; the National Museum of Women in The Arts, Washington, DC; and the Museum of Goa, India.

Salamé’s work is included in myriad publications notably, *The Contemporary Museum: 20 years*, by Irene Hoffman (2011); *The St. James Guide to Hispanic Artists*, by Thomas Riggs (2002); *Latin American Women Artists of the United States*, by Robert Henkes (1999); and *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, by Edward J. Sullivan (1996).

Major projects include: *We The Migrants: Fleeing/Flooding*, 2019; *The Women’s March*, 2017; *Are you listening?*, 2016; *alma*, Atacama Large Millimeter Array, 2014; *Territories*, 2013-14; *Barcodes: Merging Identity and Technology*, 2012; *Where Do you Live? 3000 Miles of Maryland Coast*, 2009; *Agua Viva and the Labyrinth of Solitude*, 2001.



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THE ARTIST WOULD LIKE TO THANK
Ksenia Nouril, Contributing Writer

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Fiona Suherman, Illustration

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Mariska Rivera, Studio assistant

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TURNING BLUE
2019
Silkscreen and relief printing on
600g Fabriano paper with handwork
22 x 30 inches

3000 Chestnut Ave, Mill Centre 214
Baltimore, Maryland 21211

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