



VISION & VOICE

Gallery and Documentary Workspace



Invisible Odysseys

Art By and About Mexican Farm Workers in Vermont

Collection of Dioramas created by Mexican Farm Workers; conceived by artist and writer, B. Amore, implemented in conjunction with Susannah McCandless and Ethan Mitchel/ TRAVELING EXHIBIT

Invisible Odysseys was conceived by B. Amore, artist and writer, and implemented in conjunction with Susannah McCandless, geographer, and Ethan Mitchell, independent scholar. These individuals brought paints, mixed media materials and wooden boxes to Mexican farm workers in Addison County, Vermont to create this project. The result is 14 autobiographical dioramas in which the artists (farmworkers) express their journeys from Mexico to Vermont and their lives as undocumented workers in a foreign community. Above all, the exhibit makes visible a hidden community, and makes audible a set of voices that Vermonters have heard little of. The goal of the project is to communicate the often submerged experiences of immigration and ethnicity through material culture, connecting the common threads of past and present journeys.

EXHIBITION / The exhibit was held at the Vermont Folklife Center's Vision & Voice Gallery from February 3, 2012 – April 28, 2012, and is available to travel to traditional and non-traditional exhibit spaces around the state.



Vermont Folklife Center
88 Main Street, Middlebury, Vermont

Invisible Odysseys *Exhibit Specifications*

Description

Among the most recent arrivals to Vermont communities are Mexican farm workers. These workers have made harrowing and costly journeys to reach Vermont, where their labor is vital to the dairy industry and, by extension, the Vermont landscape. Yet most such workers have no formal immigration status. Risking deportation if they are seen or heard, they remain invisible. Having made an epic journey of thousands of miles, they often live in the narrow confines of a single farmhouse and milking parlor, dependent on others for even basic needs.

While Vermonters have recently had some opportunities to discuss and reflect on this situation, Mexican farmworkers themselves have rarely had a voice in that conversation. Yet they have amazing stories to tell. The Invisible Odysseys exhibit is a collection of those stories, rendered in sculpture as well as words. The exhibit includes text in Spanish and English of each artist's story.

The Invisible Odysseys project brought art materials to many of these Mexican farmworkers. Paints, wooden boxes, and mixed-media materials were provided so that the workers could engage in making three-dimensional representations of their journeys. Kate Bass, from Juntos (Together), a volunteer student organization at Middlebury College, and Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland, a teacher with UVM's Vermont Migrant Education Program have been of invaluable aid in supporting the farmworkers throughout the process.

Other than offering materials and encouragement, no specific direction was given to the artist-workers who participated in the project. They were invited to use the materials to express something of their journeys and experiences. All of the resulting artwork was made using their ingenuity, their rich life experiences, and their dogged persistence to fit their art-making into sixteen-hour work days. Through participation in the project, they have told their own stories, in their own words, and through their own individual artistic expression. Hidden lives have been made more visible and present to anyone who sees the work and reads the accompanying statements.

Content

Dioramas – 14 autobiographical dioramas; mixed media:

1. Esfuérzate y sé valiente (*Try Your Hardest and Have Courage*) – Antonio
2. La travesía del desierto (*Crossing the Desert*) – Ismael
3. México querido (*Beloved Mexico*) – Mari and Carmen
4. El espejismo de un sueño (*The Mirage of a Dream*) – Z.
5. Las casa de cartón (*Cardboard Houses*) – Eli C.C
6. La belleza puede ser engañosa (*Beauty Can Be Deceiving*) – A.B.
7. La caja de un rancho (*Boxed In on the Farm*) – Juan Carlos
8. Mis dos patrias (*My Two Countries*) – Poncho
9. El sacrificio por un mayor sustento para mi familia (*The Sacrifice to Better Provide for My Family*) - El inmigrante mexicano
10. Aparador (*Window Shopping*) – El soñador
11. Un sueño perseguido (*Pursuing a Dream*) – Mauro
12. Ilusión (*Illusion*) – Anabel y Maria
13. Ideas of Coalition (*Ideas de la coalición*) – Beatrice Parwatikar
14. Community Network of Compassion (*Red comunitaria de compasión*) – Cheryl Connor, Beatrice Parwatikar

Text Panels – 14 label panels (7in. x 2.5in.); 28 text panels (14 English/14 Spanish) with artists' statements that create a context for the dioramas (ranging in size between 15in. x 8 in. and 15 in. x 22 in.); 2 introductory text panels (1 English/1 Spanish) (16 in. x 25 in.); 1 acknowledgments panel (14in. x 20in.); 1 quotes panel (20in. x 14in.).

Reference the following pages to see photographs of the dioramas.

Invisible Odysseys *Exhibit Specifications* (continued)

Public Programming

Artist Panel Discussion – the artists talked about the process and inspiration behind their artwork.

Forum on inclusion – A review of the development of bias-free policing in Middlebury, its expansion to a state-wide protocol, the Open Door Clinic's history of services to migrant workers, and the status of senate bill 238 (Vermont's approach to a more documented status for workers).

Migrant Justice Presentation – Farm worker organizers and their allies discussed their work and plans for the future. This group, formerly known as the Migrant Worker Solidarity Project, is having a huge impact on perceptions, practices, and laws.

Role of faith communities in supporting migrant communities - Examining the ways people are providing transportation, translation, tutoring, advocacy and other support for the farmworkers.

Exhibit Press

Vermont Public Radio — <http://www.vpr.net/episode/53175/slayton-invisible-odysseys/>

One New England — <http://www.onenewengland.com/article.php?id=460>

Burlington Free Press — <http://archive.burlingtonfreepress.com/article/20120318/ARTS04/203180318/Artist-unseen-Art-by-undocumented-Vermont-farmworkers>

Seven Days — <http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/diorama-diaries/Content?oid=2183587>

VT Digger — <http://vtdigger.org/2012/09/19/imagines-de-mi-alma-images-from-my-soul-at-the-vermont-folklife-center/>

Art of the Rural — <http://artoftherural.org/update-invisible-odysseys-and-the-work-of-b-amore/>

Addison County Independent — <http://www.addisonindependent.com/201202migrant-farm-workers-tell-their-stories-art-folklife-center>

Fees

The exhibit is available for loan for a fee to be negotiated based on the unique conditions of each host.

Exhibit Content *Dioramas*

Total of 14 autobiographical dioramas, mixed media, varying in size.

Examples of dioramas with corresponding captions:



La belleza puede ser engañosa
Beauty Can Be Deceiving

A.B.

Fabric, photo, acrylic, mixed media, text
Telo, foto, acrílico, medios mixtos, texto

22" x 19.5" x 7" (55.9cm x 49.5 cm x 17.8 cm), 2010



El sacrificio por un mejor sustento para mi familia
The Sacrifice to Better Provide for my Family

El inmigrante mexicano

Wood, acrylic, marble, copper, corn husks, mixed media
Madera, acrílico, mármol, cobre, chals de maíz, medios mixtos

20" x 32" x 13.5" (50.8cm x 78.7 cm x 34.3 cm), 2010



Las casas de cartón
Cardboard Houses

Eli C.C

Wood, cardboard, acrylic, silk flowers, mxd media
Madera, cartón, acrílico, flores de seda, medios mixtos
23" x 19" x 15.5" (58.4cm x 48.3cm x 39.4cm), 2010

Exhibit Content *Dioramas* (continued)

Total of 14 autobiographical dioramas, mixed media, varying in size.



Mexico querido
Beloved Mexico

Mari and Carmen

Wood, cardboard, acrylic, silk flowers, mixed media
Madera, cartón, acrílico, flores de seda, medios mixtos
22.5" x 21" x 13.5" (57.2cm x 53.3cm x 34.3 cm), 2010



El Espejismo de un sueño
The Mirage of a Dream

Z.

Metal, fabric, acrylic, mixed media, text
Metal, tela, acrílico, medios mixtos, texto
13" x 24" x 18" (22cm x 61cm x 45.7cm), 2010



Esfuézate y sé valiente
Try Your Hardest and Have Courage

Antonio

Wood, cardboard, acrylic, mixed media
Madera, cartón, acrílico, medios mixtos
27" x 22" x 7" (68.6 cm x 55.9 cm x 17.8 cm), 2010

Exhibit Content *Text Panels*

Total of 28 text panels (14 English/14 Spanish) with artists' statements that create a context for the dioramas.

(Example English)

Try Your Hardest and Have Courage

Antonio

Chiapas, México

October 28, 2007

One of the saddest days of my life was having to go far away from my family; it was very difficult. With the hope of getting ahead, I felt I had to leave my country. It is a decision that fills you with strength, and with a spirit of faith, you can overcome it. My mother, who was very sad, told me goodbye. Even now, I have a little movie of her in my mind telling me, "Goodbye son, take care, and may God bless you always." With tears in her eyes, she said those words to me. I will never forget it.

In this case, I see how much my mother really loves me. It's not for nothing, or just small problems, that I decided to travel to the United States with the objective of getting ahead. Finally I got on the bus and from the window I said goodbye to my loved ones. I traveled in sadness for a while, but I also had their strength, that pushed me to continue ahead.

I took three airplane flights after leaving my home. The end was the stop, in Altar, Sonora, where we took on a guide to cross the desert. In the early morning hours, he asked us if we were ready to travel but we were very tired, and we said no. The next day they told us that we would try it. The whole day went by, and in the afternoon we left the town – transported in a truck headed for the desert. Imagine our surprise when the mafia, passing as federal police, turned us back. The next day we tried to cross again. As they did before, they drove us to the desert for another big surprise. Immigration was positioned in the passes where you enter North American territory. The next day, we saw that everything was open. The guide told us that there was a chance to cross. So we tried it in the early evening. We had spent about two hours walking when the night fell. Suddenly our guide, walking ahead and directing us, said, "Watch out! Immigration! Don't move!" But it was impossible. The ground there was very loose, and we couldn't avoid making noise. Soon we saw horses. We ran toward a few bushes but it was impossible to escape. They had dogs to drag us out, and all our friends were found except one friend and me. We ran away; but they followed us. They didn't reach us; but when we saw that we were alone, we didn't have any choice but to go back with them.

They rounded us up. There were about eight of us. Later, they took us to the immigration checkpoint to interview us. It was maybe 9 p.m. They were confusing me because they separated me from the rest. I asked why. They told me that my fingerprints were like those of a Chinese man they were searching for. I was surprised. I was scared. But later, I showed my identification and I relaxed, because I was innocent. The next day at 4 a.m. we were moved to the Mexican embassy.

Afterwards, we found out how to get back to Altar, Sonora, and try again. We rested about five days, and afterwards we went to the border; but this time they assaulted us and took our money and the valuables we were carrying...

But finally we arrived at the border. Immigration was still there, but we were able to cross by going around them, and this time we walked too much for a very difficult two days and a night. We were very tired, but we managed to cross. Thank you, God.

Now I am happy, because some of my dreams have come true. I am thankful for the opportunity to tell my story, and that you can see how much one person suffered, in the hope of getting ahead.

Thanks for your support in providing materials to do our art.

God bless you always.

Antonio

Translation by Kate Bass

Exhibit Content *Text Panels*

Total of 28 text panels (14 English/14 Spanish) with artists' statements that create a context for the dioramas.

(Example Spanish)

El espejismo de un sueño

Z.

Soy de un pequeño pueblo de México donde abunda la pobreza y como muchos con una ilusión de darle a mi familia un poquito más, un plato de comida, calzado, estudio. Pero para eso tuve que separarme de ellos, dejándoles mi corazón.

¡Qué tristeza!

Atravesando el desierto arriesgando mi vida logré pasar, solo que ahora he perdido mi nombre.

Ahora me llaman el mojado, indocumentado,

el emigrante.

No pido que me regalen, lo quiero obtener a cambio

de mi trabajo.

Soy joven, anciana mujer.

Sólo quiero trabajar.

Quiero que me comprendan,

Tengo alma, corazón y cuerpo.

Vivo lejos de mi familia.

No quiero sentirme sola, aislada,

No quiero seguir escondiéndome.

No soy delincuente.

Solo soy un ser humano con deseo de trabajar y lograr algo mejor.

att.

Z.

Texto original en la obra de arte

- 1. Sale uno de su casa para recorrer mucho tiempo para llegar a la frontera de Mex-USA, gastando mucho dinero.*
- 2. Éste es el mentado desierto, montañas donde uno atraviesa caminando de cinco o más días. Pueden pasar por ríos, cercas de corrientes, túneles, o atravesando bardas. Ahí se exponen a los peligros, piquetes de víboras, asaltantes y hasta perder la vida. Por eso lo he llamado "el paso de la muerte." Pero con la ayuda de Dios se puede pasar con bien, o pueden detenernos para atrás, no importando lo que allá pasa antes.*
- 3. Estados Unidos es muy hermoso, un paraíso, un sueño, un espejismo. Es un jardín de flores para quienes pueden gozarlo. Nosotros solo podemos contemplarlo de lejos, porque no podemos entrar ahí; mucha vigilancia, policía que andan detrás de mi idioma, color. Es fácil de identificar.*
- 4. Mi hogar en USA. Este es un rancho, pueblo chico, granjas de caballos, vacas, pollos, cultivos de plantas, etc. Siempre trabajando, mi hogar prácticamente es una cárcel, pero estoy contenta porque puedo ganar dinero y enviarlo a mi familia. Por eso estoy contenta. Pero deseo un poquito de libertad.*