

To accompany the installation “Clase abstracta de bruja”
by Ricardo Rivera

January 18 - February 15, 2018
Art Space Gallery, Fresno City College

Running Interference - ELENA HARVEY COLLINS

Ricardo Rivera has created a sensing system that snaps into movement upon the arrival of its audience; a benevolent CCTV loop that projects anamorphic, real time video of the movements and bodies of the students, instructors, and members of the public who wander into the gallery.

First, the image of (our) bodies are thrown into a wavy, pixelated parallel universe – a mirror image of the gallery, projected across a thirty foot stretch of wall to form a stretched out ‘U’ shape. Suddenly a sensor is tripped and the scene changes; no longer a mirror but a window. Or both, as a live capture of the viewer’s body is now projected into a landscape that whizzes by. Shot from a speeding car, it is soft and painterly. It is also familiar and nondescript, and it flows smoothly past: green fields, flowering trees, large, rusting farm equipment. Brown, furrowed earth, ready for planting. A visual shorthand for the vast agricultural region of California that is all too easy to dismiss – what we see is how the landscape of the Central Valley is viewed by many outside the region: from a car speeding down Interstate 5 or Highway 99.

There is a particular spot you can stand in, where, caught between sensors, the landscape begins to divide, like cells, exponentially, until it snaps into a series of colored bands, like a digital weaving or abstract painting. Held in place by the viewer’s presence alone, it seems to strain and crackle. It is tense: one step to the right or left and the whole scene dissolves. One of the things that has struck me about this work is how unstable it is. Bits of code seem to slide off and drift away. Roughly translated, the phrase “clase abstracta de bruja” means “an abstract sort of witchcraft”, a phrase that comes from Vilém Flusser’s essay “Towards a Philosophy of Photography”, which charts how the way we relate to images has changed through history, from experiencing original images in person to viewing them through a screen. Made up of lines of code and light, these representations are passed through multiple screens, processors, and cables, they are low resolution, grainy. Yet here, Rivera reproduces that sense of a unique encounter as the installation responds to each individual viewer.

Rivera began this project by creating a digital 3D model of the gallery’s interior, including small details such as an oddly placed clock, and a security mirror which affords a view of the gallery from the back office. These idiosyncrasies of the space are activated in the installation: anamorphic video works and photographs are corrected in the mirror and other reflective surfaces, and a real-time projection of the clock is beamed from its position high on the wall into the middle of the space.

By elevating these ordinary details, Rivera is signaling a critical theme in his practice; challenging the rituals of looking to make the invisible visible. To a large degree, “Clase abstracta de bruja” is about seeing, and how what we see or interpret changes depending on our vantage point. This includes a general questioning of the everyday facts that surround us, as well as a deeper investigation of how labor (agricultural, artistic) is made invisible. The shifting of the clock from its place high on the wall to the middle of the gallery alludes to the centrality of timekeeping to hourly labor: the worker, the watched, the watch, the clock: meting out money and time.

Projected onto a wall in the back of the gallery we see Rivera, in the middle of a field, lip-syncing to the song “Asi Fue,” a ballad by the beloved Mexican singer Juan Gabriel, who died in 2016. It is a song remembered from childhood, hummed by Rivera’s mother as she worked. Performed in the field - a site of hard work under difficult conditions - it also takes on the significance of other songs: those sung by chain gangs working on California’s railroads, and field workers alike.

Another intervention is superimposed over this video: the video is layered or recorded over. We see Rivera, life sized, still dressed in farm wear and hat, enter the door of the gallery. Carrying a broom, he begins to sweep the floor, check the lights, and look about the space. Artist, farm worker, janitor: Rivera performs and draws an equivalence between these roles and by extension, acknowledges the invisible labor that keeps the food on the table, the floors swept, the lights on, and ultimately, the artist in the gallery.

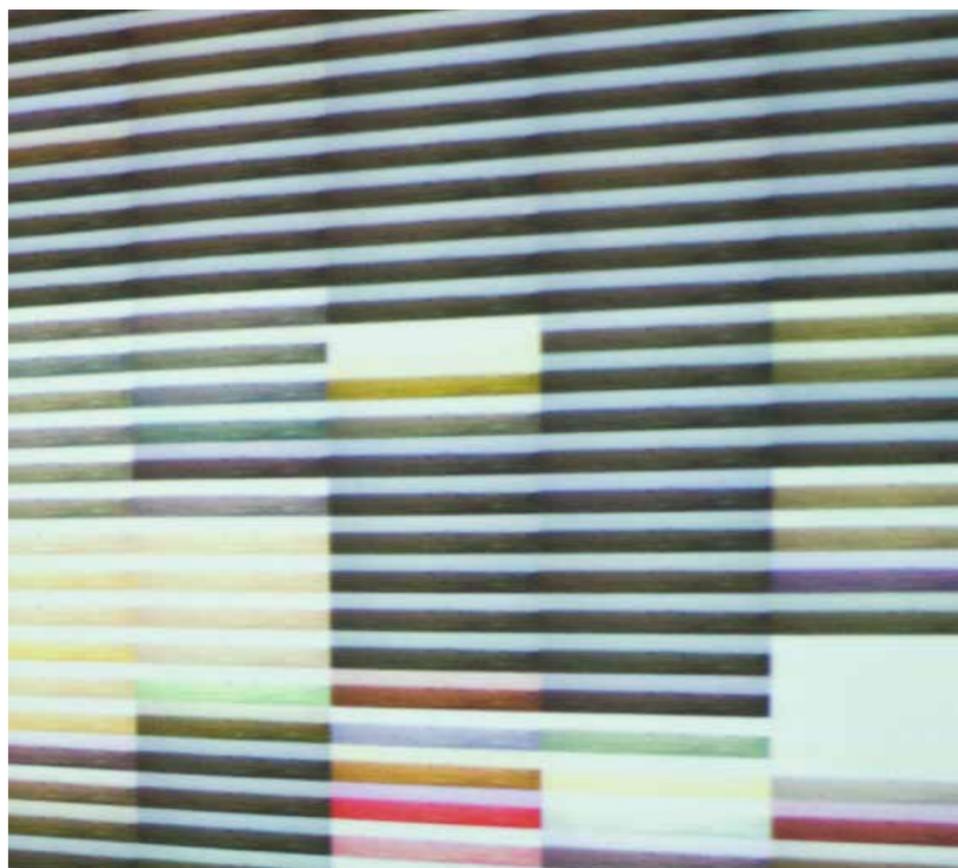
ELENA HARVEY COLLINS is a British artist, curator and writer. She organizes the programming for the Art Space Gallery at Fresno City College, Fresno, California.

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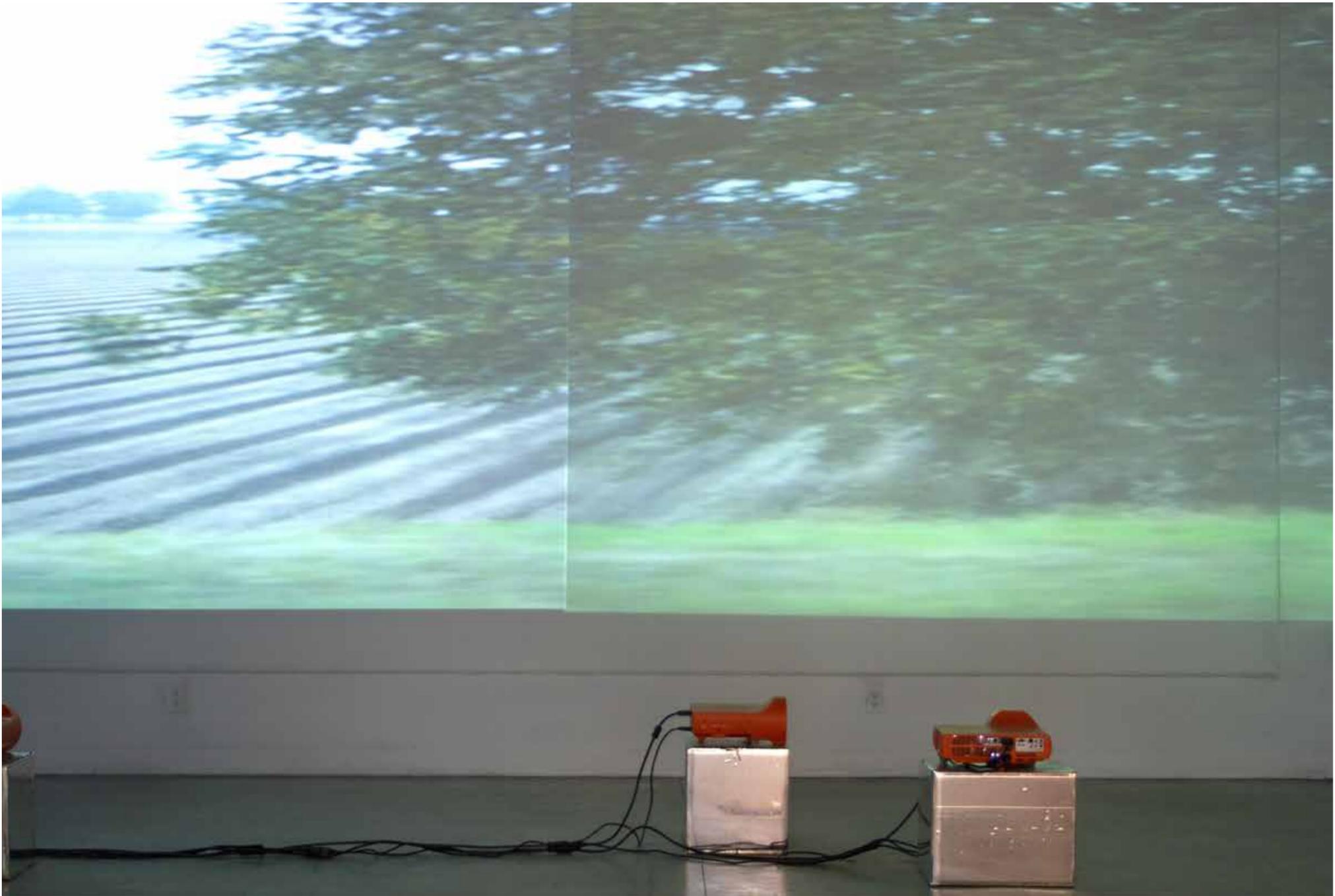
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Images:

1. An anamorphic projection is reflected and corrected in the security mirror hanging in the Art Space Gallery.

2. Detail from the 5-channel video projection showing the landscape reduced to a series of abstract, colorful stripes.

3. Installation view showing the real-time projection of the viewer's figure into the landscape; the larger than life reflective sculpture of the artist's father; and a single channel video projection in which Rivera performs lip syncing to the song "Asi Fue" by legendary Mexican recording artist Juan Gabriel.



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Images:

1. Installation view, 5 channel video projection.

2. Photograph of a protest outside Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland, CA, after the passage of the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (HR 4437). Many provisions of the bill, such as setting the minimum sentence for document fraud at 10 years, were seen as criminalizing the personhood of undocumented people. Despite the fact that the bill never made it past the Senate, it polarized the debate on immigration in the United States. It was a catalyst for immigration reform protests which took place in cities across the U.S. in the Spring of 2006.

3. Installation view from projection in which a video of the gallery's back entrance was projected side by side with the real thing. Rivera is seen entering and beginning to perform everyday tasks, such as sweeping and making repairs, in the space.

4. Installation view of Campbell's soup cans, reflective hard hat, and projections on to the floor of the gallery. The gallery clock is projected in real time, and the second projection is an anamorphic rendering of the film "Why Braceros" (ca.1959), produced by the Council of California Growers to defend the controversial bracero program.



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La Malinche, la bruja, plays an easy trick

what the men and women do the machine does
there are no parts to disassemble
there is only a machine within a machine to wreck and pull
A broom splintered in my hand
I'd rather be sleeping than awake

and our arms and legs are apparitions

Take this walk along the belt of my skin

Take this walk beyond the reflection of my skin
My labor is defragmented my labor is done
If I could say this with my feet above the ceiling
and if time was not just a reflected surface and if the work
was not turning to dust before me and if I found out just what I was trying to say to you

I

look in the mirror and the reflection is a field walking alongside me like a conveyor belt

feet of the son

trying to catch up trying to catch up trying to catch up trying to catch up



MARISOL BACA received her Master of Fine Arts at Cornell University and is the recipient of the Robert Chasen poetry award. Marisol's first book of poems, Tremor, is forthcoming from Three Mile Harbor Press. She teaches English and creative writing at Fresno City College.

Ricardo Rivera Walks on the World

- CHRIS DAUBERT

In 2006, with the help of a G.P.S mapping system, he plotted a route through the Swiss Alps, choosing the mountain roads that he would ride by bicycle. During the ride, he wore a tracking device that rendered, in real time, his progress along the roads, drawing a colored line on a map of the mountains that rose above the city of Sierre. At the end of his ride, he parked his bicycle on a traffic island, and lay down to take a nap. Anyone watching the digital line left by his route would see the word “dormir” written on the map of the mountains.

He played football in high school. He enjoyed the physical contact.

The son of Mexican immigrants, he grew up surrounded by agriculture and doing farm work at an early age. He has the deepest respect for the land and those who work it, and having experienced it himself, an affinity for those who find themselves perpetually on the outside of the surrounding society, constantly looked upon as being “the other.” This reality of being part of a culture as well as outside of the same culture manifests itself in the duality found in many of his works. He presents images of himself, and often his loved ones, in his pieces, but at the same time there is a constant presence of him, the artist, watching the whole thing, simultaneously being both the observed and the observer.



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His artworks, by being interactive and immersive, put the audience in the same position. It is impossible to view his works without participating in them. Proficiently technical, he has been writing code and building computers and monitoring systems for his artworks for many years. Like any sculptor, he imagines forms, but his forms travel through time and

space. They often consist entirely of light: reflected, refracted, caught on scrims. The physical presence (or non-presence) of these moving images are themselves metaphors. In his anamorphic distorted images, that can only be clearly observed in a curved mirror, there is at times a question about the true form. In what ways is the nature of what we see distorted by our personal or cultural biases? How many times do we see through an image, revealing another interpretation lying behind it?

He has been doing drawings, using both hands at the same time, making symmetrical forms that are as large as his arms can make them.

In 2016, back in Switzerland, a country that severely limits immigrants and refugees, he wore his “Silver Suit” that completely covered him, both obscuring his identity and simultaneously reflecting the images of those who looked at him back to themselves. Starting from high on a mountain, he “infiltrated” a small town, walking down through the surrounding vineyards, and then the streets and alleys into the town center, hiding in full sight.

His father thought that he would make a good engineer.

CHRIS DAUBERT is an artist, educator and writer living in the Central Valley. He is a professor emeritus of the Art Department of Sacramento City College, and currently teaches con-

Images:

1. Video still, Ricardo Rivera, *Descent from a High*, 2016. Single channel video with sound, 34:34. Camera: Maëlle Comut. Audio: Christophe Fellay.
2. installation view, mylar-coated boe topped with a Campbell's Seeds hat given to field workers by the company.
3. Installation view.



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