

ANTHONY
ROMERO
WITH
DEANNA LEDEZMA
AND
JOSH RIOS

SEPT 16 —
DEC 14, 2024

Published on the occasion of *The place where the creek goes underground*, an exhibition at Harvard Radcliffe Institute by Anthony Romero, with Deanna Ledezma and Josh Rios, this broadside is part of a constellation of works that carry forward the group’s intergenerational kin-based research practice. This work is situated within South-Central Texas and Northern Mexico, the region the artists and their relatives call home, and an area deeply affected by the social, economic, and ecological issues the artists explore. Through artmaking and life writing, they consider how familial networks maintain practices of care, and transmit knowledge of place shaped by the specific conditions of labor, immigration, marginalization, agrotourism, overdevelopment, prolonged droughts, and diminishing natural resources. The exhibition invites audiences to consider how family histories are produced and circulated within interwoven sociopolitical and environmental contexts.

September 16—December 14, 2024

Johnson-Kulukundis Family Gallery
Harvard Radcliffe Institute
Byerly Hall, 8 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
www.harvard.radcliffe.edu



ANTHONY ROMERO is an artist, a writer, and an organizer committed to documenting and supporting Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities.

DEANNA LEDEZMA, PH.D. is a Tejanx scholar, writer, and educator specializing in latinx studies, the history and theory of photography, contemporary art, and visual culture.

JOSH RIOS is an educator, a media artist, and a writer whose projects deal with the histories, archives, and futurities of Latinx subjectivity and U.S./Mexico relations as understood through the intersections of modernity, postmodernity, and neocolonialism.

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THE
PLACE
WHERE
THE
CREEK
GOES
UNDER-
GROUND

SOMEWHERE IN THAT CITY
OR TOWN,
THERE IS SOMEONE
WHO REMEMBERS THIS PLACE,
THE PLACE WHERE THE
CREEK GOES UNDERGROUND.

ROBERTO BEDOYA
CULTURAL AFFAIRS MANAGER, CITY OF OAKLAND
AS TOLD
ANTHONY ROMERO

IN EVERY CITY OR TOWN

...

THERE IS A CREEK.

IN EVERY CREEK THERE IS A
PLACE WHERE IT GOES

UNDERGROUND.

THAT PLACE MAY STILL BE
ACCESSIBLE, OR IT MAY

BE PAVED OVER. IT MAY BE A
PARKING LOT, OR A HOSPITAL,

OR A SET OF CONDOS.

The place where the creek goes underground collaboratively gathers archival collections, moving images, family photographs, sound, and multiple genres of life writing to reflect on the complexities of kinship, belonging, and place. The title of the exhibition is taken from a conversation between Anthony Romero and the cultural activist Roberto Bedoya, in which Bedoya described how someone always holds the memory of a place even as the built environment alters or obscures facets of the landscape. Visibility neither determines presence nor precludes what is felt and remembered. Relationship to place is expressed through many ways of knowing, including affective and experiential sensations not contingent on the rationality of the seen. Attuned to these ways of knowing, this exhibition foregrounds place as a cultural practice. To consider a place is to reflect on localized knowledges that speak to land as a contested instrument of power and to the multigenerational temporalities that emerge from being in and of a place.

In this exhibition, place is overlapping. On one hand are the sovereignty of Massachusetts lands, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, and Harvard University. On the other are the places we are working from, including the distinct yet adjacent regions we grew up in—South-Central Texas, the Gulf Coast, and the Texas Hill Country—along with our recent and distant ancestral migrations from Coahuila and San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Our shared homeland is perched at the edge of the borderlands, where prairies transition to marshes amid networks of rivers

and aquifers; where creeks converge, branch off, and go underground; where streams nurture the cottonwood, juniper, oak, mesquite, and pecan trees that punctuate a landscape inhabited by deer, armadillos, wading birds, snakes, and countless other fauna. These are places where communities face the economic and cultural ramifications of capital investment in rock mining, fossil fuel production, and relentless real estate development—all compounded by the intergenerational sociopolitical realities of living under racialized Anglo dominance.

As in other regions of the country and the world, water resources are jeopardized by extreme heat and prolonged droughts exacerbated by the climate crisis. They are also depreciated by excessive and largely unregulated groundwater pumping by developers and private companies that provide water utilities, rapid population increase, and a refusal to adopt conservation strategies. Almost daily, our relatives voice their fears about water loss, made conspicuous by dried creek beds and continual news that the aquifer is reaching record lows. Some talk of what could be done if their well or their neighbor's well runs dry. The question "Who will remember when the creek still flowed?" is as pragmatic as it is poetic.

Our visual and narrative-based practice, which we describe as *kinship research*, is the foundation of an ongoing multimedia project conceptualized as a collective memoir written and made with one another and generations of our relatives. Informed by the storytelling

NOTES FROM THE CREEK: KINSHIP RESEARCH AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

practices of autoethnography, testimonio, and autohistoria-teoría, kinship research critically examines the entanglements of personal experience and social relationships, familial and collective histories, territory and emplacement. Through this collaborative practice, we accentuate kinship formations that transcend juridical and biological notions of family. Kinship research includes driving down back roads, following routes committed to memory, gazing at the unfurling landscape through car windows, and getting out to look more closely. It propels subsequent trips to libraries, archives, databases, online auctions, and spaces of cooperative dialogue. It is characterized by sharing meals made with or brought to family members. By walking through yards and fields with video cameras, snapping photographs of extant and approximate buildings and properties referenced in family stories. By conversing via echoing speakerphones and video calls.

Much of this work depends upon our families' willingness to hear, if not always to answer, questions phrased in a variety of ways—with rehearsed brevity, muddled in off-the-cuff rambles, occasionally posed with trepidation when nearing a traumatic subject. We listen with patience to their tangents, which turn out to be not digressions but, rather, answers to questions we did not know to ask. An occasion of listening cannot be reduced to gaining information. Instead, it yields an understanding of how our relatives came to know the things they tell us. But how does one listen to the voices of the dead, of the late elders whose loss feels recent even though the calendar tells us otherwise?

How are those recollected voices embodied in the narratives and performances of others? Kinship research grapples with these questions and speaks to our desire to produce a living archive. It asks us to bear collective witness to the stories of family members and to situate their experiences within social and historical contexts. Kinship research, as a form of storytelling, inevitably spills out across the edges of our lives and is a way of remembering and reckoning with the people and places we come from.

DEANNA LEDEZMA
JOSH RIOS
ANTHONY ROMERO

