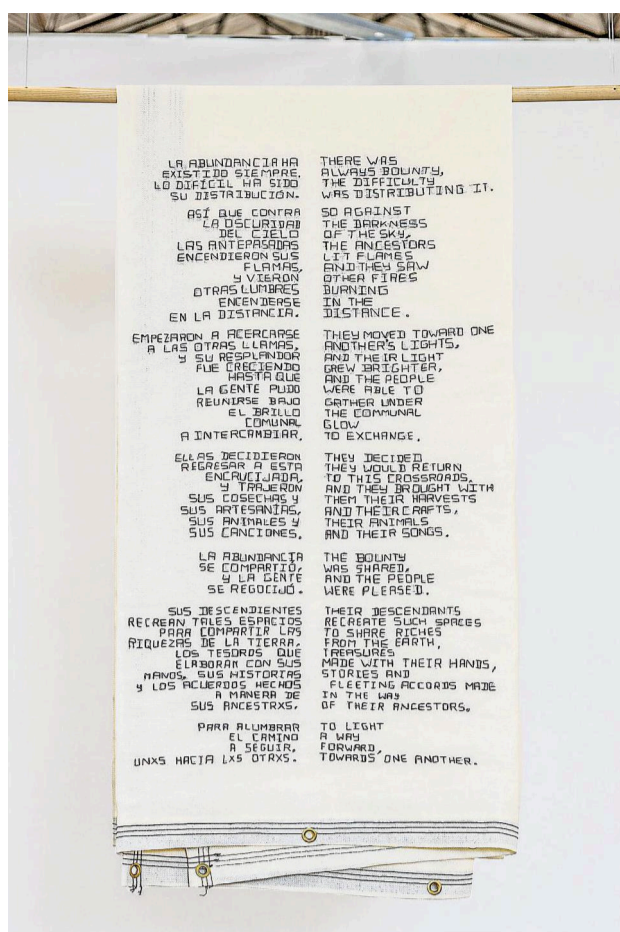


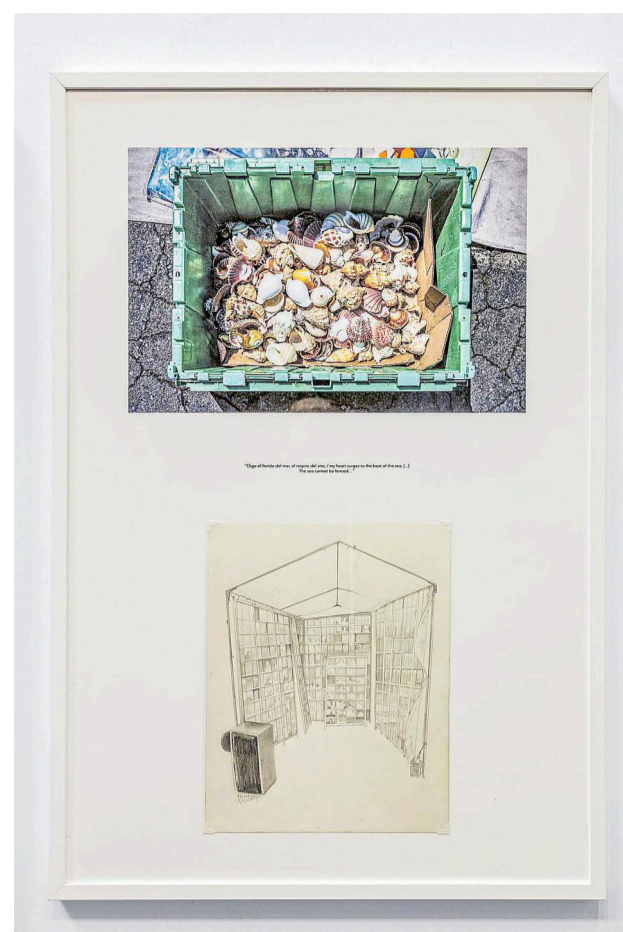
ARTS



“En todas partes y en ninguna a la vez ... (El Cielo del Sobrueadas)”



“Tianquiztli / Tianquiztli”



“Market Dialogue (with Matthew the Apostle, from the Gospel of Matthew)”

MARC WALKER PHOTOS

Marketplace of ideas

Border art duo Cog•nate Collective explores the exchange of thoughts and culture in new ‘Tianquiztli’ exhibit at ICA North in Encinitas

BY SETH COMBS

The appropriateness of meeting up with Cog•nate Collective at the Eighth Street Market in National City is not lost on me. Yes, they live in the area, but given the subjects they’ve explored in their work, it seems all the more fitting to be speaking to them among the bustle and business of a neighborhood market.

“Markets are these really great spaces where you have cultural exchange happening alongside social gathering and also financial transactions taking place,” says Amy Sánchez Arteaga, who, along with partner Misael Díaz, make up the “primary instigators” of Cog•nate Collective. “Some people go simply to get their groceries, to have their basic needs met, but there’s also this really nice social dimension to us.”

For the decade-plus they’ve been creating art together, Díaz and Sánchez Arteaga have been exploring multiple dimensions within their work, but with an emphasis on, as they put it, the “communities across the U.S.-Mexico border region.” Their work is conceptual, interventionist and site-specific in nature. It is always research-based and often immersive, using multiple mediums to communicate broad concepts of border life.

One of the other core elements of this type of research-based practice, however, has been immersion. From their earlier works where they would spend days and weeks at the San Ysidro Port of Entry crossing to their most recent project, “Tianquiztli: Portraits of the Market as a Portal,” both of them say it’s of utmost importance that they take a thorough, almost scientific method-based approach to their practice.

“We were trained more in art history than in art production, so I think we always had some inkling that, whatever we did, it would be heavily research-based,” says Díaz. “That opened up an interesting proposition to go and find spaces and communities that are contending with border issues that are particular to them, but that are part of the everyday experience of living there. We wanted to conduct the research and actually spend time in those communities and maybe even co-develop whatever would result from that work.”

Hence, the “collective” moniker. That is, Díaz and Sánchez Arteaga don’t see themselves as the Cog•nate Collective per se, but rather they are something of a responsive, catalytic channel in which a border narrative can be studied and presented. They are, of course, an integral component to whatever results from the work, but they are also the first to point out that there is no work without the community itself.

“We had that shared ethos that we sort of developed early on, to let the sites and communities that we were engaged in dialogue

with determine what we were going to make,” Díaz continues. “It’s likely why we’ve ended up creating such radically different work.”

“Ideas are more interesting than individuals, than personalities,” Sánchez Arteaga adds. “I’d rather the ideas that we work with are what is remembered rather than me or us.”

The two first met as art history major undergrads at UCLA. They shared a common experience in that Díaz grew up in Tijuana but attended school in San Diego, while Sánchez Arteaga grew up in Imperial Valley but would often travel to Mexicali to visit family. The two bonded and say that even in lecture halls filled with other Latinx students, they still gravitated toward each other over, as Díaz puts it, their “shared experience of growing up along the border.”

“I had started to realize that, when it came to the narrative about the border that I was hearing in my courses, these were different from our own personal experience growing up here,” says Díaz. “I think there was a lot of focus on the border as this place of trauma, this place of violence. That’s one of the components, but there were also stories of residence, creativity and resourcefulness that we grew up seeing.”

The two have worked on over a dozen art projects since 2010. If there is one idea that could be seen as a



COG•NATE COLLECTIVE

MICA, or the Mobile Institute for Citizenship and Art, is a library, research hub and listening station.

‘Cog•nate Collective, Tianquiztli: Portraits of the Market as Portal’

When: Opens Nov. 11 and runs through Jan. 29. Hours: noon to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays. Opening reception 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Nov. 19

Where: Institute of Contemporary Art North, 1550 S. El Camino Real, Encinitas

Admission: Pay-as-you-wish

Phone: (760) 436-6611

Online: icasandiego.org

ucts, but it also includes the exchange of culture, and, in the case of the marketplaces and mercados they explore in “Tianquiztli,” the exchange of ideas.

The idea for the exhibition came to them during

Díaz and Sánchez Arteaga had to adapt their approach. What’s more, they began to understand more fully the importance of neighborhood marketplaces and how they serve a functional purpose (buying groceries or household items), but also serve as a community’s social center where people congregate, hang out and catch up with friends.

Another parameter they were interested in exploring was the historical, pre-colonial origins of these markets. The name of the exhibition is a Mexica/Aztec word meaning “gathering place.” The word also referred to the Pleiades (“The Seven Sisters”) constellation. Some of Cog•nate Collective’s past work was organized around the intersections of the celestial and

Sánchez Arteaga began to see metaphors worth exploring for “Tianquiztli.”

“We kept returning to this idea of this connection between the market and the sky, the celestial, and really started thinking about the deep, ancient connection,” says Sánchez Arteaga, joking that the two of them “like to think about space a lot” but wanted to connect it to “questions around the colonial violence that manifest the border.”

The two visited multiple markets in Southern California and San Diego, as well as mercados in Tijuana and even one in Mexico City that has pre-Columbian roots. With these ideas in mind, they settled on a location, of sorts, at the National City Swap Meet. They set up a stall at the swap meet where they had a

exhibition will have a recreation of a stall the duo set up at the swap meet, along with a monitor displaying video of some of the interactions that took place in National City. There will also be documentation of other installations where the two sourced particular objects from various markets and swap meets in San Diego County and Tijuana (items like mirrors) and would bunch them together at their stall, thereby recontextualizing them. They will also have their mobile art trailer, the Mobile Institute for Citizenship and Art, outside of the Institute of Contemporary Art North in Encinitas, where there will be an archive of previous projects they’ve worked on in public marketplaces.

Both Díaz and Sánchez Arteaga say they’re pleased with “Tianquiztli,” considering the project began during the pandemic.

Earlier this year, they were also awarded the San Diego Art Prize, an annual prize recognizing established regional artists. They see the prize as not only recognition of their unconventional approach to so-called “border art,” but also a testament to how they’ve stuck it out over the years, creating symbiotic and symbolic works they never could have produced alone.

“Not to oversimplify things, but I think it helps that there’s two of us,” says Díaz. “I think part of the reason we work so well together is that we’re interested in the same things, but we look at it through different vantage points. I sometimes tend to enter into these projects looking at it more abstractly but with certain ideas, while Amy is much more committed to engaging with the site and the communities.”

“We fight well,” says Sánchez Arteaga, and they both laugh.



COG•NATE COLLECTIVE

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Combs is a freelance writer.