

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) Announces Fall Exhibitions

Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way

Stanya Kahn: No Go Backs

September 26, 2020–January 10, 2021

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Los Angeles, CA (August 21, 2020)—The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) announces its fall season, with two exhibitions opening next month: *Let us gather in a flourishing way*, the first West coast solo presentation of **Harold Mendez** and *No Go Backs*, the Los Angeles debut of the latest film by **Stanya Kahn**, presented with two earlier works.

Good Works Executive Director **Anne Ellegood** says, “After having to close in March because of the COVID pandemic, we are thrilled to be able to reopen and welcome audiences back to the museum. In this period of introspection and attention on the local, it is fitting that our fall exhibitions celebrate the work of two exceptional Los Angeles-based artists. While each artist’s approach is distinct in terms of medium, processes, and sensibilities, both have profound insights into how today’s culture is informed by the past and sensitize us to the precarity, fragility, and beauty of life.”

Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way

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Let us gather in a flourishing way is the first West coast solo museum presentation of Los Angeles-based artist **Harold Mendez** (b. 1977, Chicago). Borrowing its title from a poem by Juan Felipe Herrera, the exhibition will include a selection of approximately 20 works by Mendez made over the past decade including newly produced works. Working between photography and sculpture, Mendez explores the tension between fiction and truth, visibility and absence, with

an interest in how constructions of history and geography shape our sense of self. A first-generation American of Mexican-Colombian descent, his work often considers the transnational experience, ritual, and cultural memory.

Mendez's large format two-dimensional works transform found or archival photographs through a laborious manual transfer process similar to lithography. Using charcoal or graphite to build the surface, Mendez both traces and erases found imagery with specific sociocultural or art historical references to create otherworldly new images. Mendez's seemingly ordinary images evoke something more complex or uncanny, making connections between the everyday, histories of conflict, and what is often unspoken.



If they are not fears, they're contritions. If they are not doubts, inabilities (After Melitón Rodríguez) (2015) appropriates a 1933 photograph from the archives of Colombian artist Melitón Rodríguez (1875-1942), and eludes to a decade of violence and unrest in the country, the affects of which remain today. Mendez's sculptures take found objects, industrial goods, or symbolic organic matter—such as eucalyptus bark, bone, or cochineal pigment—to examine identity and place. Certain works, such as *become living* rather than static objects, requiring the regular replenishment of water or flower petals, the sculptures becoming sites of offering and marking the passage of time, mediated by social conditions. *American Pictures* (2016), comprising an aging tree limb that grew around a rusted metal fence, is imagined as a monument to the changing social and political landscape of post-industrial American cities. While experimenting with dramatic shifts in scale and unorthodox materials, Mendez's excavatory approach to production is a process of unearthing and transforming that highlights the tenuous relationship between history and its representation.

Harold Mendez (b. 1977, Chicago) has taken part in numerous exhibitions such as *Being: New Photography* (2018) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the 2017 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Mendez was recently the subject of a solo presentation, *The years now* at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago. In addition, his work has been shown in group exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Bass Museum, Miami; LAXART, Los Angeles; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; MoMA PS1, New York; Renaissance Society, Chicago; Project Row Houses, Houston; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, among others. Mendez has been awarded residencies at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI; Light Work, Syracuse; the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; the Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture; and the Headlands Center for the Arts. His works are included in the permanent collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Minneapolis Institute of Art; the DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; and the Colección Diéresis, Guadalajara, Mexico. Mendez studied at Columbia College Chicago; the University of Science and Technology, School of Art, Ghana, West Africa; and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is currently based in Los Angeles.

Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way is organized by Jamillah James, Curator.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Harpo Foundation, Michael Asher Foundation, Pasadena Art Alliance, Michael Silver, and *Friends of Harold Mendez*: Christine Meleo Bernstein and Arman Bernstein, Claire Morton, Laurence Renner. Additional support is provided by the Wilhelm Family Foundation.

ICA LA is supported by Curator's Council, Fieldwork, and 1717 Collective.

Stanya Kahn: No Go Backs
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Los Angeles-based interdisciplinary artist **Stanya Kahn** (b. 1968, San Francisco) works primarily in film and video, with a practice that includes drawing, sound, performance, sculpture and writing. Humor, pathos, and the uncanny are central to Kahn's hybrid approach to moving image, which examine fiction and document, the real and hyper-real, and varied expressions of time. Known for using improvisation and real-life scenarios, Kahn's projects often center language and how rhetoric gains and loses power, as well as the impact of socio-political conditions on lived experience. This exhibition comprises three works by Kahn produced over the past ten years: *It's Cool, I'm Good* (2010); *Stand in the Stream* (2011–17), and her latest short film, *No Go Backs* (2020), marking its Los Angeles debut. Together, these videos present an urgent reflection of our times, foregrounding global concerns such as climate change, racism, state power, and rebellion.

Completed earlier this year, *No Go Backs* (2020), shot on Super 16mm film with an original sound score and no dialogue, follows two teenagers (and real-life friends) who leave the city for the wild. Traveling north into the Eastern Sierra's landscapes, the pair traverse the haunted precarity of a collapsed world, in dreamlike states of distraction, malaise, and resilience. Braving harsh weather systems and difficult terrain, they travel quietly along sites connected to California's historic water wars in the early 1900's. The two eventually encounter other youth along the way, forming camaraderie in facing the unknown. A timely indictment of current crises and a meditation on an uncertain future, *No Go Backs* is an allegorical epic about an entire generation that must make a new way forward.

Stand in the Stream (2011–17) is an ambient digital feature film shot on multiple camera formats over the course of six years. The film's vast and varied footage—all shot or screen-captured by Kahn in real time—is edited to create a visceral reflection of life, power, and uprising in late capitalism. The film's progression through different settings—domestic and public spaces, urban and natural scenes, online chat-rooms and home movies—is framed by the decline and death of the artist's mother with glimpses of Kahn's own experience of motherhood and the toil of daily life. *Stand in the Stream* situates these intimacies within the shift of civic and digital landscapes over time, revealing the many intersections of the personal and the political.



It's Cool, I'm Good (2010) features a severely injured protagonist (played by the artist), moving through twenty different locations in and around Los Angeles, seducing, harassing and charming caretakers along the way. Sharing humorous anecdotes and questionable advice on living through difficult times, the bandaged character is at once narcissistic and self-deprecating, teetering between life and death. Kahn's character's embodiment of overwhelming psychic and environmental stress remains relatable and prescient, ten years later.

The exhibition's daily screening schedule will be available on the museum's website at theicala.org.

Stanya Kahn is a 2012 Guggenheim Fellow in Film/Video. Recent solo exhibitions include shows at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus; Contemporary Arts Museum, St. Louis; MoMA/PS1, New York; New Museum, New York; and Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the 2018 Gwangju Biennial; New Museum; Centre Pompidou, Paris; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Hammer Museum; New Museum, New York; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; MOCA San Diego; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Fearnley Astrup Museet, Oslo; and the Orange County Museum of Art, among others. Her collaborative work with Harry Dodge has shown at the 2008 Whitney Biennial; Brooklyn Museum; the 54th Venice Biennale; MOCA, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, DE; Sundance Film Festival; and the New York Underground Film Festival, among others. She was a contributing writer and actor in the 2001 feature film *By Hook or By Crook*. Her writings and drawings appear in multiple publications including *Die Laughing* (2nd Cannons, 2016), *Moving Image* (MIT Press), *It's Cool, I'm Good* (Cornerhouse, 2012), and *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 2016) Her work is in the collections of the Hammer Museum; MoMA, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Goetz Museum, Munich, among others.

Stanya Kahn: No Go Backs is organized by Jamillah James, Curator.

No Go Backs was made with the support of the Film/Video Studio Program at the Wexner Center for the Arts and an Emergency Grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Art.

ICA LA is supported by the Curator's Council, Fieldwork, and 1717 Collective.

About the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA)

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA) is an epicenter of artistic experimentation and incubator of new ideas.

Founded in 1984 as the Santa Monica Museum of Art (SMMoA) and reestablished in 2017 with a new identity and home in Downtown Los Angeles, ICA LA builds upon a distinguished history of bold curatorial vision and innovative programming to illuminate the important untold stories and emerging voices in contemporary art and culture. The museum's 12,700 square-foot renovated industrial building—designed by WHY Architecture under the leadership of Kulapat Yantrasast—features ample space for exhibitions, public programs, retail pop-ups, integrated offices, and special projects.

ICA LA's mission is to support art that sparks the pleasure of discovery and challenges the way we see and experience the world, ourselves, and each other. ICA LA is committed to upending hierarchies of race, class, gender, and culture. Through exhibitions, education programs, and community partnerships, ICA LA fosters critique of the familiar and empathy with the different.

ICA LA is committed to making contemporary art relevant and accessible for all. Admission is free. For more information, visit theicala.org. Join the conversation, follow on social media at @theicala and #icala.

Exhibition Hours: Wednesday–Friday 11am to 7pm; Saturday and Sunday 11am to 6pm, by appointment

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Image captions, descending: Harold Mendez, *Sin nombre*, 2018. Cotton, graphite, gesso, watercolor, toner, lithography crayon on ball-grained aluminum lithographic plate mounted on Dibond. 84 × 180 in. (213.4 × 457.2cm). Installation view, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2018. Collection of Brett Hofer. Photo: Martin Seck; *If they are not fears, they're contritions. If they are not doubts, inabilities (After Melitón Rodríguez)*, 2015. Mixed media on ball-grained aluminum lithographic plate mounted on Dibond, cotton, graphite, spray enamel, watercolor, toner, vegetable oil, lithography crayon, soot. 60 × 84 in. (152.4 × 213.4 cm). Collection of Rodney Lubeznik and Susan D. Goodman; *Jaulas*, 2017. Metal, Hydrocal, twine, bone, graphite, pigment. 48 × 88 × 138 in. (121.9 × 223.5 × 350.5 cm). Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago; *American Pictures*, 2016. Reclaimed wrought iron, wood, crushed cochineal insects, staples, industrial work mats, carnations. Dimensions variable. Private collection. All images courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago. Stanya Kahn, *No Go Backs* (video still), 2020. 16mm film transferred to 2k video (color, sound). TRT 33:13 min; *Stand in the Stream* (video still), 2011–17. HD digital video (color, sound). TRT 60:50 min.; *It's Cool, I'm Good* (video still), 2010. SD video (color, 5.1 sound). TRT 35:25 min. All works © Stanya Kahn; courtesy the artist and Vielmetter, Los Angeles.

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