

NANCY NEWBERRY



SMOKE BOMBS AND BORDER CROSSINGS

FOTO RELEVANCE HOUSTON TEXAS

MAR 26 - MAY 7, 2022



NANCY NEWBERRY

SMOKE BOMBS AND BORDER CROSSINGS

Cover Image: Character Study 07

Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP

Above: Character Study for the Series Smoke Bombs and Border Crossings

Archival Pigment Print
30x22" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
50x36" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP

SCENES FROM NANCY NEWBERRY

FOREWORD BY SUZANNE ZELLER

Bright colors accented by deep shadows draw us in to a Western stage of Nancy Newberry's creation, *Smoke Bombs and Border Crossings*. Influenced by her Italian heritage and her Texan roots, the photographs in the show function as a contemporary Spaghetti Western, investigating the spectacle at the core of the Wild West. With meticulous attention to costume and uniform, the director artfully stages scenes of archetypal characters - American cowboys, Mexican charros, and soldiers costumed in marching band uniforms. Newberry's work investigates the artifice and the real, the mythologies and the histories, the actors and the stage.

The Spaghetti Western genre, made popular in the 1960s by Italian director Sergio Leone and the iconic soundtrack of composer Ennio Morricone, notably diverged from traditional Western films by reinterpreting and questioning its own archetypes and mythologies. This critical lens led to the rise of the anti-hero, a complex protagonist who can neither be considered fully good nor evil, in direct contrast with the very literal black hat vs. white hat, good vs. evil trope popularized in previous Western narratives. In this new understanding of the world, informed by post-war conditions in Europe, heroes are often fallible and villains are sometimes redeemable. The earlier black-and-white approach simplified complex historical narratives into neatly packaged parables, and these narratives steadily worked their way into the popular conception of the real history of the West.

The mythologies utilized by and reinforced through Western film narratives lie at the essence of US culture, whether we are conscious of it or not. Commonly used tropes include the lone gunfighter, the outlaw, the shootout, the last stand, and westward expansion/manifest destiny (often visually communicated through the wagon train or the construction of a railroad). We see these tropes in popular media everywhere, regardless of genre (to look at two major franchises, consider the solitary bounty hunters of *Star Wars*, or the primary mission of the crew in *Star Trek* to explore new worlds, ever expanding their reach throughout the universe). Rugged individualism informs the creation of US government policies in a very "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" fashion. In Texas, specifically, one failed military maneuver has become immortalized by the saying which encourages you to remember it.

Within the series, Newberry explores some of the nationalizing mythologies of Mexico, focusing largely on costume and mythological figures arising from the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821). The images and stories of prominent figures such as Pancho Villa are heavily mythologized, as are the images of Mexican soldiers with ammunition belts crossed over the chest (seen in painted form in Newberry's series). Also featured in Newberry's work are the soldaderas, or women soldiers, nicknamed Adelitas during the war. La Adelita is a mythologized figure herself - her original identity unknown, she was immortalized in a popular war ballad and came to represent all soldaderas as a symbol of patriotism. However, the myth focuses heavily on her desirability to the male soldiers, and so its legacy is a complex one, her image both utilized by some Mexican feminists and also heavily critiqued.

Newberry presents three archetypal characters in *Smoke Bombs and Border Crossings*: the cowboy, the charro, and the soldier, expressed through costume and uniform. Newberry's photography has long centered around the role costume plays in defining identity. In this series, Newberry meticulously selected pieces from her extensive collection of wardrobe. Hats create sharp shadows covering the eyes of the subjects, and ornately embroidered western shirts are accented against softly colored backdrops. These character studies are reminiscent of a less gritty Spaghetti Western, in the moments during a standoff where tension builds as the film focuses tightly on the gunslingers' faces. The charros and escaramuza charras in the series wear their own traditional regalia. Charros are Mexican horse riders who participate in charrería, the national sport of Mexico, a longstanding cultural tradition similar in format to the rodeo. Escaramuza charras are female riders who compete specifically in synchronized maneuvers on horseback. Their dresses are inspired by and are a direct reference to the Adelitas, and that is the role they play on Newberry's stage.

The military archetype is expressed in the series through characters outfitted in vintage marching band uniforms. Marching bands, having originated as military bands marching alongside foot soldiers, retain details on the uniforms which reference that past (epaulettes, plumes, etc.) and call into play ideas surrounding group identity and loyalty. Playing into the series' focus on colorful regalia, the reference to marching band performances underscores the spectacle inherent in the Western genre. Band performances are carefully choreographed spectacles, blocked like plays on a huge stage. Western films expand that stage into the landscape around us, introducing artifice into the everyday, making it that much easier to conflate myth with reality.

A brand new addition to this series are a set of flags, imagined and created by Newberry, featuring ornate belt buckles at the center of each one. Referencing the six flags that have flown over the geographic area of Texas, the images call into discussion very directly the role of symbolic imagery in the creation of national identity and in displays of power. The buckles feature ornately carved scenes of cowboys and rodeo events, and act themselves as myth-carrying devices. The flags are also seen in some of the marching band / military images, appropriately underscoring the association between military force / occupation and nationalism. The title of the series invokes the concept of the border, a construct which shifts with time and action, diplomacy and bloodshed. The land itself does not shift, and neither do the occupants of that land, even when border lines are drawn and redrawn.

There are three main characters in this series, and that begs the question of who and what is absent. It is not possible to write about the Western genre without acknowledging its complex history with racism, misogyny, and violence. *Smoke Bombs and Border Crossings* opens a dialogue to these topics while focusing in on one aspect of the Western – its spectacle, its storytelling, its myth-making. Not only does Newberry comment on these rooted cultural myths, but she attempts to create her own. Like a Spaghetti Western, the series is self-parodying in its own way. The bright color palette of the series takes us out of any realm of considering this work as truth or history - it pulls us deeper into the performance, the weaving of the narrative. The inseparability of aesthetics from identity are evident in the colorful, striking images of *Smoke Bombs and Border Crossings*.





Character Study in Scenescape

Archival Pigment Print
30x20" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
40x30" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP



Character Study 02

Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Scene 01
Archival Pigment Print
21x30" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x40" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Flag 0200
Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



Flag 0101

Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



Escaramuza 02

Archival Pigment Print
30x20" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
50x33" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Untitled Character Study 01
Archival Pigment Print
23.5x20" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
40x47" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Scene 04
Archival Pigment Print
21x16" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
40x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Flag 0600

Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



Flag 0300

Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



The Sentinels

Archival Pigment Print
24x36" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
34x50" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Character Study 05

Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Character Study 06
Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Scene 02
Archival Pigment Print
24x36" • Edition of 7 + 2AP
34x50" • Edition of 3 + 2AP



Open Carry

Archival Pigment Print
22.5x15" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
30x20" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Untitled Scene 06

Archival Pigment Print
22.5x15" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
30x20" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Scene 03

Archival Pigment Print
16.5x23.5" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
21x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Character Study 36

Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



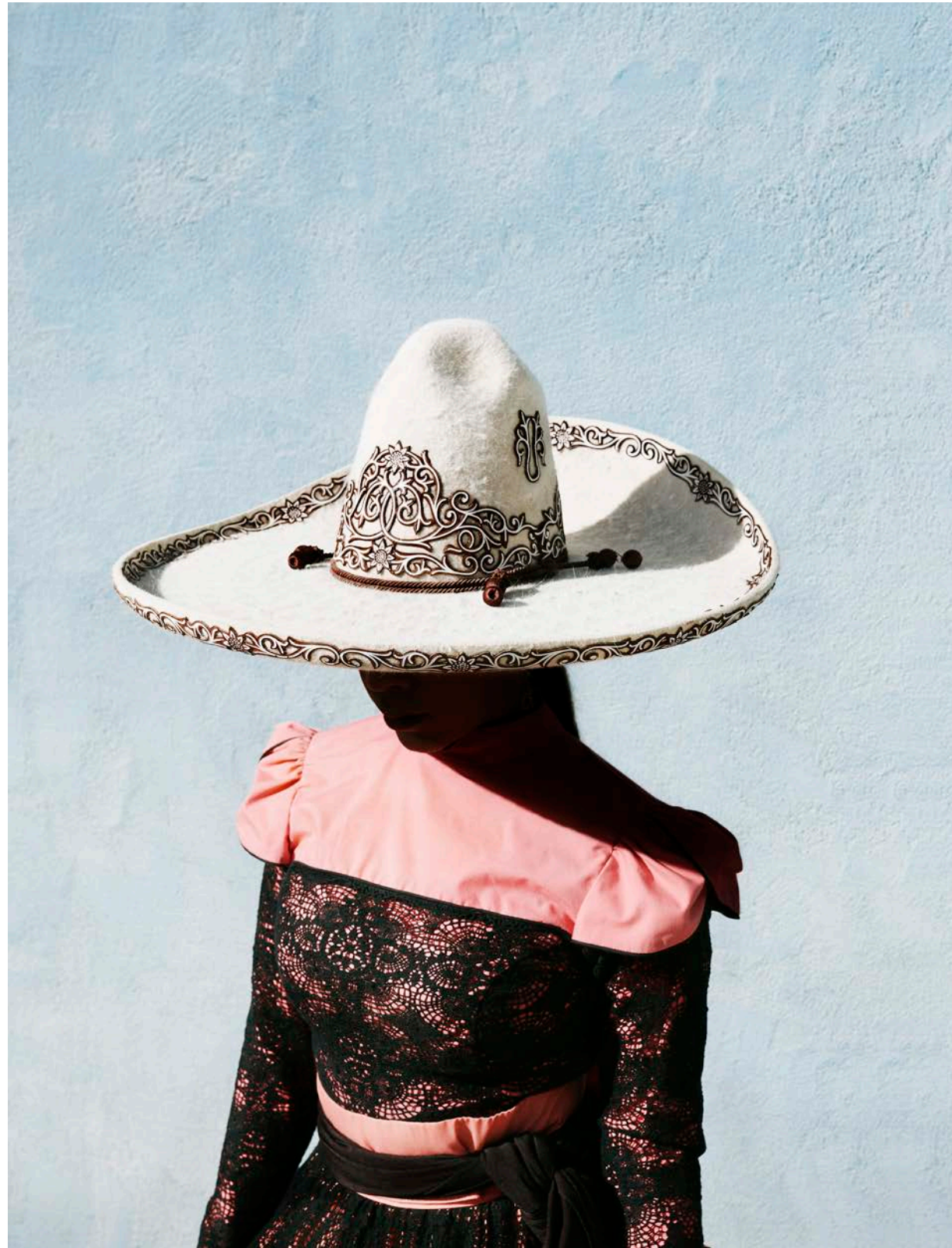
Flag 0500

Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



Flag 0400

Archival Pigment Print
13x19.5" • Edition of 5 + 2 AP
20x30" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 2 + 2 AP



Escaramuza

Archival Pigment Print
18x13.5" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
50x38" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Character Study 10

Archival Pigment Print
15x23" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
28x42" • Edition of 3 + 2 AP



NANCY NEWBERRY

THE ARTIST

Nancy Newberry is a Dallas-based artist and photographer. Her performative portraiture investigates individuation, specifically focusing on cultural and social systems of belonging. Her work is deeply personal, exploring narratives of identity, myth and memory as the foundation of her practice.

She has received many honors and awards from both publications and institutions. Most recently she has received The Nasher Sculpture Center Artist Grant (2020); The British Journal of Photography Female in Focus Award (2019); The Griffin Museum of Photography, Richards' Family Trust Award (2018); The International Festival of Photography, Hyeres, France, Grand Prix Finalist; PhotoEspaña Madrid Descubrimientos Prize; Kolga Photo Award, Tbilisi, Georgia; PhotoVisa Award, Krasnodar, Russia; FotoFest Houston, Discovery of the Meeting Place; and The National Portrait Gallery, London, Taylor Wessing Portrait Exhibition (2012, 2017).

Ms. Newberry has worked extensively with regional and global organizations for 20 years and her photographs are in the permanent collections of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Centro de Arte Alcobendas, Spain; and Villa Noailles, Hyères, France. Her work has been exhibited throughout the US, Europe and China.

Untitled Character Study 02

Archival Pigment Print
22.75x16.5" • Edition of 7 + 2 AP
30x21 • Edition of 3 + 2 AP

FOTO RELEVANCE

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum quality contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. The gallery has mounted monographic exhibitions as well as group shows to investigate current trends and themes in contemporary art, showcasing a broad range of both darkroom and digital photographic techniques. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District of Houston, Texas.



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