May 7–Oct. 9, 2022

A Country is Not a House: Ronald Rael + Virginia San Fratello
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Introduction

Fusing design with activism, Ronald Rael and Virginia San Fratello have spent over a decade questioning the implications and contradictions of the border wall that divides the United States and Mexico. Structurally and conceptually, the artists undermine and dismantle the wall itself — a symbol of xenophobia and fear — through speculative explorations that promote social, economic and ecological reparations. Their inventive and poignant commentary is a protest against the wall, our most politically polarizing architectural feature, and a projection about its future. Offering new imaginaries, the exhibition features drawings, prints, models, videos and newly commissioned sculptural installations inspired by our region that serve as a reminder of how human beings can transcend the forces that seek to divide us.
About the Artists

Professor Ronald Rael is the Eva Li Memorial Chair in Architecture in the Department of Architecture in the College of Environmental Design at the University of California Berkeley.

Virginia San Fratello is professor and chair of the Department of Design at San José State University.

Learn more about Rael San Fratello’s work at rael-sanfratello.com or on Instagram @rrael and @vasfsf.
The exhibition’s title draws from an open letter Rael wrote in The Architect’s Newspaper in 2019. Responding to critics of their creative endeavors against the wall prompted him to consider, “Why do so many make a parallel between a country and a house when it comes to making an argument for the border wall?” He cites economist David Youngberg, who argues that unlike a home, which one owns, one cannot own a country because it is a public space. A country is not a house.
The nearly 800-mile-long wall that divides the U.S. from Mexico has left deep scars on the people and landscape of the borderlands. Construction crews blasted through tribal nations, sacred sites and protected public lands. They mowed down ancient cacti and sensitive ecosystems, disrupting animal migration patterns and causing catastrophic flooding.

The most expensive segments cost up to $20 million per mile as part of a $15 billion mega project that ranked among the costliest in U.S. history. The wall cuts through private property, separating not only countries but neighborhoods, communities and families. Additionally, hundreds of migrants die every year attempting to cross the border as the wall pushes them into brutal terrain.
The 1,954-mile border between the United States and Mexico traverses a variety of terrains, including urban areas and deserts. This map shows the various types of fencing along the border, whether it is a pedestrian fence, a vehicle fence or no fence.
Ambos Nogales: Sister Cities

Nogales, Arizona has a uniquely special relationship with its namesake and sister city across the border, Nogales, Sonora. Both Nogaleses — or Ambos Nogales, as locals refer to them — have rich layers of history and culture.
Nogales, Arizona, a town with a population of 21,746 citizens, is a U.S.-Mexico border community established in 1880 by Jacob and Isaac Isaacson, who built a trading post along the border. Nogales became a city in 1922, and the first passenger rail service from Tucson through Nogales to Mexico City was established in 1927.
Nogales, Sonora sits across the fence from Nogales, Arizona, and together these border cities are known as Ambos Nogales. The two towns were first settled in the early 1880s and are named after the walnut trees that “once grew abundantly in the mountain pass” of the narrow valley carved by arroyos feeding the Santa Cruz River in Arizona.

By 1882, a railroad connecting the port of Guaymas on the coast of Sonora with Benson, Arizona, across the borderline, created Ambos Nogales (Flores, 1987). Early maps portray the unique morphology of Ambos Nogales carved out by arroyos and the railroad tracks and spanning the boundary line. The current urban footprint spans south and north, outlining a metropolis whose pulse beats to the rhythm of the border.
In Ambos Nogales, workers, tourists, shoppers, traders and goods cross the borderline, creating flows that mark and transform daily life and engender transborder communities (Lara-Valencia & Dolzblasz, 2018). Although economic factors remain significant in explaining the dynamic flows in Ambos Nogales, government efforts to control the movement of people across the line become more prominent factors of cross-border mobility in recent years. Rigorous inspections and long waiting lines became a regular sighting at most border ports of entry connecting Mexico and the United States after 9/11 and during the Trump administration. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the abrupt closure of the border on March 21, 2020, resulting in a massive rebordering event with no precedent in the history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.
Border Crossings

Human connections fueled by kinship, friendships and pure humanity have helped Ambos Nogales withstand recurring bordering waves. A shared ecology formed by plants, animals and arroyos, moving defiantly across the borderline, adds to the borderwork that keeps Ambos Nogales — the idea of a borderless place — strong and exciting despite walls and other bordering acts (Lara-Valencia & Herzog, 2021; Rumford, 2013).
Ambos Nogales is the most populous urban area on the Arizona-Sonora border and one of the most rapidly growing metropolises in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The engine of this growth is Nogales, Sonora.

Before the arrival of the maquiladora industry in the mid ’60s, Nogales grew at a rate of 3.4 percent annually. Maquiladoras attracted thousands of people who saw Mexican border towns as an alternative to unemployment and low wages in rural areas of southern Mexico. As a result, the city’s population increased by 55 percent in the 80s and grew even more rapidly in the ’90s. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is behind the high growth of the ’90s and the consolidation of Ambos Nogales as a hub for international trade and manufacturing. With a 2.3 percent growth rate in the last decade, Nogales, Sonora remains one of the fastest-growing urban areas among mid-size Mexican cities.
## Ambos Nogales: People, Shelter and Place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nogales, Arizona</th>
<th>THE PEOPLE • LA GENTE</th>
<th>Nogales, Sonora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19,770</td>
<td>Total Population • Población total</td>
<td>261,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,340</td>
<td>Female population • Población femenina</td>
<td>131,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,430</td>
<td>Male population • Población masculina</td>
<td>129,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>Males per 100 females • Hombres por 100 mujeres</td>
<td>99.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>Median age • Edad mediana</td>
<td>27 años</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>Population under 18 years • Población de menos de 18 años</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>Population 65 years and over • Población de 65 años y más</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>Population 25 years and over with high school or higher • Población de 25 años o más con bachillerato o más</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nogales, Arizona</th>
<th>HOUSING • VIVIENDA</th>
<th>Nogales, Sonora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,939</td>
<td>Total housing units • Total viviendas particulares</td>
<td>80,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,129</td>
<td>Occupied housing units • Viviendas particulares habitadas</td>
<td>70,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>Homeownership rate • Tasa de propiedad</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Average occupants in occupied housing units • Promedio de ocupantes en viviendas habitadas</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>Occupied housing with 2 or more bedrooms • Occupied housing with 2 or more bedrooms</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>Housing lacking plumbing facilities • Viviendas carentes de agua entubada</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>Housing units with an internet connection • Viviendas con conexión a internet</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nogales, Arizona</th>
<th>THE CITY • LA CIUDAD</th>
<th>Nogales, Sonora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36.54</td>
<td>Land area (km²) • Extension territorial (km²)</td>
<td>49.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>541.1</td>
<td>Population per km² • Población por km²</td>
<td>5,285.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Prepared by Transborder Policy Lab based on INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda. 2020 and US Census, 2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates and 2020: DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

### AMBOS NOGALES

| Population of mexican ascent | 94.8% | Poblacion de ascendencia mexicana |
| Spanish speaking population | 90.9% | Poblacion que habla espanol |
Population Growth

The 2020 census reports 261,137 residents in Nogales, Sonora, mainly people of productive age and their newly formed families. The median age of the population of Nogales, Sonora is 27 years, lower than the median age of the population of the state of Sonora and Mexico as a whole (INEGI, 2021). About one in three residents of Nogales, Sonora is of school age or younger.
Tribes in Sonora

There are many tribes native to the Sonoran Desert — here are a few of them:

- Mayo
- Yaqui
- Pima
- Seri
- Cucapá
- Papago
- Guarijio
- Kikapú
- Tohono O’odham
- Gila River Indian Community
- Cocopah

You can find more information on the tribes at this link.

La Danza del Venado: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTCmhhJk3ml
Picture from: https://www.nps.gov/articles/yome.htm
Tribes in Sonora

The waters provided by the Santa Cruz River, Sonoita Creek and Harshaw Creek were ideal for fishing. The land was also ideal for agriculture and ranching.

Members of the Lipan Apache and Opata tribes hold a prayer west of Nogales, Sonora, in an area where an Apache battle took place nearly 100 years ago. Photo: Kendal Blust, Nogales International
Downtown Nogales, Ariz. Photo: John Burcham for The New York Times
Revolution

Nogales was part of a migratory path and trade route much later called El Camino Real (The King’s Highway). Later on, Spanish Conquistadors forayed north along the valley in quest of precious metals and gems.

In 1914, during the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa’s army was stationed in Nogales. The U.S. military’s garrison in Nogales swelled to over 10,000 mostly black soldiers of the highly decorated 25th Regiment mostly detached from Washington, D.C. The military buildup and related business growth attracted many businesses to Nogales.

Nogales, Arizona and Sonora in the 1910s.
From the first platting of the towns in 1884, Mexico had maintained a fifty-foot setback from the original 1854 boundary survey. This 1890s view looks west from a nearby hill to show the setback. The two-story building with arched windows on the Mexican side (south) near the upper center of the image is positioned at the north end of Calle Elías, and across the open space fifty feet beyond is Morley Avenue in Nogales, Arizona. On the American side (north), all buildings are built up to the boundary. The tower of the Mexican customs house built circa 1887 is faintly visible at left background.
• A big fight between Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora in 1918, was known as La batalla del 27 de agosto. This battle was notable for being a significant confrontation between US and Mexican forces during the Border War, which took place in the context of the Mexican Revolution and the First World War. It led to the building of the first permanent border fence separating two towns anywhere on the U.S.-Mexico border.

• The full name of Nogales, Sonora is “Heroica Nogales,” meaning the “Heroic City of Nogales.”

• Nogales, Sonora is the 7th largest border town in Mexico with a population of 264,782 people.

• The name Nogales is derived from the Spanish word for walnut or walnut tree. It refers to the large walnut trees that once stood in the mountain pass where Nogales is located.

• A replica of Train 501 stands in its own plaza. “Maquina 501” is an old train used in the movie of the same name. The film centers on the life of Jesús García Corona, a 26-year-old engineer who sacrificed his life for the greater good by preventing a train loaded with dynamite from exploding.
As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration issued an emergency order in March 2020 under Title 42, the public health code. Claiming that it prevents the spread of contagious disease, the policy allows U.S. border agents to quickly expel asylum-seeking migrants to Mexico or their home country without due legal process. The Biden administration has maintained this sweeping border restriction that has led to 1.7 million migrant expulsions as of the end of February 2022, according to government statistics. They are scheduled to end the policy on May 23, 2022. Three states — Arizona, Louisiana and Missouri — are suing in hopes of stopping the government from ending Title 42. For more, visit What is Title 42?
“Remain in Mexico” Policy

The controversial Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), known informally as the “Remain in Mexico” policy, allows U.S. authorities to send migrants, many of them asylum seekers, who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border without proper documentation back to Mexico to wait out the duration of their U.S. immigration court proceedings. Enacted in January 2019 under the Trump administration and extended in December 2021 by the Biden administration, it has led to thousands of asylum seekers needing to essentially reside in Nogales in an almost semi-permanent sense.

“Remain in Mexico” sends asylum seekers to face risks of kidnapping, extortion, rape and other abuses in Mexico and violates their right to seek asylum in the United States.

Ecological Effects

Where portions of the border wall have been completed, environmentalists are concerned that the lighting will disrupt the migratory routes of birds by hindering their ability to navigate. Any bright lights along the east-west border could misdirect north-south flying birds, said conservationists.

In many areas groundwater was pumped out to make concrete and keep dust down on the roads. As a result, some of the springs have dried up, leaving no water for wildlife.
The wall separated the jaguars that are in the United States from their breeding population in Mexico. It strands these jaguars in the United States with no hope of them finding a mate or reproducing.

This image from Fort Huachuca in southeast Arizona shows a wild jaguar in southern Arizona, Dec. 1, 2016.

See a list of species with images in the border area here.
Learn More:

What is Title 42?

History- City of Nogales

Danza del Venado

The August 27, 1918 Battle Of Ambos Nogales

Remain in Mexico 2.0

Border Wildlife Study

Nogales, Arizona

Threats to Wildlife Persist Even as US Halts Border Wall Construction
Bibliography


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