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mountains and river

The border wall cuts through geography, through memories. It separates old women from the river they swam in as children; it contributes to habitat loss of the jaguar, ocelot and jaguarondi; it becomes a place where families reach through the slats to hold hands; or where they stand, a deported father on one side with his guitar singing a song to his 16-year-old daughter, a US citizen.



policemen in the park

In February 2019, policemen lined the border in Piedras Negras, Mexico as tensions rose over the rights of a caravan of 1,700 migrants from Honduras who were being held in an abandoned body bag factory. The migrants said they had not been allowed to exercise their legal right to request asylum in the US while Mexican officials argued that they should be bused away from the border. When the migrants attempted to escape the facility, Mexican security forces and riot police blocked their exit. A Honduran migrant named Josué explained, “There are children here, look. Children who are also coming from where we are. And look. For them, they should let us leave the factory, right? If we as adults are frustrated, imagine what the kids are feeling. We’re sick. We’re frustrated.”



boundary river

In Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, on weekends, families gather on the banks of the Rio Grande to fish, swim and cookout. Sometimes, among the children swimming, a group of men, naked from the waist up, float by on a pile of inflated trash bags, and when they reach the banks closest to the U.S., they scramble up with dreams of reaching the U.S. The man in the blue shirt has Hecho in Mexico (“Made in Mexico”) tattooed on his shaved head. He explained that, yes, some people want to swim across the river and go to the U.S. but they are clearly desperate. To illustrate his point, he said, “Look, here in Mexico we have delicious barbecue chicken and in the U.S., you only have frozen chicken and canned beans.”



in marfa

Marfa is like a movie set. Marfa has been the site of many movie sets. Marfa is known for its art scene. Known for its land art. And it’s million dollar houses. But Marfa is also trailer homes and dirt roads and dogs barking. At any given time, there are 152 or 157 or 189 mobile homes for sale in the area. Xiodong explored less visited neighborhoods of Marfa with filmmaker ShiQian who took a selfie in a puddle, the sky open wide behind him in seemingly endless purple and blue glory.



juarez at the casa del migrante in Juárez

A group of LGBTQ migrants from El Salvador rests inside a building normally reserved for prayer at the migrant shelter in Juárez, Mexico. They traveled together for 23 days, sometimes walking, to reach the US-Mexico border where they hoped to request asylum. They hitchhiked and slept in fields and rode on trains, moving forward despite the weight of fear, the worry that they might not survive the journey. Many of them including Violeta, 28, a trans woman, fled violence based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. As for the iguana, the rabbit and the dog – they are migrants too, pets that made the journey with migrants, lovingly carried for thousands of miles.



a mexican family, the martinez

Juana Martínez López, the matriarch of the family, sits with her granddaughter Herlinda Martínez Martínez, who has just woken up from a nap and is rubbing her eyes, in her lap. She and her husband Pedro Martínez Méndez, who sits on his walker, migrated from Oaxaca to Piedras Negras, Mexico with their family. They live in Colonia Presidentes III, a neighborhood of migrants from around Mexico and Central America that includes a mix of brightly colored houses, many under construction, most with packed earthen floors. They live in a tiny house with one turquoise concrete pillar out front with their daughter Clara Estela Castillo Martínez, their son, Juan Martín Martínez Méndez and their daughter-in-law, Blanca Isenia Martínez Camarillo.



a wall that can turn around

At times the border fence looks like it leads nowhere, but it curves around, a solitary piece of ironwork standing in a desolate landscape. In a parallel universe, it could be a work of art.



girl at the border

A migrant stands on the international bridge in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. She is almost half way across the bridge, right between Mexico and the U.S., and she hopes she will be allowed to request asylum. She has spent countless nights sleeping on the bridge, her body one among many resting on pieces of cardboard. During the day, she checks her phone for messages from her family and chats with a group of Venezuelan teens fleeing persecution by their government. They offer her fistfuls of bolívares, declaring the Venezuelan currency worthless. Although it is her international right to request asylum, she has arrived at a port of entry when the US government is changing policies to increasingly limit asylum requests.



chatting

On his 1,530-mile border road trip along the US-Mexico border, Liu Xiaodong and his team drove through Tornillo, Texas to visit the site of a detention tent camp for migrant children. The camp had already been shut down for a series of serious safety issues, and there was no trace of it when Xiaodong and his team arrived. Leaving town, he stopped along a deserted road at the site of a cross and wandered into the desert with journalist Alice Driver. They wondered aloud about the fate of the children who had been living in tents, wondered if their lot would improve or if they would be shifted to increasingly remote places.