

**From the Mountains To the Sea: Conversation With Artist Bia Gayotto
Wednesday, June 19, 2013, Altadena**



Bia Gayotto in her studio.

Bia Gayotto, a Los Angeles based artist, is opening a show that is well worth visiting at the Pasadena Museum of California Art on August 10, 2013. Gayotto's work, an overlay of rich imagery and sound, is more than an ethnographic study, it is a captivating amalgamation of people and places defining the changes taking place along California's Route 66. Gayotto constructs unusual yet very familiar images that seem very personal and distant at once. And it is those seemingly conflicting elements in her work that help us see the coexisting diversity as the underlined strength of the LA community and its cultural paradigm.

P: Bia, you have a new project coming up, can you tell us about it?

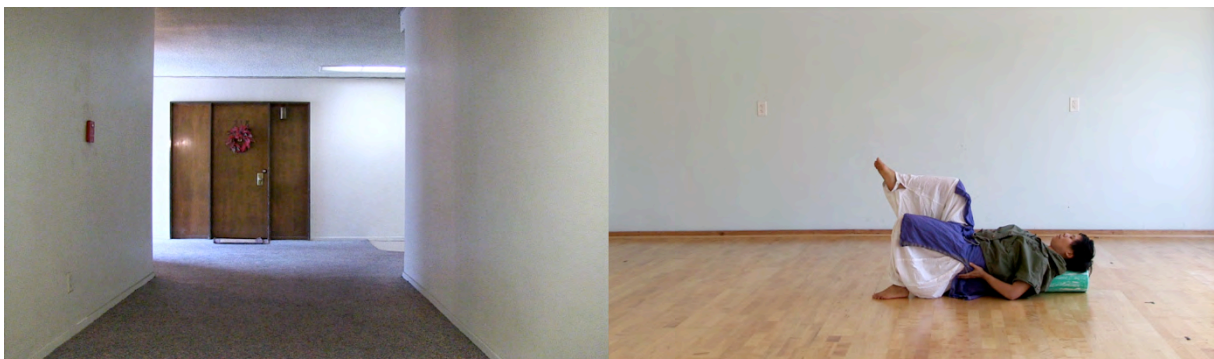
B: I am working on *Somewhere in Between: Los Angeles* a two-screen video installation. This project is a part of an ongoing series that I have been developing in different cities in the United States. It is a portrait of a city, a portrait of Los Angeles, through stories, people and landscapes.

P: Your work deals with cultural diversity. Which communities did you work with for the *Somewhere in Between: Los Angeles* project?

B: First I was thinking more locally but when I started defining the geographical area I became intrigued by Route 66 and its historical importance to LA. Known as the “mother road”, Route 66 offers an interesting geographical link between LA’s diverse neighborhoods. Historically, the route not only connected East and West but also brought along a lot of migration; which symbolically, represents American mobility. My starting point became Pasadena and my ending point Santa Monica. There are about twenty-one different neighborhoods along this section, a path that goes from the mountains to the sea.

P: Were you interested to work with a specific group of people?

In the beginning of this series of projects I started working with the first and the second generation of immigrants because it is related to my own experience. Then I realized that it would be much more interesting to work with all those who consider themselves bi-cultural and not to define the term bi-cultural in advance. Now I try to let that happen naturally because the term is very broad and often ambiguous. This way of thinking opens the project up in a fruitful way. In the most recent video I involve people of different backgrounds whether we speak of nationality, race, or even sexuality.



Credit: Bia Gayotto, "Somewhere in Between: Los Angeles" 2013. Video still courtesy of the artist.

P: Are people generally interested to participate and be interviewed? What is your experience?

B: The response is very positive. There were many people interested to participate in the *Somewhere in Between* series. What happens is that I meet each participant individually in person for an interview often in a museum because it provides a neutral ground. The interviews are intimate and deep, and emotional for both parties; it's an incredible moment to get to know each other and it is a very special part of my work.

P: What types of questions come up during such an interview?

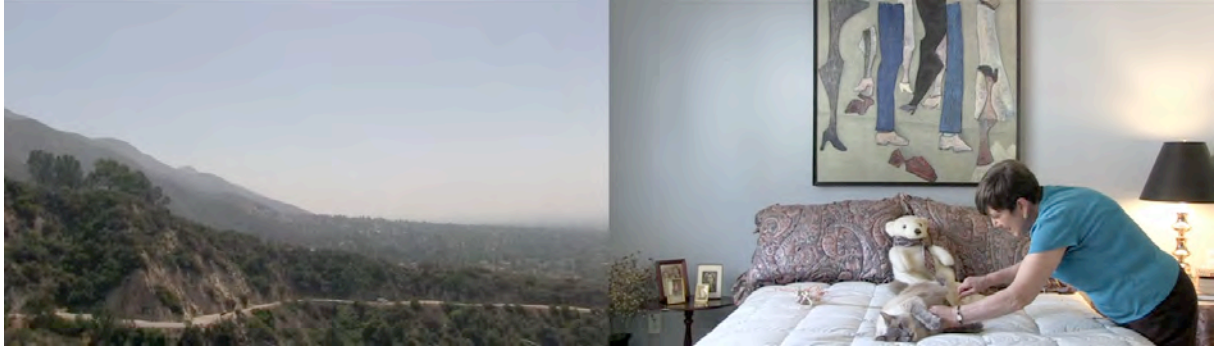
B: We discuss various topics such as sense of self, place, identity, home, and language. We talk about how people feel in their neighborhood and what is their sense of belonging. In short, the interview is an overview of people's life experiences.

P: Your work is a thoughtful reflection upon these particular issues of belonging and community. Would you say your work also creates a sense of community or togetherness?

B: Well...yes. Many people respond to my work that way. Last year I did a similar project in the Silicon Valley and many of the participants came to its opening. We felt like a family. It was a wonderful way for them to meet each other. Overall, there is a strong sense of a collective experience because everyone is able to relate to the banal tasks the people in the videos participate in. It is about accepting others through familiarity. And this is why I believe everyone can relate to my work. LA is very challenging city because community here is very disconnected; LA is a unique place that way. There are many small towns inside of a big town. People can get enclosed in their neighborhoods in order to protect themselves from the vastness and complexity of the city.

P: Your videos are captured separately after the initial interviews. You already said you ask people to participate in any ordinary daily tasks. Can you tell us more about the shoot and how it is staged?

B: During the shoot I ask participants to choose a location that is very meaningful to them, a place that tells a little about their life story. Then I ask them to choose an activity, something that characterizes their nature. The video then focuses on the movements and the micro expressions of people immersed in their daily routine activities. I then juxtapose this personal universe with that of the city. The street life, the outer landscape and the personal world than coexist in the same space.



Credit: Bia Gayotto, "Somewhere in Between: Los Angeles" 2013. Video still courtesy of the artist.

P: Your work is a very sensitive contemplation of the relationship between the public and the personal. The separation of the voice and the image -the story from the face- is a very powerful choice because it creates a distance between the viewer and the subject and therefore provides the subject with certain freedom. The participants are presented as self-determined entities rather than objects to be perceived. You skillfully turn the exploitive glance into a contemplative one. Is that something you think about?

B: I start with a very ethnographic approach based on stories and narratives but at the end I end up with more of a poetic result which is more based on an intimate observation. It is not a traditional documentary. My work arises from social concepts but in its final stage it is rather a collage of people, places, and experiences; that gives the feeling of collectiveness and interconnectedness. I am very much interested in the idea of simultaneity and transience. I am more and more interested in layering and distancing the image from the voice. I am now working with Kubilay Uner a LA-based composer who will make a sound design for my recent work. I am curious to see how the subtle interplay of sound and voice will change the perception of the final piece.

P: The strong composition of the images in your video tells us a lot about your artistic choices. How important are these formal choices in your work?

B: The framing is very important. I do make a lot of formal choices when it comes to camera angle, light and color. My photography background plays a big role in this process. When I shoot, though, it is most important to translate my own personal experience of a place. I always make sure to highlight the general as well as the specific aspects of a given situation. This process allows me to draw an attention to the relationship between the whole and its constituencies.

P: What is your background, Bia?

B: I grew up in Southern Brazil and then moved to São Paulo after living in London for two years. My early studies were in Marine Biology, and Communication and

Semiotics. I began to get interested in photography as a young adult, eventually moving to LA to attend UCLA's MFA program. At UCLA I started thinking conceptually about my work, using serial structures, collaboration and chance operations. Since then I've been interested in issues of cultural identity and geographic connectivity. To further chart movement my work evolved from photographic series to multi-channel video installations. Currently I live in Altadena, and work as an independent artist and educator.

P: Do your life experiences inform your work?

B: My own experiences have a big impact. I often had to learn how to adapt to different cultures and how to recreate a sense of community. I try to embrace these experiences now. My projects then become investigations of questions related to the experiences I have had. I moved away from photography to the video because I was not interested in the object as much as I was interested in the experience. Making an art work is a social experience which allows me to explore the meaning behind our role in the community. A sense of belonging is a big part of everyone's life in connection to a place. My work, which allows me to interact with people, gives me a sense of belonging.

Bia Gayotto's installation *Somewhere in Between: Los Angeles, 2013* is on show at the Pasadena Museum of California Art from August 10, 2013 until January 5, 2014. This exhibition is supported by the Board of Directors of the Pasadena Museum of California Art and is made possible in part by the Pasadena Arts & Culture Commission and the City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division. Bia Gayotto is a recipient of an ARC Grant from the Center for Cultural Innovation.

Warm thanks to the 16 participants from 14 LA neighborhoods

Pasadena: Ellain Baul-Highfill, Bob Oltman, South Pasadena: Carrie Adrian, Highland Park: Amy M Inouye, Lincoln Heights: Eldon Cline, Chinatown: Lupe Liang, Downtown LA: Iesha Wadala, Echo Park: Rollence Patugan, Silver Lake: Fanshein Cox DiGiovanni, Nina Harada, Hollywood (Little Armenia, Thaitown): Armen Makasjian, TJ Suwanswetr, West Hollywood: Noemi Torres Beverly Hills: Miriam Ha, West LA: Craig Martin, Santa Monica: Cynthia Ling Lee