

Ana-Teresa Fernández



La Llorona Unfabled: Stories to (Re)tell To Little Girls

GROUP SHOW

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GALERÍA DE LA RAZA

by Matthew Harrison Tedford

La Llorona (the Weeping Woman) is a pan-Latin American legend of Mexican origin. Versions of the folktale recount the story of a woman who, in a state of sadness, drowns her children. Her celestial punishment is to spend the eternity of death wandering the earth searching for her fallen children. Weeping, her specter haunts brooks and riverbanks. On view at Galería de la Raza, *La Llorona Unfabled: Stories to (Re)tell To Little Girls* utilizes this parable to re-examine Latina archetypes and posit strong, confident, if still melancholic, subjects.

The group exhibition focuses on the work of [Ana Teresa Fernandez](#). In *Untitled (Performance Document)* (hair piece) (2011), a two-channel video installation, the artist submerses herself in the ocean at the San Diego-Tijuana border, just meters away from the border fence extending into the Pacific. These waters are known for their contamination by sewage runoff from the Tijuana River. On the left monitor, viewers see Fernandez's bare upper back and the back of her head as she dunks her face in the water. The accompanying audio is the violent-sounding muffle of crashing and receding waves. At her face, Fernandez holds what appears to be a camcorder, and on the second monitor, this close-up is displayed. The artist's wet hair resembles a weeping

willow. She is like La Llorona, haunting this Californian beach. But their dispositions are not the same. There is a hint of defiance in the juxtaposition of the videos of Fernandez's wet back and her weeping hair framing the border wall. This is an attack on the racist slur "wetback," as the curatorial text explains in only slightly more explicit terms.



Ana Teresa Fernandez. *Untitled (Document of a Performance) (hair piece)*, 2011 (video stills); video installation. Courtesy of the Artist and Galería de la Raza, San Francisco.



Geraldine Lozano. *GeraLupe*, 2010; C-print, production still. Courtesy of the Artist and Galería de la Raza, San Francisco.

Fernandez may be cast in a role—as La Llorona, as a wetback—but her fortitude casts herself anew.

In another video, *Untitled (Performance Document)* (shoe piece) (2011), Fernandez engages with the European fairy princess archetype, donning a pair of “glass slippers” made entirely of ice. She stands above a storm drain on an Oakland street. This night, her prince doesn’t come and her slippers melt, washing away into the San Francisco Bay. But she perseveres—alone. Although her face is unseen, the artist’s composure and stoicism are visible in her posture as she withstands her frozen footwear, straining to remain upright as the shoes disintegrate. Refusing to be La Llorona or Cinderella, Fernandez asserts that both pain and strength can coexist in the female body.

In the video *GeraLupe* (2010), [Geraldine Lozano](#) plays the role of the venerated La Virgen, patroness of the Americas. The irony of this patronage is never more apparent than it is at the Ciudad Juárez–El Paso border, where [recent femicide](#) has killed hundreds, if not thousands, and where women toil in the city’s infamous maquiladoras.¹ Human misery curses Latinas on both sides of the Rio Grande, while an apocryphal virgin commands the highest of respect. In an empty parking lot, Lozano stands at an ironing board, performing her domestic duties. The conflation of antithetical cultural signs—La Virgen laboring—brings this gender confusion to the fore. For women from the maquiladoras, women from the mass graves, and undocumented migrant women, the gulf between exaltation and degradation is the artifice of papal pronouncement. Lozano resists having the role of patron or victim decided for her.

La Llorona Unfabled is fierce and intrepid, but it is not naïve. The Latina body is under assault—from culture, labor, and policy. La Llorona persists. The exhibition does not ignore these impediments to a liberated life. Instead, it tackles them head-on. When one walks out of the gallery back onto busy 24th Street, these realities will still exist. But hopefully the proposition of an emboldened Latina will prevail as well.

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