

Proposal

Hostile Terrain 94: Pop-Exhibition May–November 2020

Background:

In 1994 the United States Border Patrol formally implemented the immigration enforcement strategy known as “Prevention Through Deterrence.” This was a policy designed to discourage undocumented migrants from attempting to cross the U.S./Mexico border near urban ports of entry. Closing off these historically frequented crossing points would funnel individuals attempting to cross the border illegally through more remote and depopulated regions where the natural environment would act as a deterrent to movement. It was anticipated that the difficulties people would experience while traversing dozens of miles across what the Border Patrol deemed the “hostile terrain” of places such as the Sonoran desert of Arizona would ultimately discourage migrants from attempting the journey. This strategy failed to deter border crossers and instead, more than six million people have attempted to migrate through the Sonoran desert of Southern Arizona since the mid-1990s. At least 3,200 people have died, largely from dehydration and hyperthermia, while attempting this journey through Arizona. In recent years, this policy has shifted people towards Texas, where hundreds (if not thousands) have perished while migrating through unpopulated wilderness. Prevention Through Deterrence is still the primary border enforcement strategy being used on the U.S./Mexico border today.

Pop-Up Installation Synopsis:

Over the course of six months (May through November 2020) leading up to the American presidential election, Hostile Terrain 94¹ will be realized in 150 locations around the globe including Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Seattle, Miami, Mexico City, San Pedro Sula (Honduras), San Salvador (El Salvador), and Lampedusa (Italy). These installations will be a 15-20 foot long map of the Arizona/Mexico border with ~3400² hand written toe tags. These tags represent the recovered bodies of people who have died between the mid-1990s and 2020 crossing the U.S./Mexico border through the Sonoran Desert (**Figure 1**). These tags are color-coded (manila for identified bodies and orange for the 1,000+ unidentified) (**Figure 2 and 5**) and will be filled out by teams of volunteers who will then publicly place them in the exact locations on the map where those individuals were found. Each tag corresponds to a specific number on a large grid to ensure accurate placement of individual remains (**Figures 3-6**). Each map will come with introductory wall text explaining the project and also feature an augmented reality (AR) experience to accompany the map that can be accessed for free using a cell phone app. Additionally, during the pop-up installations, there will be screenings of the documentary film [Border South](#) produced by Raul O. Paz Pastrana and Jason De León.

Prototypes of this installation have been constructed throughout 2019 at the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin & Marshall College (**Figures 7-11**), as well as the University of Michigan, Cypress College, and the Penn Museum at the University of Pennsylvania.

¹ “94” installations is a nod to both the year that Prevention Through Deterrence started and the year that the North American Free Trade Agreement was initiated, the latter having resulted in an out migration of millions of disenfranchised Mexican farmers.

² 3400 dead is what would be projected for 2020 based on yearly averages since 2000. See

<https://derechoshumanosaz.net/coalition-work/remembering-the-dead/>

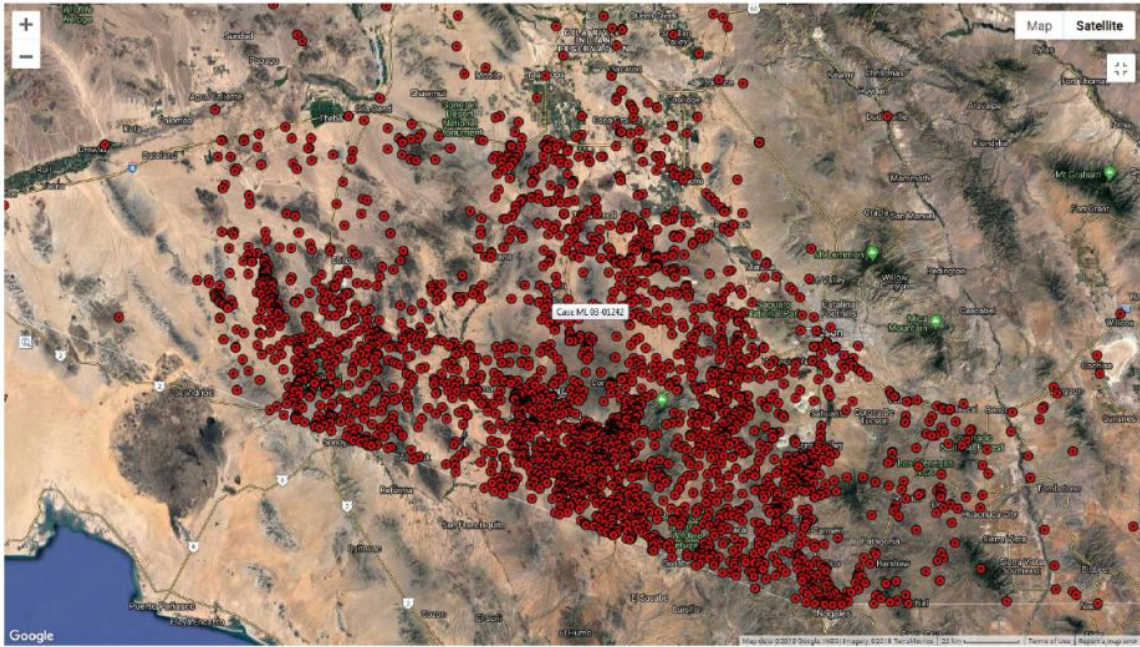


Figure 1. Map of Recovered Human Remains, Arizona
(from <https://humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/>)



Figure 2. Examples of filled out toe tag with death information for deceased border crossers.
Approximately 3200 of these tags will be filled out by hand and mounted in their exact location on a 15-20 foot long wall map.

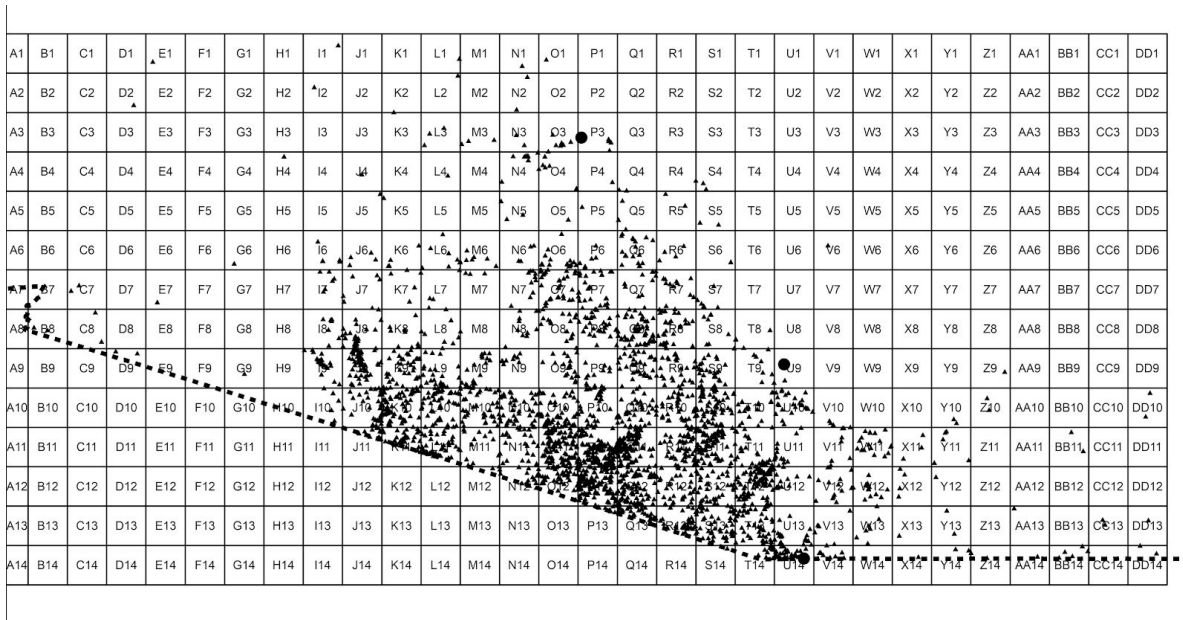


Figure 3. Layout grid of migrant deaths between the mid-1990s and 2019. Each hosting institution will receive an installation package that includes a vinyl wall graphic that shows the border line and key cities (Phoenix, Tucson, and Nogales). This grid will be reproduced through 8.5x11” printed sheets of paper. The printed grid sheets allow for the placement of the toe tags in the exact locations where they were found.

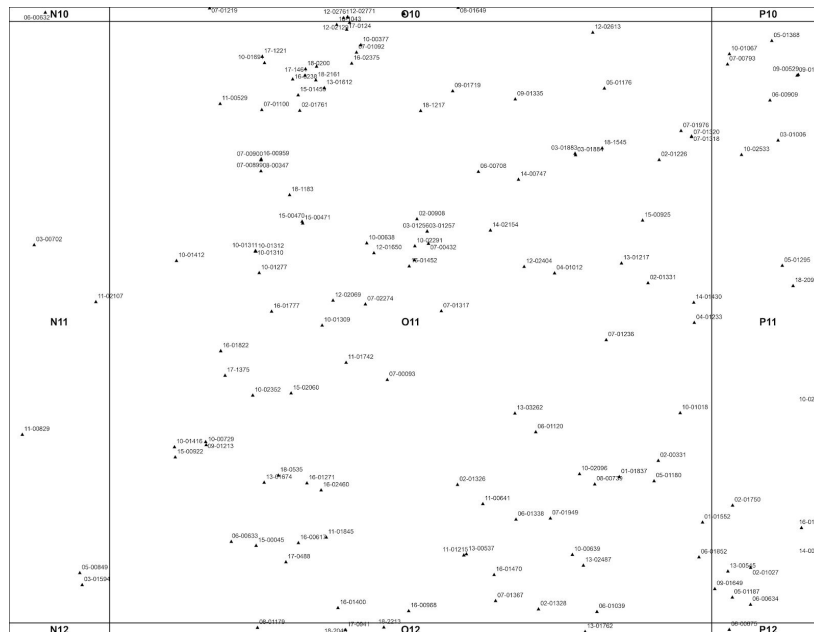


Figure 4. Detail of a printed grid sheet showing the location of migrant human remains listed by case number. For ease of installation, these printed sheets will be organized in separate envelopes labeled by grid designation. Each envelope contains appropriate grid sheet and detailed case information to be filled out for those remains associated with the specific grid.

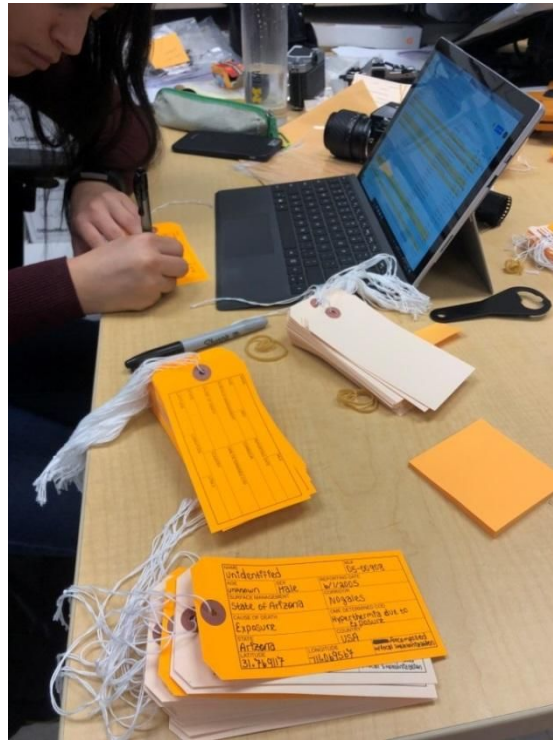


Figure 5: The wall graphic is composed of ~3,200 toe tags that have been filled out by hand.

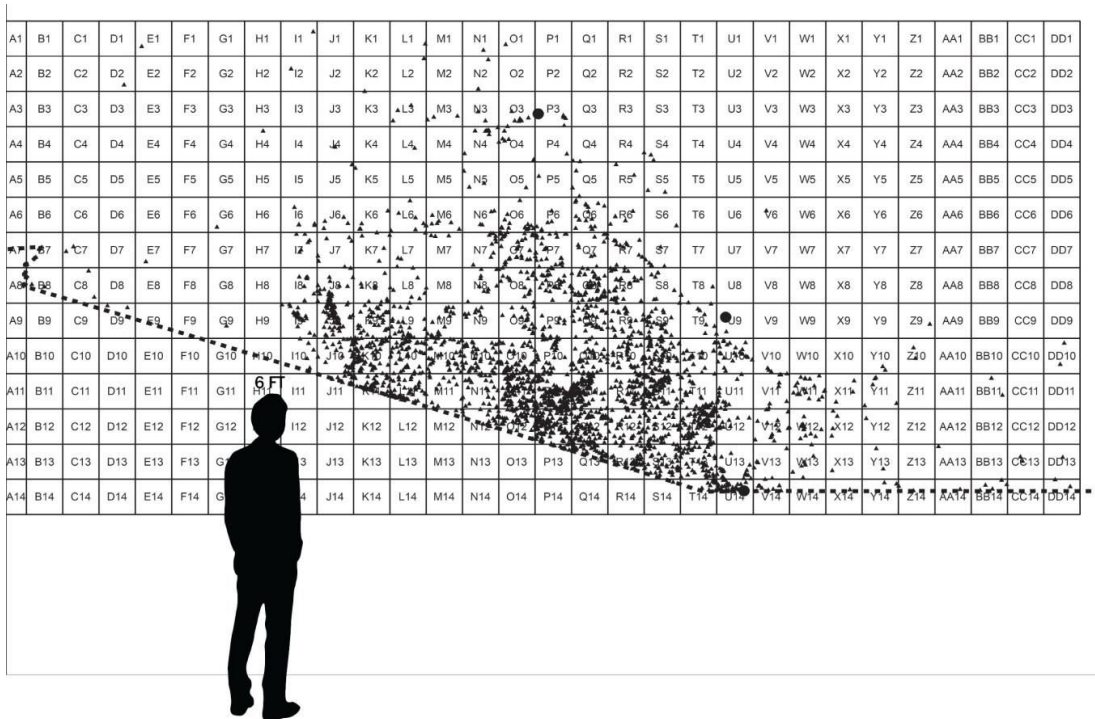


Figure 6. Scale drawing of installation. The small triangles on this grid would be replaced with hanging manila and orange toe-tags.



Figure 7. Prototype from Franklin & Marshall exhibition (January 2019).



Figure 8. Prototype from Franklin & Marshall exhibition (January 2019).



Figure 9. Detail of prototype from Franklin & Marshall exhibition (January 2019).

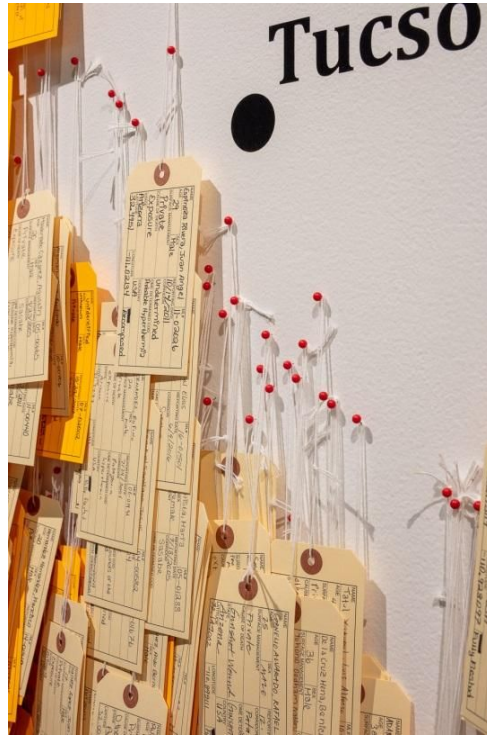


Figure 10. Detail of prototype from Franklin & Marshall exhibition (January 2019).

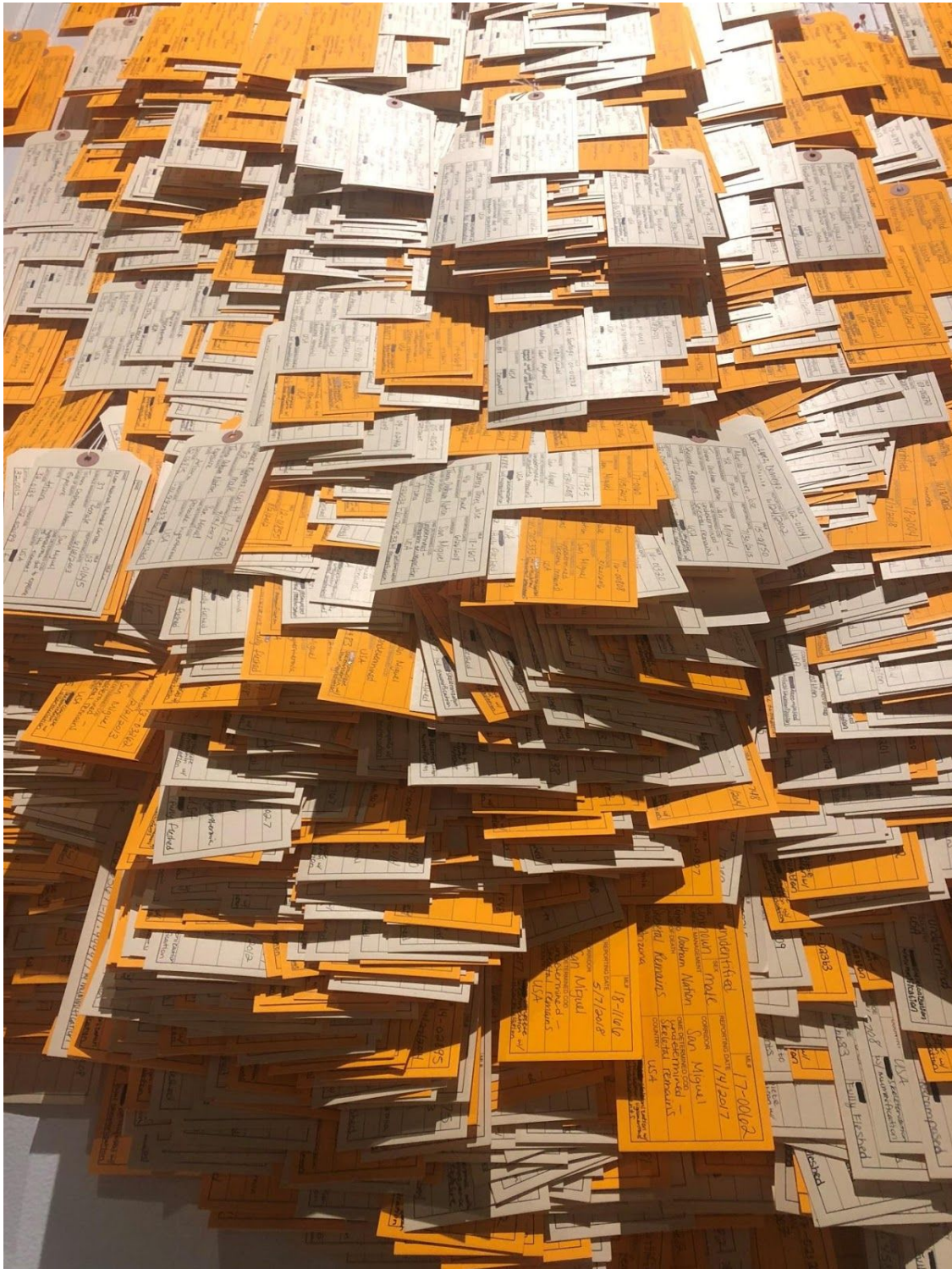


Figure 11. Detail of prototype from Franklin & Marshall exhibition (January 2019).

Interpretative Goals:

This participatory political art project is sponsored and organized by the [Undocumented Migration Project](#), Inc. 501(c)(3) (UMP), a non-profit research-art-education-media collective, directed by anthropologist [Jason De León](#). This installation is intended to do several things:

1. To raise awareness during a presidential election season about the realities of the U.S./Mexico border, including the death and suffering that has been happening daily (since the Clinton Administration) as a direct result of the Border Patrol policy known as “Prevention Through Deterrence” (PTD).
2. To globally memorialize the thousands who have died as a result of PTD, especially the hundreds of still unidentified people whose remains have yet to be reunited with family members.
3. To construct an affordable, accessible, and democratized exhibition that draws in community participation across a range of national and international locations. The installation logistics require the involvement of many people who will directly contribute to its construction and display. **The most powerful participatory element of this project involves the time and effort required of volunteers to meticulously fill out the ~3400 individual toe tag cards that include the name, age, sex, cause of death, condition of body, and location of recovery for each person (Figure 5). (NOTE: We predict that by fall 2020 the death toll will have risen from the current count of ~3,200, so we are projecting the number of tags to be ~3400).** Much of the labor involved in filling out the toe tags will occur off-site, but we could potentially involve visitors to the site to assist with filling out tags if that were feasible.
4. In addition to making the installation using a team of volunteers, each host location (in consultation with the UMP) will create locally relevant programming to coincide with the event (e.g., lectures, testimonials, vigils, performances, film screenings, etc.) that connects that community to global and local immigration issues. This includes the development of an affordable Augmented Reality (AR) experience that can connect the viewer (via a free cell phone app) to stories and visuals from the desert. Each hosting hub can run their own social media programs throughout the planning and installation process. Photographs and videos taken of the installation will be used for inclusion in a book and film to be produced by the UMP in 2021.³

³ The UMP will provide hosting partners with formal consent forms for photographs and videos.

Installation Structure:

In the early fall of 2020, collaborating community groups, institutions, and organizations will receive a pre-prepared installation package complete with wall map, blank toe tags, death information, detailed installation instructions, and associated promotional materials including access to online resources. The recruitment of these groups will begin 12 months prior in the fall of 2019.⁴ These groups will self-organize for the installation in consultation with members of the UMP, some of whom will physically travel to select sites to assist with the install. Between May and October of 2020, all 150 installations will be realized around the world. Each node will organize additional events around the installation that are appropriate and relevant to local immigration issues. These communities will livestream parts of their events, as well as make photographic and video recordings that will be compiled into a website, book, and film. Host cities will potentially include large metropolitan areas (e.g., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Tucson, Detroit, Miami, Mexico City, San Pedro Sula, Madrid, Manila) and smaller cities and towns in the U.S. and elsewhere. Some smaller locations will be chosen for their significance to immigration issues (e.g., Nogales, Mexico and Lampedusa, Italy).

Funding:

Funding for this project will come from a variety of sources including development and implementation grants that the UMP will apply for, donations from a 2020 public fundraising campaign, organizational sponsors, and funds from hosting institutions. We predict that the funding commitment from a host institution or group will be \$1500 if the payment is processed through the Undocumented Migration Project, Inc. 501(c)(3) or \$2070 through the principal institution (due to an overhead fee).⁵ This price includes installation materials, shipping, insurance, online content, remote consulting, and access to a documentary film. The UMP will also fundraise so that we can subsidize installation costs for locations that may not be able to raise all of the installation fees.

Personnel:

The Undocumented Migration Project, Inc. 501(c)(3) (UMP) is an internationally known research-education-art collective founded by Jason De León in 2009. The UMP has been featured in numerous academic publications, as well as popular media outlets including [The New York Times](#), [RadioLab](#), and the [BBC](#). De León is [Professor of Anthropology](#) and Chicana/o Studies at UCLA. He is the author of the award-winning book [“The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail”](#) (UC Press 2015), co-curator of the award winning exhibition [“State of Exception”](#), and a 2017 [MacArthur Foundation Fellow](#). The pop-up installation “Hostile Terrain” is based on the multi-media exhibition of the same name co-produced by [Michael Wells](#) and [Lucy Cahill](#).

Contacts:

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UMP Project Manager: Austin Shipman austin@hostileterrain94.com

Exhibition Coordinator: Nicole Smith nicole@hostileterrain94.com

⁴ The UMP will do several prototype installations in different locations during the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020 to fine tune the install process.

⁵ We are still prototyping the exhibition package and will have hosting costs finalized in the winter of 2020.

Exhibition Coordinator: Gabe Canter gabe@hostileterrain94.com

Media and Design: Michael Wells <http://www.mwellsphoto.com/>

Design and Curation: Lucy Cahill <http://lucycahill.com/>

Fundraising: Gina Tan (Tangible Strategies) <https://www.tangible-strategies.com/>

“Border South” Documentary Film: [Raul Pastrana \(Andar Films\)](#)

Map Design: Cameron Gokee <https://anthro.appstate.edu/directory/dr-cameron-gokee>