

Artistic Statement | Kiri Avelar

Interdisciplinarity promotes our thinking as artist-scholars and creatives to expand and challenge what we know. An interdisciplinary approach to our work may help us in being more open to how we see our findings and enable us to recognize biases in our practices. Reaching across the methods often implied for specific disciplines can enrich our artistic projects, shift the lens of our creative research, and provide more inroads for our investigations. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa acknowledges this permeation of borders. She challenges the binary thought process and calls us to a third space, an in-between, liminal space that seeps through seemingly defined spaces and exists in their intersections (Anzaldúa, 101). In *A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity* (2017) author Julie Thompson Klein points to the flexible, inquisitive, and fluid nature that interdisciplinarity holds, reinforcing Anzaldúa's interest in a third space that is liminal. I suggest that at the intersection of interdisciplinarity exist multiple possibilities for engaging creative research, with a borderless edge all around, in-between, and far apart. In capturing, articulating, and inquiring upon the complexity of our identity(s) through creative process, the fluidity of interdisciplinarity can serve as a malleable holding space for the art to live. To create work that is dependent on the interconnectivities of dance and identities, a movement between diverse disciplinary practices garners multifaceted support for the process to unfold, and stretches the imagination of yet-to-be-imagined worlds.

My own *identidad* has always brought to me a sense of more than one thing, a simultaneous experience in my flesh, and in my aesthetic vision. This is reflected in the ways I negotiate allocated time in rehearsals, fuse traditional and contemporary dance styles of diaspora, translate languages/movements/approaches, accommodate the needs of each group and individual in the creative process, and migrate between dance forms, musical forms, and visual artforms. *Una mezcla*, always crossing, crossing back, and residing in that intersectional space of Americana/Tejana/Chicana-ness. My interdisciplinary, collaborative approach holds my liminal *sabor de la frontera*, and becomes an ultimate *guia* to shape the works of art I create alongside my communities.

In 2017 I created *Juntos somos uno, Se quién soy*, an interdisciplinary expression of Latinx identities in community, through the media of dance, music, and visual art. Choreographed in collaboration with Latinx students from the Mason Gross School of the Arts dance program at Rutgers University, and Mexican and Mexican American community members from the Esperanza Neighborhood Project in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the work reflects the solidarity of being in community, and the unique identities each individual brings to that place. The work wove together the dance forms and musical structures of bachata, flamenco colombianas, rumba flamenca, palo Dominicano, Mexican Chilenas from Oaxaca, and salsa, through a contemporary lens, with moments of set choreography, structured improvisation, and audience participation. This link and fusion between the connected yet diverse art forms and choreographic methodologies reflected the breadth of variation and commonalities found within the Latinx diaspora, and the very cast that would co-choreograph and perform the work alongside of me¹.

The challenge of capturing the complexities of identities in *Juntos somos uno, Se quién soy* moved me to later integrate the medium of film, specifically in the form of screendance, in my creative process. My Americana/Tejana/Chicana *fronteriza identidad* and spirit became more overtly expressed through my MFA thesis performance, *Descubrimiento: Voice, Place, Identity*² (2019), an interdisciplinary community

¹ The co-creators and performers of this work include Brianna Brathwaite, Shahnise D. Evans, Karina Hernandez, Nella Iaccarino, José Lapaz-Rodríguez, Rafael Lozada, Kennyth Montes de Oca (who also served as Rehearsal Director), Kimberly Reyes, Victoria Torres, and Isabella Vergara, all students at Rutgers University in 2017, alongside the Esperanza Community Members in New Brunswick, NJ including Ricarda, Amanda, Floribel, and Perla, and singer, musicó, and songwriter Enso Taves. The work premiered December 2017 at the Loree Theater at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

² This work was created as a collective, including contributions by Brianna Brathwaite, Franchesca Marisol Cabrera, Cecilia Cáceres-Ntiamoah, Radhamely De Leon, Federico Garcia, Karina Hernandez, Derek Leyva, Rafael Lozada, Jessica Lynch, Johsian

Artistic Statement | Kiri Avelar

experience providing diverse platforms for expression that give way to a deeper understanding of *ruido*, *mestiza* consciousness, intersectionality, migration, and *Latinidades*.

Since the premiere in April 2019, the work has continued to be reimagined as *The Intersections of Interdisciplinarity: Embodying the Borderless Experience*. This interdisciplinary, immersive performance utilizes unique spaces to explore the borderless experiences among 1) community-audience and performer, 2) dance, film, and musical genres/media, and 3) the various cultures of the Latinx diaspora.

The performance unfolds through a dance film, *Ruido*, which looks at the body as voice, and the concept of the body in action as *ruido*. Inspired by the life and work of Boricua Spanish Dance Artist, Sandra Rivera, and the multifaceted nature of Spanish Dance, the castanets represent the connection in diaspora to our colonial heritage, a way of recuperating our inherited cultural practices, crossing the space between our identities in America, and the “other side” of the border. As the film ends, Rivera performs for the audience live, her embodied oral history, where the cultural tradition of the Pasodoble with castanets is a performative effort to *hacer ruido*, to be seen and heard. The sounds and movements of the Pasodoble are met with the clave, flamenco, and Mexican folkloric rhythms brought in by Mexican Colombian American dance artist, Franchesca Marisol Cabrera. The playful and interactive soundscape they create together challenges the borders of rhythmic frameworks in Latinx dances and the diaspora.

The performance continues through a second film, *Mestiza Consciousness*, an interactive screendance that explores the intersection of the body, food, *cultura*, rhythm, and labor, considering gestures, symbols, and sounds that speak to the in-between space that Texas possesses for so many of us. The screendance was inspired by the work of Chicana feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mexican American choreographer Michelle Manzanales, aforementioned Cabrera, and my own lived experience as a borderland *tejana*. The screendance opens with text from Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, foregrounding the ‘caught in-betweenness’ of *tejanidad*, and then transitions to visual moments of *tejanidad*, as if summed up through distinct, overlapping images: La Virgen de Guadalupe with her head tilted to the side and hands folded in prayer; a “Don’t Mess With Texas” label slapped on a red, white and blue trash can; the confederate flag flying in the wind, straight above a sign that painstakingly reads ‘flags sold here’; a sign in the local *mercado* that reads ‘*baratisimo*’; and a long, colorful string of *papel picado*. These images in the film are projected onto Cabrera’s body as she performs live, and moves through the space with her *mantón*. The juxtaposed images of violence and love are inscribed on the physical body, reminiscent of simultaneous experiences a *tejana* embodies within her own kinesthetic memory of the culture(s).

From the text, and then the images, the film next eases its way into vignettes in the *cocina*, emanating nostalgia of home, of being *en casa*. The dancers chop cilantro, *ajo*, *cebolla*, and *jitomate*, then grind the ingredients in a *molcajete*, and slap together the *masa* prepped for *tortillas de maiz*. The sounds of the *cocina*, the gestural movements of the hands laboring, and the aromas arise in overlapped unison, as Mexican folklorico *zapateado* and contemporized salsa basics weave in and out of the screen. The film encapsulates a simultaneous embodiment and in-betweenness of the rhythmic and gestural frameworks. The gestures, aromas, and *ruidos* of the *cocina* find common ground, generating improvised movement and sound, with threads of overlapped movement principles and rhythms in these memories of our kitchens - the grinding of the *molcajete*, the rolling of the tortilla *masa*, the slapping of the *ajo* and cilantro.

Martinez, Kennyth Montes de Oca, Kimberly Reyes, Sandra Rivera, Michelle Manzanales, Joel "EXTRANJERO" Moscoso, Rebecca Wilson, and Joshua Winzeler. The work premiered April 2019 at El Barrio’s Artspace PS109 in East Harlem, New York City.

Artistic Statement | Kiri Avelar

The performance culminates with live food preparation, embodying the gestures, aromas, and *ruidos* of the *cocina*. The audience-community is served the food they see being prepared by Manzanales and Cabrera, both in front of them and on the screen, and are invited to the table to cook alongside the performers (Rivera joining back in at the table now, alongside Manzanales, Cabrera, and the audience). The *chisme* at the kitchen table stretches into conversations around the themes of the performance, engaging everyone in *plática*. This brings the audience and performers back to their own stories, in relationship to one another - a permeation of physical, artistic, and cultural borders ushering all to a third space, where the *plática* lives in-between the performers and audience as a new-found community.

In reflection, I see an overt and subtle divergence between my two artistic works—*Juntos somos uno, Se quién soy* and *Descubrimiento: Voice, Place, Identity*—and the numerous creations I have put forth since. I acknowledge how my *identidad*, and working collaboratively in community through creative process, has laid the groundwork for an interdisciplinary Chicana-*fronteriza*-tejana methodology to emerge, and now serve as the foundation of my artistic practice.