

KQED Arts



Ana Teresa Fernandez (Photo: Travis Pulley)

VISUAL ARTS

Women to Watch: Ana Teresa Fernandez

By Lakshmi Sarah JULY 19, 2016

Welcome to KQED Arts' [Women to Watch](#), a series celebrating 20 local artists, creatives and makers who are pushing boundaries in 2016. Driven by passion for their own disciplines, from photography to comedy and every other medium in between, these women are true vanguards paving the way in their respective communities.

Ana Teresa Fernandez is a Mexican-born artist currently living and working in San Francisco. With powerful site-specific installations covering issues of immigration and the erasure of history, her work brings to life important global issues.

<http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2016/07/19/women-to-watch-ana-teresa-fernandez/>

Where do you live?

I live in Bernal Heights, SF. My studio has been in Hunters Point for the last eight years.

Describe yourself in one word?

Determined.

What did you do last night?

I did a sunset surf in Santa Cruz. Had a great dinner with friends after all day-surfing. We ate a lot (sushi, ramen and eggs with soy sauce) and laughed the entire evening. Then I drove home to SF like a tired pup.

What can't you live without?

Art, family and surfing.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Now, I think it would be the Galápagos Islands or Sri Lanka.

**KQED**

Arts

Ana Teresa Fernandez (Photo: Travis Jensen)

Who is your personal hero? Why?

My family. My mom Maria Teresa, my dad Genaro, my brother Genaro, and my two sisters Mariana and Maria. No matter how crazy life might get, they always show up for me. And on their own, just observing them move through life, they each inspire me in so many ways; to be kinder, more present, more hard-working and more calm.

How did you find your creative voice?

It has always been there. People would give me paper and any sort of writing or drawing utensil, and I would instantly draw or create something with it since the age of two. My parents were very supportive and were always pushing me to pursue it. I didn't always trust "it." They kept encouraging me to study it and to keep creating. Finally, at age 19, I became more proactive and experimented with sculpture and drawing classes in community college, where someone from the San Francisco Art Institute saw my work and recruited me on the spot.

When I went to SFAI and began studying there, I became aware of how magical the art-making process could be. My life changed. The way I drank in the world, paying closer

attention... listening to untold stories. I wanted to conduct and pursue my life where I could have meaningful exchanges with people all over the world and “my voice” would re-tell their stories, paint beautiful images that would transcend the given or provide alternative truths.

What is something most people don't know about you?

I'm a cookie monster. I will never say no if you offer me a cookie. And I like naming things, anything. I name all my surfboards, I give friends nicknames all the time. And I don't know any technical terms for tango steps (even though I have danced it over eight years). I re-named my favorite bakery/coffee place. The original name is “Devil's Teeth,” I just call it “Jaws,” and now, all of my friends call it that too.

What do you do when you feel uninspired?

I surf, I run. I try to keep moving. But I also meditate. You hit very rough patches, where you feel you are back to square one, after years of doing this. You think it gets easier, and it doesn't. We all go through the moments where you feel you are walking through molasses. However, everything passes, things continually change. It is a good reminder to feel this, because even though it truly sucks, you feel so grateful when you are on the other side, and it makes you more empathic and humble in the end.



Ana Teresa Fernandez (*Photo: Travis Jensen*)

What's been your biggest 'learning moment,' and what did you take from the experience?

When I was doing an artist residency in Cape Town, South Africa, walking to and from the art center to grab a coffee down the street, I kept seeing some kids playing soccer in an abandoned field. This was in a really poor and drug-stricken neighborhood. The lot would be a [parking] lot to fix bullet-hit windows during the morning and a kids' play lot in the afternoon. One day I stopped to take pictures of them. As soon as I had my camera in front of my face a woman came screaming towards me. Asking me to go away and not abuse their poverty. I put my camera down and slowly began trying to talk with her, telling her I was an artist and not a reporter. I thought, "Just breathe and talk calmly. Just listen and ask her why she is so upset."

After she calmed down, we had an hour-long conversation about the neighborhood and how tired they were of it and them feeling so abandoned by the government — so underserved. I remember standing there listening, feeling so grateful she was sharing this with me.

Everyday from that day on, for over a month, I would stop and talk with Sharifa. I got to know her and the neighborhood more. I asked everyone if they would like to see some more public art and murals. There was a communal feeling and yearning for color and change.

One day I showed up with paint and designed the first mural, which was created with over 50 members of the community, including Sharifa and her three kids. Later I was welcomed into their homes to take portraits of many families. I printed photos and brought them back to them. A friend of mine visited the center and neighborhood and sent me a picture that had the entire neighborhood filled with murals! I understood how agency of change was so imperative. Allowing people to see they have that power, to believe, to instigate and create change themselves.



U.S. Mexico Border fence is seen from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico after artist Ana Teresa Fernandez and Border/Arte volunteers painted the border fence in blue to give an illusion of “Erasing the Border” on Saturday, April 9, 2016. *(Courtesy of Ana Teresa Fernandez)*

What’s your greatest achievement, and how has it shaped you?

I think my greatest achievement happened recently when I collaborated with Border/Arte to create *Borrando la Frontera* for the third time in three locations; Agua Prieta, Juárez, and Mexicali on April 9, 2016.

It was so incredibly moving to see so many people, from so many different communities and walks of life, come together to want to be a part of something bigger. I have worked with my family before, but this time, my mom and dad helped lead *Borrando la Frontera* in Mexicali all on their own. I’m still feeling the immense high from it all, as well as exhaustion. You feel different, like you have a voice that can really talk back to the government and say, “We can help paint a different reality or truth, using paint and

imagination as your weapon... no guns, no violence, just the community working together, tearing down walls with creativity.”

Coffee or tea? What kind?

Tea! Soy Chai... always!

What does a perfect day look like for you?

Surfing, painting, maybe sunset surf again, a Chimay beer and peanuts with a good friend and conversation to seal off the evening.

Who are your local inspirations?

Author/activist Rebecca Solnit; artists Jennifer Locke, Tony Labat, and Lawrence La Bianca; activist and entrepreneur Doniece Sandoval (designer of the pop-up shower for the homeless called Lava-Mae); emotional psychologist Eve Eckman; and psychocranial therapist Celine Germain. Each one of these people touch and inspire me directly and make me experience and see the world differently.



'Erasure (Performance Documentation)', 2016, Oil on canvas (*Courtesy of Ana Teresa Fernandez*)

Favorite meal?

Sushi!

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Surfing a lot and working with diverse communities around the world, and still creating work about themes and issues I find pressing and important.

If you could live in a book, TV show, movie, play, song or painting, what would it be?

Wow, this is the toughest question! I'm torn between *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez or *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende.