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GUILLERMO BERT REIMAGINES THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN *THE JOURNEY*

Reno, NV (August 26, 2023) - In 1974, an entire army of terracotta warriors that had been hidden for 2,000 years was unearthed in Shaanxi province in northwest China. Contemporary artist Guillermo Bert, whose exhibition *Guillermo Bert: The Journey* will be on display at the Nevada Museum of Art beginning August 26, 2023, also embarks on an archeological project to excavate the challenges faced by modern-day immigrants—a.k.a. the warriors of the 21st century, post-COVID world—through a multi-faceted exhibition that explores narratives of identity, immigration, culture, and humanity.

The 5,000 square foot mid-career retrospective features Bert's newest installation *Local Warriors*, a series of 20 life-sized sculptures laser-cut from wood based on highly detailed 3D-scans of actual immigrants employed as front-line workers. These sculptures depict those tasked with stocking grocery store shelves, who harvested fruits and vegetables from fields and orchards, who drove delivery trucks to fulfill millions of online orders, ultimately making the on-demand economy function. Despite existing right in front of our eyes, this kind of work was largely invisible until the pandemic brought these workers to light.

Bert's exhibition also interrogates this aspect of their (in)visibility. Surrounded by mirrors, the installation multiplies the number of life size sculptures, while inviting guests into the vast and seemingly infinite army that exists within every community. "The idea is that these workers have come through the desert—a dry and inhospitable terrain—and face the reality of their life, which are highly risky but necessary jobs. The [installation] recognizes the work that they do, that has been largely invisible to the mainstream culture. And yet, there is also this recognition that they came to the United States to live the American Dream, only to realize that, instead, they exist within its shadow," Bert said.

Local Warriors opens Bert's multi-media and conceptually-layered exhibition that spans the past fifteen years of his career, in which ancient traditions and modern technology merge to create a narrative that works to preserve the past using tools of the contemporary moment. "We live in a world where the ancient and the new live in the same time zone, and the interpretation of reality should have a more holistic approach," he said. "The lack of an integrated historical, anthropological, and psychological perspective is at the core of some of the pressing social issues we face today."

Through his different series that comprise *The Journey*, Bert gives voice to stories that articulate the immigrant experience by layering tradition and technology.

The Bar Code Series: Blurring the Boundary Between Cultures and Commodities

Bert continues the work of "de-coding" the immigrant experience through the *Barcodes* series. Consisting of glossy red, white, blue and gold panels, Bert transforms the typically small Universal Pricing Code (UPC code) into the central focus of his art to question whether democratic ideals themselves have been commodified to such an extent that they have lost their value. This series infers that everything has a price, including ideas intimately tied with national identity, including

democracy, citizenship and individualism. “The immigrant’s journey entails the commodification of American values. It is a disconnection between the immigrant’s dream of holding these ideals, while experiencing detachment and difference from them that is the result of an extreme form of capitalism, which commodifies these values while absorbing other histories into these value systems,” said Bert.

A native of Santiago, Chile, the inspiration for much of the work included in *The Journey* came from Bert’s 2010 return trip to his native country. His experience with the Indigenous Mapuche community inspired a series titled *Encoded Textiles* in which “high tech” QR Codes are handwoven into traditional textile designs. When scanned with a smartphone, the QR Code takes guests into a cinematic world of stories and reflection by Mapuche elders, activists, and poets. To date, this group of work has resulted in multi-media collaborations with Mapuche, Navajo, Maya, Mixtec and Zapotec weavers. The work is a marriage of old and new: while the textile pieces look traditional, the artist is simultaneously challenging the limits of our latest technologies to become adept methods by which traditional stories can be transmitted to audiences.

In the series *Tumble Dreams* Bert projects video testimonials of immigrants who have crossed the border onto the desert’s iconic symbol of movement: the tumbleweed. The individual narratives articulate nomadic immigrant journeys through the desert to reach a better life. “Always changing direction, forming a new kind of nomadic population on the move—the tumbleweed is particularly tied to the southwest landscape where the dry conditions and the desert are also the backdrop for the crossing for the Latin American migrant,” said Bert.

Exhibition Details

Guillermo Bert: The Journey, organized by the Nevada Museum of Art and guest-curated by Vivian Zavataro, will be on view at the Nevada Museum of Art August 26, 2023 – February 4, 2024. Bert’s work has been widely exhibited at both museums and galleries including The Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, Queens Museum in New York, Palm Springs Museum, Lille3000 in France, Anchorage Museum, Museum of Latin American Art, Pasadena Museum of California Art, Museum of Art and Design in New York, L.A./L.A. Pacific Standard Time and the Craft Contemporary Museum. His work has become part of the permanent collections of LACMA, The Rhode Island School of Design and Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. His work was shown at the Nevada Museum of Art in the 2017 *Unsettled* exhibition and was acquired by the Museum for its permanent collection.

Additionally, his work has been reviewed nationally and internationally by *Smithsonian Magazine*, *ArtNews Magazine*, *LA Times* and *LA Weekly*. He was awarded a COLA individual artist grant from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, received the California Community Foundation Fellowship in 2015, the Center for Cultural Innovation Quick Grant for Education in 2015, and the 2010 Master Artist Grant from National Association of Latino Arts.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a 200+ page book published by the Nevada Museum of Art. The bilingual publication includes contributions from Alma Ruiz, former curator at MOCA Los Angeles, Dr. Tressa Berman, founder of the Institute for Cultural Practice, and Dr. Ximena Keogh Serrano, assistant professor of Spanish and Latinx Studies at Pacific University. An interview between Bert and guest-curator Vivian Zavataro is also included.

[Use this link to access exhibition press images.](#)

A companion exhibition featuring Guillermo Bert’s work will be on view at The John and Geraldine Lilley Museum of Art from September 5, 2023 to January 27, 2024.

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Sponsors

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Image captions (from left to right): Guillermo Bert, *Local Warriors*, 2022, sculptures laser-cut from wood. Collection of the Artist. Guillermo Bert, *Tumble Dreams*, 2018, Tumble weed and digital video projection. Collection of the artist. Guillermo Bert, *You don’t have the right*, 2017, Neon light and plexiglass, 24 x 48 x 4 inches. Collection of the artist.

The Nevada Museum of Art is the only art museum in Nevada accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A private, nonprofit organization founded in 1931, the statewide institution is supported by its membership as well as sponsorships, gifts and grants. Through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programming, and E.L. Cord Museum School, the Nevada Museum of Art provides meaningful opportunities for people to engage with a range of art and education experiences. The Museum’s **Center for Art + Environment** is an internationally recognized research center dedicated to

supporting the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their environments. The Center houses unique archive materials from more than 1,000 artists working on all seven continents, including Cape Farewell, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Burning Man, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Great Basin Native Artists Archive, Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains*, and Trevor Paglen's *Orbital Reflector*. Learn more at nevadaart.org.

Land Acknowledgement

The Nevada Museum of Art acknowledges the traditional homelands of the *Wa She Shu* (Washoe), *Numu* (Northern Paiute), *Newe* (Western Shoshone), and *Nuwu* (Southern Paiute) people of the Great Basin. This includes the 28 tribal nations that exist as sovereign nations and continue as stewards of this land. We appreciate the opportunity to live and learn on these Indigenous homelands.