

Lisa Alvarado
Scab Diagram
The Modern Institute, Bricks Space
26th February 2021

The Modern Institute presents Chicago based artist and musician Lisa Alvarado for her first solo exhibition in the UK and with the gallery in the Bricks Space location. Alvarado's assemblages are a considered orchestration of polarities, creating an environment that provokes a heightened awareness of our present moment, and the histories that shape the conditions of experience today.

Scab Diagram is an alignment of painting, sound and sand that maps the fluid language of regeneration, focussing on the fragile stage between injury and restoration. *Scab Diagram* also connects the geography of river borders to the corporal body and its processes of healing, considering reconstruction as a woven movement that relates to the pulsations of breath, heartbeat and growth - such divisions and polarities are thus harmonized into a vibratory cartography of repair. These overarching themes continue from Alvarado's previous solo show *Thalweg*¹, which focused on the US/Mexico border, and the artist's family history dealing with the mass deportation of Mexican American citizens during the 1930s. The forced migration of peoples, and subsequent trauma and healing derived, emphasise these motifs of revival and resilience. These sentiments are echoed in the profound writings of Gloria E. Anzaldúa, which have been crucial to Alvarado:

Our task has always been to heal the personal and group heridas [wounds] of body, mind, spirit. [...] I define healing as taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by woundings. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf. Often a wound provokes an urgent yearning for wholeness and provides the ground to achieve it. In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure - you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you.²

This presentation is part of a growing, free-hanging painting series titled *Traditional Object* (2010-ongoing), which explores rhythm, movement, and the complementary relationship between the vibration of colour and sound. The works also coexist with musical performance, acting as movable stage sets and context shifters to accompany the ensemble

¹ A term which marks the lowest elevation in a river and is also used to define the location of international borders that are within a waterway.

² Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. by AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2015), p. 89.

Natural Information Society (in which Alvarado plays harmonium). *Traditional Object* is rooted in Alvarado's personal and cultural interactions with the Mexican American visual traditions of textile and mural painting that the artist experienced growing up in southern Texas - coincidentally where Anzaldúa hails from too. Through her series, Alvarado contemplates their overlooked histories that are often categorized outside of fine art.

At either end of the space is a two-part floor piece, featuring connecting diamonds in black and white sand in a narrow border against the middle section of the wall. The pattern recalls a suturing seam, a physical representation of the innate fragility found in healing; while the inverted monochromes at once suggest both opening and closing, acting out the liminality between injury and recovery. Likewise, the acrylic works echo the diamond and triangles populating the space, emphasising the transformational qualities Alvarado's work holds: created in relation to the space they blend, grow and merge into its environment like an iridescent moss. In tandem, the sound environment pulses and weaves back and forth throughout the room, as though it were the breath of this metaphorical body.

In Alvarado's work, the installation is not only the paintings but the shared encounter in the space of sound and visitors coming together, affecting one another, thus collectively creating something new. As such, the works explore collective memory, durational viewing and utility; embodying an interwoven hybridity forming of painting, sound, sand and setting - existing like organs in a living and reviving body.

Lisa Alvarado (b. 1982) lives and works in Illinois, Chicago. Selected solo exhibitions include: *Thalweg*, Bridget Donahue, New York (2020); *Polyphonic Shadow Cloth*, LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2018); *Sound Talisman*, Bridget Donahue, New York (2017); *Traditional Object*, Soccer Club Club, Chicago, Illinois (2013); *Limpia*, Soccer Club Club, Chicago, Illinois (2012).

Selected Group Exhibitions include: *unFlagging*, Ballroom Marfa, Marfa (2020); *It Remains an Open Horizon*, LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2020); *Psychedelic Healing Center*, Essex Flowers, New York (2019); *Out of Easy Reach*, Gallery 400, Chicago (2018); *Alan Shields Project*, Van Doren Waxter, New York (2018); *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2017) and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2016); *Material Issue*, KMAC Museum, Louisville (2016); among others.

Alvarado also plays harmonium in the ecstatic-minimalist band *Natural Information Society*. They have performed in numerous venues including: Copenhagen Jazz Festival,

Copenhagen, Denmark (2019); Pitchfork, Chicago (2018); Rewire, Netherlands (2018); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2017) and Serralves Museum, Portugal (2016). In addition to releasing albums on Eremite Records & Drag City Records, she has also performed with Theaster Gates's *Black Monks* at Palais De Tokyo (2019) and Documenta 13 (2012); and in Simon Starling's play *At Twilight*, Common Guild, Glasgow (2016) and Japan Society, New York (2017).