

For immediate release

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The Chinati Foundation to Present First Exhibition of Zoe Leonard's *Al río / To the River* in the Americas

Leonard's work poses the question: what does it mean to ask a body of water to perform a political task?

Opening October 12, 2024 during 37th annual Chinati Weekend benefit



Image: Zoe Leonard, *Al río / To the River* (detail), 2016–2022. Gelatin silver prints, C-prints and inkjet prints. © Zoe Leonard. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Gisela Capitain, and Hauser & Wirth.

Marfa, Texas (April 11, 2024) — The Chinati Foundation/La Fundación Chinati is pleased to announce its forthcoming exhibition of Zoe Leonard's *Al río / To the River*. Opening during the foundation's 37th annual Chinati Weekend benefit, October 11-13, 2024, and on view through June 2025, the photographic work follows the course of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo where the river is used to define the boundary between the United States and Mexico. Leonard's work contemplates the intricate cultural, social, political, ecological, and economic landscapes that comprise the 1,200 mile stretch of river from Ciudad Juárez and El Paso to the Gulf of Mexico and poses the question: what does it mean to ask a body of water to perform a political task? "The shifting nature of a river—which floods periodically, changes course, and carves new channels—is at odds with the political task it is asked to perform," says Leonard.

Known for her work across photography, sculpture, and installation, Zoe Leonard has long explored the physical and bodily act of looking, often underscoring tensions between the natural world and human-built environments.



Her work *You see I am here after all* (2008), made on-site at Dia Beacon and exhibited from 2008 to 2011, is composed of thousands of postcards of Niagara Falls from the early 1900s through the 1970s. It considers the role of photography in constructing American historical narratives and myths. In her large-scale installation *100 North Nevill Street*, on view at the Chinati Foundation from 2013 to 2015, the artist transformed a former ice plant building into a camera obscura that projected the ever-changing state of the external environment in Marfa. As with all of her camera obscura works, the piece was made on-site in response to the existing architecture, history, and land.

In late 2016, Leonard began to photograph the Rio Grande/Río Bravo—and the ways in which humans live in relation to it—from various perspectives in the United States and Mexico. The artist crossed back and forth from one side of the river to the other (and from one country to another), creating layered and thought-provoking compositions that draw attention to the complexity of the river as a porous channel, a source of life, and a politicized site. The work depicts the water, the land that surrounds it, and the infrastructures built along, across, and through it, offering viewers a variety of frames through which to think about the movement of people, animals, cars, boats, information, and goods.

Al río is comprised of several hundred photographs, structured in groupings, or ‘passages,’ and in this exhibition, a selection will be installed across three buildings on the grounds of Chinati. By arranging the photographs in passages, Leonard uses seriality to show actions unfolding; quotidian scenes of rest and play contrast with acts of policing and government control. The images are deeply specific and rooted in place, but they also relate to our shared world—one in which daily life is disrupted by fences, checkpoints, and surveillance. The project engages with histories of image-making from abstraction to documentary to digital surveillance, and, in doing so, reconsiders representational tropes, mythologies about the American West and Mexico, and the role of photography in shaping our perceptions of borders and rivers.

The opening of *Al río / To the River* at the Chinati Foundation—its first institutional presentation in the Americas—follows its debut at Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (2022), and subsequent exhibitions at Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris, Paris Musées (2022) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2023). Hauser & Wirth presented a related gallery exhibition of excerpts from *Al río* in New York in 2022, as did Capitain Petzel in Berlin (2022) and Galleria Raffaella Cortese in Milan (2023/2024).

At Chinati, where artworks are permanently installed throughout the former military spaces of Fort D.A. Russell, Leonard’s photographs will respond to—and sometimes mirror—the surrounding environment. When traveling between exhibition spaces, visitors may notice familiar subjects, like the mountains in the distance or a passing border patrol vehicle.

The exhibition is accompanied by a two-volume publication, also entitled *Al río / To the River*. Edited by poet Tim Johnson, designed by Joseph Logan, and published by Hatje Cantz, the book features a selection of Leonard’s photographs and a compilation of writings by artists, poets, historians, musicians, and scholars with an interest in the politics, ecology, and cultures that intersect at the river. Both Johnson and his partner Caitlin Murray, Director of the Chinati Foundation, are longtime friends of the artist, who first came to Marfa in 2006. When Donald Judd established the foundation in 1986, he invited his friends to install work there; Leonard’s exhibition expands upon this history of long-term collaboration and conversation among friends.

Following the opening of *Al río / To the River* during Chinati Weekend, a series of related public programs will take place throughout late 2024 and 2025. Details about these talks, readings, and screenings will be shared in the coming months.



Tickets for the 37th annual Chinati Weekend benefit are now on sale; for additional information about the gathering, which features open viewing of the collection, studio visits with artists, talks, music, and other programs, please visit <https://chinati.org/support-chinati-weekend-2024>.

Al río is made possible with support from Hauser & Wirth, Kathleen Irvin Loughlin and Christopher Loughlin, Celeste and Anthony Meier, Lisa and John Runyon, and Texas Commission on the Arts. Additional support has been provided by the Director's Circle.

About Zoe Leonard

Zoe Leonard (born 1961 in Liberty, New York; lives and works in New York, New York and Marfa, Texas) balances rigorous conceptualism with a distinctly personal vision in her work with photography, sculpture, and installation. Employing seriality and shifting perspectives, and with an attention to the materiality of photography, Leonard's practice probes the politics of representation and display. Leonard explores themes such as gender and sexuality, loss and mourning, migration, displacement, and the urban landscape. Her photography invites us to contemplate the role that the medium plays in constructing histories and shaping our perceptions of the world around us. More than its focus on any particular subject, Leonard's work encourages the viewer to consider the act of looking itself, as a complex and conditional process.

About The Chinati Foundation/La Fundación Chinati

In 1986, Donald Judd (1928–1994) established The Chinati Foundation/La Fundación Chinati with the aim of bringing art, architecture, and land together to form a coherent whole. Judd imagined Chinati, which is located on a 340-acre former military base in Marfa, Texas, as a site where artists could situate work according to their own intentions, permanently. Today, Chinati carefully maintains artists' installations as they were conceived and presents them to a broad public. With rotating exhibitions, artist residencies, educational activities, and public programs, Chinati is a place where art—both the creation and viewing of it—is a part of daily life.

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