

CULTURE (/CULTURE)

At Sea-Tac airport, a red border made of sand draws attention to human trafficking

The *Border US-MX* installation can be viewed by plane passengers overhead and light rail commuters.

by Agueda Pacheco Flores (/author/aguada-pacheco-flores) / July 31, 2019 /
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The red sand is shaped in the form of the southern border that divides the U.S. from Mexico. It took nearly 2.6 tons of red sand to build the 350-foot-long line. (Courtesy of Molly Gochman/The StoryMakers)

As an artist, New York-based artist Molly Gochman brings awareness to social justice issues that highlight vulnerability and exploitation. Her past works include *Before*, a photography project featuring the destruction brought on by floods in Houston and India, and *The Give-away Project*, in which she gave away nearly all her clothes and documented who took them.

Her *Red Sand Project* began in 2015, when local organizations in Miami asked Gochman to bring awareness to modern human slavery. She dropped red sand into the cracks of sidewalks to represent those who have “fallen through the cracks” into human trafficking.

Now her *Red Sand Project* is a thick red line migrating across a small field of dry grass near the cellphone lot at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

The red line looks like a graph that rises and falls. But look closely and you’ll see the outlines of the southern boundaries of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas and the northern boundaries of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

“This is just a line that separates people... [but] when you see the Earth from above it’s very fluid, so this is for people to think about freedom of movement and ownership,” Gochman said in a recent phone interview from New York. “We have these different boundaries, but when we talk about immigration, it’s about crossing a line from one political area into another.”

It took two days last week to create this U.S.-Mexico border in red sand. A crew dug a shallow trench: 350 feet long and 2 feet wide. They filled it with cement and generously dusted it with 2.6 tons of red sand.

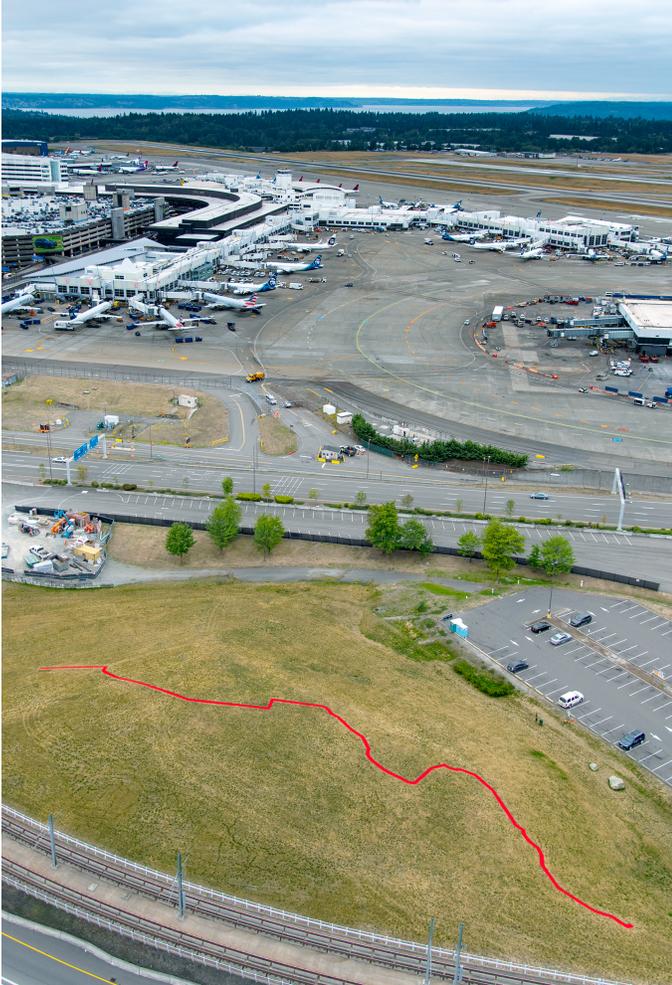
The art installation, known as *Border US-MX*, can be viewed by passengers on planes flying overhead, from the top of an airport parking garage or while riding the Link Light Rail through the SeaTac station.

It has been created previously at three other locations: the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, and Caroline Street in Houston.

The artist wants to call attention to the people crossing the border who are seeking refuge in the U.S., but who could be at a higher risk of being victims of human trafficking.

“Lack of immigration status is a vulnerability that can lead to human trafficking or other forms of exploitation,” Gochman said.

According to the Port of Seattle, in Washington state alone there are an estimated 300 to 500 children being sold for sex work annually. And in 2015, Washington had the 14th highest volume of calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Nationally, the center received more than 10,000 calls reporting a human trafficking case just last year.



Molly Gochman's Border US-MX art installation can be accessed from the cellphone lot. Gochman said she was happy to see people engaging with it already after seeing footprints down the length of the border. (Courtesy of Molly Gochman/The StoryMakers)

When Tommy Gregory, the new public art director of Sea-Tac Airport, proposed bringing Gochman's U.S.-Mexican border project to Sea-Tac, the port fully embraced the idea.

"I think public art should be thought-provoking, and this certainly will do that," said Gregory.

He said the installation was placed just in time to welcome the influx of art enthusiasts traveling in for the Seattle Art Fair, which begins this week, with some “strong commentary.”

The artist said her target audience for this work is people with the freedom to move and travel comfortably and conveniently.

Gochman, who speaks at events about her activism and art, said when people ask her why migrants don’t come into the country legally, she uses her own husband, a Canadian, as an example of how hard it can be to navigate the U.S. immigration system. He only recently received his green card after multiple attempts since 2007.

“It’s really hard to [become documented] legally,” she said, adding that her husband had the privilege of being backed by lawyers provided by his employer.

It can be hard for people to understand what it’s like to be vulnerable and exploited, she added, explaining how discrimination against migrants exacerbates the border crisis and human trafficking.

“I wanted to deepen the conversations around that,” she said.

An earlier version of this misspelled the project name and misstated the amount of sand used.

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Artist to install earthwork calling attention to immigration and human trafficking

Trail of red sand will be visible to travellers in flight and on the ground in Seattle

NANCY KENNEY

18th June 2019 18:06 GMT



To signal her opposition to the creation of a US-Mexico border wall, the New York-based artist Molly Gochman has fashioned one of her own: a 350-foot-long earthwork that will go on display at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on 3 August and be visible to travellers in flight and on the ground.

Gochman says that the work, *Red Sand Project: Border US-MX*, previously on view at the international airport in Houston, is intended to start a dialogue on human trafficking, immigration and the effects of political maneuvering on individuals and communities. “We need empathy because it diminishes the sense of otherness among people and drives social change,” she says. The installation, which will remain at the airport for a year, is timed to the Seattle Art Fair and will be associated with programming developed with Seattle nonprofits such as Refugees Northwest and NW Immigrant Rights Project.

More broadly, Gochman’s ongoing Red Sand Project offers toolkits with packets of red sand that allow people to physically engage with the artist’s campaign to combat human trafficking and enslavement. “When you see online or read in a pamphlet that more than 40 million people are enslaved today, that can feel very overwhelming, and it’s easy to put to the side,” she says. When people participate, “then you’ve created a more robust connection to the subject”.

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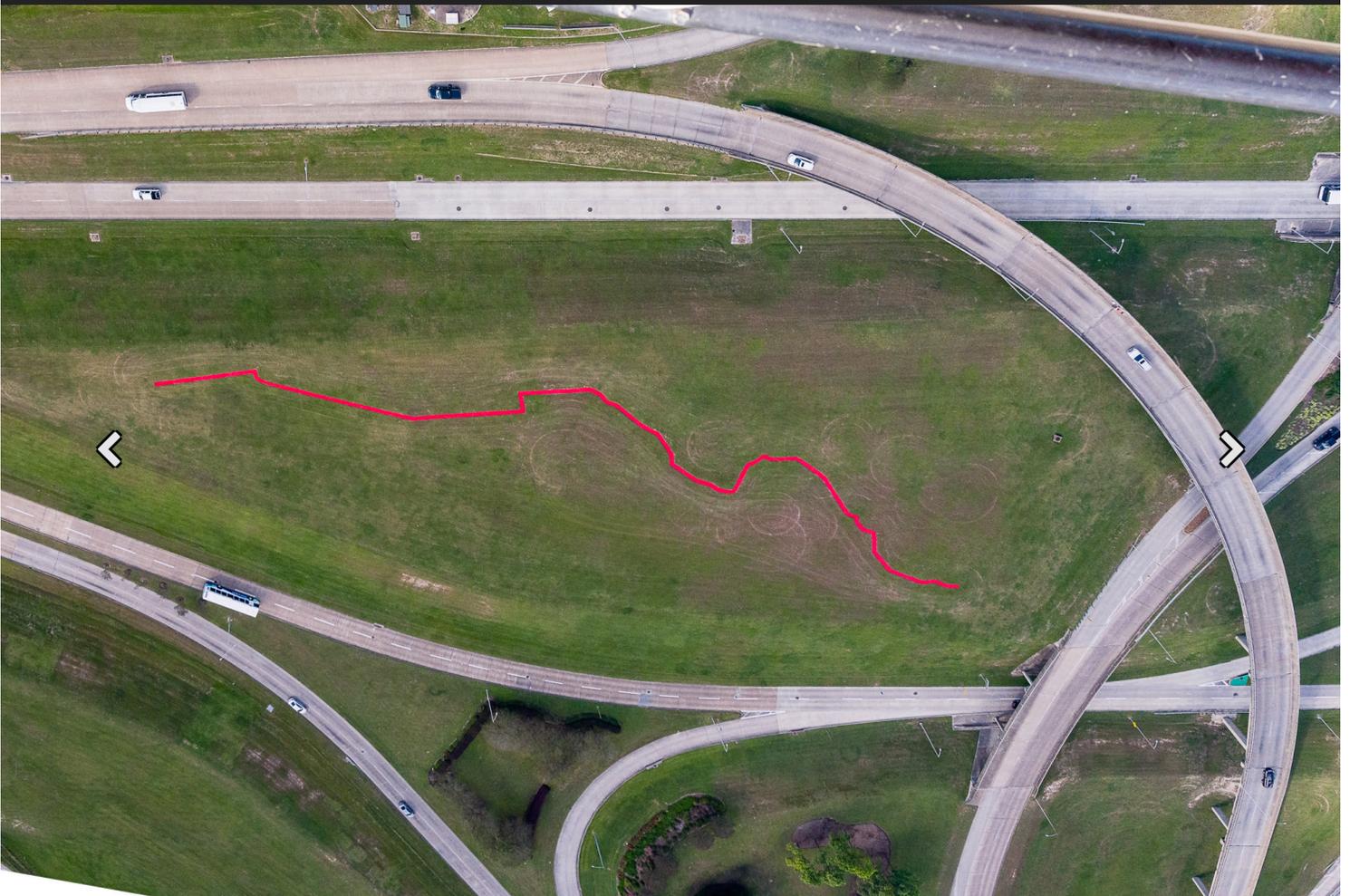
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THIN RED LINE

Artist draws the U.S.–Mexico border outside Houston

By THE EDITORS • January 15, 2019

Border US-MX, 2018, International Airport Houston by Molly Gochman will be a temporary artwork in the shape of the U.S.–Mexico border drawn in a bright red color in the middle of a highway interchange. (Courtesy Molly Gochman)



Artist Molly Gochman is drawing her newest [land art](#) piece directly on the surface of the earth, at a large enough scale that it will only be legible as a whole to passengers flying in or out of the nearby George Bush International Airport in Houston. *Border*

US-MX, 2018, International Airport Houston will be a temporary artwork in the shape of the [U.S.-Mexico border](#) drawn in a bright red color in the middle of a highway interchange.

Gochman said in a statement that the work is meant to raise awareness about human trafficking. Her ongoing Red Sand Project is a participatory artwork that invites people to fill in cracks with red sand, and then document and share the result to encourage discussion and activism on the issue. Gochman said in a statement: “The undulating, irregular border of Texas—created by the natural curves of Rio Grande—in contrast with the straight lines and edges of the other states, highlights the arbitrary ways in which borders are drawn.”

The 650-foot-long work evolved out of “the ways in which borders and migration connect to vulnerabilities and susceptibility to exploitation,” Gochman said in a statement. The work will be up through the end of April.

Land Art

US-Mexico Border



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Red Sand Project Raises Awareness of Human Trafficking

CATEGORIES

Nov. 14, 2018



Red sand can be seen from the air and the ground at IAH

Modern-day slavery.

That is one of the phrases most often used to describe the scourge of human trafficking, among the largest criminal industries in the world and somehow, still vastly underrecognized. The International Labor Organization estimates that there are more than 40 million victims of human trafficking globally, including hundreds of thousands of victims in the U.S. According to recent statistics, more than 300,000 people in Texas are victims of human trafficking, including 80,000 underage boys and girls forced into prostitution. Most of the victims come from Asia, Central America, and Mexico. People see Houston as a hub for human trafficking because of its proximity to the Mexican border, access to the I-10 highway corridor and access to two international airports and one of the largest ports in the world.

Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) and William P. Hobby Airport (HOU) both work closely with the Department of Homeland Security to actively combat human trafficking. Houston Airports recently undertook an art initiative at IAH to further raise awareness of this federal crime.

Recently installed at IAH, "Border US-MX, 2018, International Airport Houston" is a 650-foot-long temporary earthwork in the shape of the U.S.-Mexico border filled with red sand. The piece was created by Molly Gochman, a New York City-based experiential artist and activist who works around the world to raise awareness and understanding of issues like human trafficking.

A part of the larger Red Sand Project, "Border US-MX" can be seen from the air and the ground as a red crack in the earth that stretches out into the airfield. The earthwork will be displayed at IAH through the end of January 2019 in an effort to raise awareness – and to help us "think" – to provide inspiration for reflection on such a weighty issue. Gochman's Red Sand Project uses earthwork installations, sidewalk interventions, and convenings to create opportunities for people to ponder and take action against human exploitation.

Human trafficking is still often "hidden" from public view and can literally be in front of our eyes or right around the corner and we not be aware of it. Houston is filled with dozens of strip centers that house massage establishments and nail salons, two such venues which often provide cover for sex and labor trafficking.

Labor trafficking also happens in such industries as factory work, domestic services, restaurants, and construction, to name just a few.

Human trafficking gets people into a country illegally, supplies individuals for the sex trade, supplies individuals to engage in forced labor, and is also used to provide so-called "mules" to transport illegal items such as drugs.

Houston Airports encourages its staff and associates to be vigilant and on the lookout for signs of human trafficking. In October, TSA Agent Fernanda Reyna was given the Heroic Service Award at the annual Houston Friendly luncheon for her recognition and recent rescue of a victim of human trafficking at IAH. Agent Reyna recognized the signs and acted upon them.

Some signs include living with an employer, poor living conditions, multiple people in a cramped space, the inability to speak to individuals alone, answers that sound scripted and rehearsed, indicators of physical abuse, and individuals who come across as submissive or fearful.

Gochman launched the Red Sand Project in 2014 to draw awareness to the horrors of human exploitation. Her unique concept has been featured in every state in the U.S. as well as 70 countries around the world.

Recognition can lead to rescue – keep your eyes open! If you suspect human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733.

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An equitable Houston demands continuous engagement in the wake of Harvey

by Elena Vann April 26, 2018 Harvey Recovery



Hurricane Harvey “pulled back the curtain” on inequality in Houston, revealing some “scary truths about the city we are living in,” said Ginny Goldman last week as she moderated a panel discussion at the Deborah Colton Gallery in the wealthy Boulevard Oaks Neighborhood.

Drenched

Molly Gochman

Water. The main constituent of all the earth's living organisms. It's where we all found home before we were born. It's where we often find home as we grow. It's what has brought us to build cities, and what has torn our cities apart.

Drenched combines several series by Molly Gochman that seek to explore the vulnerabilities people face because of natural disasters, and the ways in which communities come together as a result.

The hope is that *Drenched* can serve as a memorial to the emotional loss caused by flooding, in the context of Houston and India. Homes ruined, belongings irreparably damaged, photographs lost forever, families separated — the flooding destroyed more than just objects.

These images, of flood-damaged personal items and parts of homes that became piles of trash, were transferred by hand onto paper then digitally printed onto aluminum, juxtaposing a resilient and durable object with precious, fleeting memories.

"Drenched" artist Molly Gochman's words on the exhibit at the Deborah Colton Gallery

In conjunction with the panel was artist Molly Gochman's exhibit, "Drenched," which examines life in the aftermath of flood disasters featuring photos of damaged belongings in both Houston and India. The series, as described by the artist, seek to "explore the vulnerabilities people face because of natural disasters, and the ways in which communities come together as a result."



Artist Molly Gochman (center) speaks with an attendee at the Deborah Colton Gallery

Goldman, founder and executive director of the Texas Organizing Project (TOP) led the discussion between panelists Maria Moreno, director of communications at TOP, Marianela Acuña-Arreaza, executive director of Fé y Justicia Worker Center, and Lance Gilliam, a senior policy advisor for Harris County Precinct 1. The panel aimed to educate guests on Harvey recovery – what has and has not been done – and how to make Houston more equitable in the process.

What has become obvious to Houstonians citywide is that there is disaster money entering the pipeline for recovery purposes. Lots of it.

The main takeaway of the discussion, however, was that even if money comes falling from the sky and we have more than we know what to do with (however unlikely that may be), **without engagement, money will be spent unequally**. Moreover, despite the multibillion dollar federal disaster allocations, it has been a tough year in U.S. disasters, and money must be divided between Texas, California, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Left to Right: Ginny Goldman, Lance Gilliam, Mary Moreno, and Marianela Acuña-Arreaza

Most vulnerable to an inequitable recovery, and the focus of each of the panelists' work, are low-income communities and low-wage workers, especially undocumented immigrants working in construction. With less than six weeks until the start of the next hurricane season, the sense of urgency among advocates is an everyday presence. The priority of each of the panelists' organizations is ensuring their communities have a voice in the recovery process and are not left behind.

Without local recovery policy steering by communities and advocates, however, and an over-reliance on Federal aid dollars, low-income communities are in danger. On one hand, many homes affected by the flood waters fall into the contested category of “naturally occurring affordability,” which largely includes housing units that are not fully up to code, or in hazardous areas – such as flood plains. Harris county feels, stated Gilliam, that while many of these communities should be bought out, the right of residents to stay where they are if they so choose, makes “safe, affordable, replacement housing...a non-negotiable” where buyouts do occur.

While federal programs such as Army Corps of Engineers Bayou Projects proved themselves **incredibly effective against flooding during Harvey**, the Corp’s criteria, said Gilliam, is inherently **“codified discrimination based on income.”** The criteria for giving federal projects the green light, he explained, is based solely on the property values of homes, rather than the number of citizens in an area of interest. In order to qualify, a neighborhood can have no lower than a 1:1 cost ratio. Simply put, the federal government will not provide the funding in low-income neighborhoods because the homes are not valued high enough. While Brays bayou in Houston’s more middle class neighborhood of Braeswood qualified for federal project, as did Sims bayou’s main channel (barely scraping by at a 1:1.1 cost ratio) Gilliam stated bluntly, “you can’t sugarcoat it...if all we have is federal Army Corps of Engineers money, you’re never going to see a long-term project on Greens Bayou,” that travels through the historically low-income Northeast quadrant of the city.

The most important thing for Houston, echoed the panelists, is for communities to get involved and stay engaged. State and City officials have a crucial role to play by actively seeking – and acting upon – citizen participation. One major difficulty Moreno pointed out, with regards to getting more Houstonians to understand the magnitude and severity of damage that remains almost a year after the storm, is that **“the pain people are enduring is not visible,”** as mold and **shoddy repairs** hide behind front doors. The coming together of so many Houston non-profit and advocacy organizations, however, as well as the increased attention to flood risk in the wake of Harvey, gives them hope for a more equitable future for Houston.

“We need to stay together,” said Acuña-Arreaza, followed by Gilliam’s insistence that, **“it’s going to take a motivated constituency...if we are going to see change.”**