



art21

# ART IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

Screening Guide

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# Screening Guide

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## Screening Society

Art21's Screening Society is a free global screening program, in support of the award-winning television series, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. With each new season, Art21 invites a wide variety of partners—schools, universities, libraries, museums, nonprofit organizations, galleries, arts and cultural spaces, community centers, and more—to screen one of the season's episodes.

In response to the global pandemic, Screening Society for Season 10 has been reimagined as a digital experience. This guide offers hosts and participants information about the episodes and the featured artists as well as suggestions for further engagement through discussion questions and activities.

For more information, resources, and educational opportunities, please visit [art21.org](https://art21.org).

## About Art21

Art21 is a celebrated global leader in presenting thought-provoking and sophisticated content about contemporary art—a preeminent resource for learning first-hand from the artists of our time. Art21's mission is to inspire a more creative world through the works and words of contemporary artists.

A nonprofit organization, Art21 provides unparalleled access to artists' voices, using the power of digital media to introduce diverse audiences around the world to contemporary art and artists. For more than two decades, Art21 has changed the paradigm for teaching and learning about the creative process.

## Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century

The first and only nationally broadcast public television series to focus exclusively on contemporary visual art and artists in the United States and around the world, *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century* introduces audiences to a diverse group of established and emerging artists working today and to the art they are producing now.

Through in-depth profiles and interviews, the series reveals the inspiration, vision, and techniques behind the creative works of some of today's most accomplished contemporary artists. Art21 travels across the country and abroad to film contemporary artists—from painters and photographers to installation artists, video artists, and sound artists—in their own spaces and in their own words. The result is a unique opportunity to experience first-hand the complexity of the artistic processes—from inception to finished product—behind today's most thought-provoking art.

Ten seasons have been produced for PBS (2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020).

## Credit Line

When hosting an Art21 screening, please use the following credit line in publications associated with your event:

*This event is presented in collaboration with Art21, a nonprofit global leader in art education, producing preeminent films about today's leading visual artists and education programs that inspire creativity worldwide.*

### Cover image:

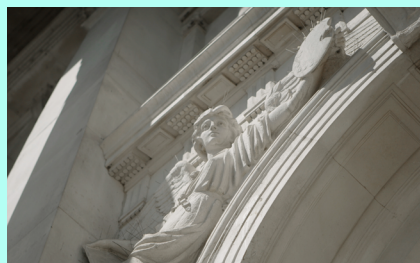
Anish Kapoor. *Leviathan*, 2011. PVC; 33.6 x 99.89 x 72.23 m. Photograph: Dave Morgan. ©Anish Kapoor. All rights reserved DACS/ARS, 2020.





# London

EPISODE SYNOPSIS A centuries-old city transformed by skyscrapers, innovations, and a diverse citizenry, London has long been home to groundbreaking artists, from Romantic-era trailblazers like J.M.W. Turner to pioneering modernists like Francis Bacon. Buoyed by this history of artistic excellence, the artists featured in this film draw inspiration from decades of British art while contending with the repercussions of colonialism and xenophobia, brought to light at a time of massive political upheaval in the country. This esteemed group takes on fundamental artistic principles of form and content to create sculpture, installation, video, and performance works that rethink history and subvert tradition, all while drawing upon the architectural and technological innovations of the twenty-first century. As collisions of old and new, their works are as layered, diverse, and dynamic as the city in which they live.



Production stills from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 10 episode, "London." © Art21, Inc. 2020.

# London



## Anish Kapoor

Born 1954, Mumbai, India

World-renowned for his perception-defying sculptures and large-scale public installations, Anish Kapoor works with industrial materials like mirror, steel, stone, and vinyl to create forms that evoke the metaphysical and

challenge viewers' ideas about physical space. Kapoor's sublime use of concave forms, reflective surfaces, intense colors, and monumental scale invites viewers to experience both collective awe and private contemplation.

**As artists, we conduct our educations in public. You can never know whether it's going to be a success in terms of what the work is after. One just has to risk it.** —Anish Kapoor



## John Akomfrah

Born 1957, Accra, Ghana

A pioneering filmmaker, John Akomfrah creates multichannel video installations that critically examine the legacy of colonialism, the Black diaspora, and environmental degradation. Akomfrah weaves together original footage with archival material to create stirring, layered narratives that juxtapose personal and historical memory, past and present, and environmental and human crises. His epic films draw connections

across time, history, and themes, poetically weaving together topics such as the cruelty of the whaling industry and the Atlantic slave trade (*Vertigo Sea*, 2015); the effects of climate change on humans and our ecological landscapes (*Purple*, 2017); and the wave of recent refugees from Africa, declining elephant populations, and Ghana's layered political history (*Four Nocturnes*, 2019).

**The essence of all experiments, be it in politics or aesthetics or narrative, is that there has to be a way in which the past, present, and the future can be brought into some sort of whole.** —John Akomfrah



# London



## Phyllida Barlow

Born 1944, Newcastle upon Tyne, England

Inspired by the urban environment, Phyllida Barlow's sculptures marry unconventional materials such as cardboard, plywood, plaster, and cement with vibrantly colored paint and fabrics. Her invented forms are created through layered processes of accumulation, removal, and juxtaposition—gestures that Barlow describes as “more functional than artistic.” The resulting massive works challenge viewers’

experiences of physical space, stretching the limits of mass, volume, and height as they tower, block, and interrupt space. Yet these works remain distinctly anti-monumental; the artist leaves exposed, unfinished seams, revealing the means of the works’ making and playing with the tensions between hardness and softness, the imperious and the comic, and the painterly and the sculptural.

**It’s you and the work and the place. It’s a very particular relationship, where there’s nothing else coming between you and that intention.** —Phyllida Barlow



## Christian Marclay

Born 1955, San Rafael, California

Marclay began his career in New York City’s East Village, where he was an early experimental DJ and musician, creating a series of works by destroying, collaging, and scratching vinyl records. Influenced by musique concrète, punk rock, and the work of John Cage, Marclay collaborated with a variety of artists, musicians,

and performers during this time. The transformation of sound and musical objects into visuals and visuals back into audio experiences has been an important and ongoing part of the artist’s practice. Collectively, his works tap into and comment on the subliminal power of mass visual and audio culture.

**I think it’s important to make discoveries through the knowledge of other people. That’s what I’ve enjoyed about music, all my life: it is a collaborative effort.** —Christian Marclay

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## Further Engagement

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After viewing the episode, use the following suggestions to elicit conversation and connection. Whether virtually or in person, participants can engage with the film in a variety of ways using a broad range of platforms. Please choose the questions and suggestions that best connect with your community.

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**TECHNOLOGY TIP:** When your audience is gathered online and before the episode begins, request that participants remain in the meeting session after the episode concludes, to engage in discussions and activities related to the film.

### Discuss the episode

How do artists in the London episode collaborate? Describe qualities that these artists share. Now reflect on your community: how is it collaborative?

What do these artists transform? How does each artist ask us to contemplate different ideas and questions, through the idea of transformation? Discuss some of the ideas you find compelling.

Consider your prior knowledge of London. Did the episode reinforce or challenge your preconceived notions? Discuss this with other participants and then share with the group. Are there common threads among your thoughts? Why might that be?

How do the artists define their role(s) in the process of artmaking? What parts do they play? Which artist has a role that's similar to one that you play, in your life?

### Discuss the artists

How does Anish Kapoor create a sense of awe? What strategies or approaches does he use? How does this compare to moments when you have been in awe?

Phyllida Barlow discusses her memories several times during the segment. How is memory a theme in her work? What is the relationship between the objects she creates and the memories associated with them? Compare her work to that of one or more artists who use memory as a theme.

John Akomfrah refers to multiple points of view on several historical events, including Brexit, global warming, immigration, Ghanaian independence, British colonization, and transatlantic slavery. How does he confront these topics differently than a historian would? How do you think his work, compared to the work of a journalist or academic, helps viewers to see and consider unfamiliar historical events?

In what ways does Christian Marclay visually represent sound? When do you find yourself experiencing sound in a visual way? And when has something visual suggested a sound?

### Go Further

Prior to screening the episode, ask participants to have a sheet of paper or notebook handy. Encourage them to draw while viewing. They can make visual notes, sketch the artwork, or record insightful quotes. Ask participants to compare sketches and notes after the episode concludes, and discuss the kinds of themes, ideas, and questions shared by the group.

Set up an open playlist on any music platform that you favor. Ask participants to add songs to the playlist in response to their experience of watching the episode. How might music respond to the work and insights of these artists?

Ask participants to consider the idea of transforming something in their homes. What kind of object or collection of objects can be manipulated or rearranged in some way to send a different message or tell a different story? Ask participants to photograph their creations and share them with others through the use of Padlet, Google Slideshow, or another platform.



# Beijing

**EPISODE SYNOPSIS** A city with a history of more than two thousand years, Beijing has recently become the center of shifting politics, rapid urbanization, and an economic boom, making it fertile ground for art and artists. Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, a new generation of artists emerged in the city, marking the birth of contemporary art in China. Amid Beijing's dizzying economic, urban, and cultural transformation, artists have responded to its relentless evolution with urgency and ambition, all the while contending with many centuries of Chinese cultural traditions. This film witnesses the maturing of a unique contemporary-art hub and follows a multigenerational group of artists who grapple with memory, modernization, their roles in the global art world, and art's place in their own ever-changing society.



Production stills from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 10 episode, "Beijing." © Art21, Inc. 2020.



# Beijing



## Xu Bing

Born 1955, Chongqing, China

Fascinated with visual and written languages, Xu builds mixed-media installations that simultaneously evoke and subvert centuries-old Chinese cultural traditions, such as calligraphy, wood-block printing, and landscape painting scrolls. The artist asks viewers to consider how our cultural backgrounds,

especially those shaped by language, fundamentally color our worldviews. Near the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, Xu was sent to work in the countryside for two years as part of Mao Zedong's "re-education" policy; he later returned to Beijing to study printmaking and drawing. Due to increasing artistic restrictions following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, Xu moved to New York City, where he lived for almost two de-

cades. Playing with systems of language and disrupting viewers' expectations and perceptions has remained a throughline in Xu's works. Created with materials as varied as tobacco, construction debris, and surveillance-camera footage, Xu Bing's installations remain elegant and poignant, at once revering and questioning cultural traditions and challenging viewers' preconceived assumptions.

**I like using the tactic of diversion in my art: It looks like I'm addressing one issue with utmost seriousness, but what I'm really trying to say is somewhere underneath.** —Xu Bing



## Yin Xiuzhen

Born 1963, Beijing, China

## Song Dong

Born 1966, Beijing, China

Working in site-specific installation and sculpture, Yin Xiuzhen uses second-hand or recycled items like clothing and domestic objects to create works that preserve personal memories in a rapidly globalizing and homogenizing world. Originally trained in oil painting, Yin Xiuzhen was influenced by the New Wave movement in China in the 1980s, which refused the social-realism aesthetic of the 1960s–70s

Cultural Revolution and prioritized more experimental and conceptual art practices. Yin has also collaborated with her husband, the artist Song Dong, on the series, *The Way of the Chopsticks* (2001–ongoing).

Working with humble, readily accessible materials, such as household objects, wooden window and door frames, and even food, Song Dong creates sculptures, installations, videos, and performance works that explore personal and collective memory, impermanence, and the transience of human endeavor.

On the forefront of conceptual art in China in the late 1980s and early 1990s,

**Once these objects are turned into something new, we can meet people of the past. They've left a trace in history, allowing us today to receive the future and connect to the past.** —Song Dong

Song Dong had studied painting, but he soon began working in video and performance, inciting his early investigations into impermanence. His most-well-known installation, *Waste Not* (2005), posthumously catalogued more than 10,000 items from his mother's Beijing home, creating at once a time capsule of a half-century of Chinese culture and consumption and a psychological process for coping with personal grief. Both deeply personal and universally relatable, Song Dong's works are poetic meditations on the fleeting nature of life.

# Beijing



**I prefer to paint places that can't be easily judged by a single value system.** —Liu Xiaodong

## Liu Xiaodong

Born 1963, Liaoning, China

A leading figure among the Chinese Neo-Realist painters, Liu Xiaodong depicts everyday people in his enormous oil-and-acrylic paintings, foregrounding the human dimension of global issues like economic hardship, environmental crisis, and migration. The artist often works on site, painting his subjects *en plein air*.

Considered a part of the New Wave or New Generation artists who emerged following the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong, Liu Xiaodong's work is influenced by figurative realism, a key artistic legacy still thriving in contemporary Chinese art. Imbued with rawness, his paintings are composed of loose brushstrokes and rich colors, suggestive of the sometimes rough, improvised lives of his subjects.

Liu Xiaodong draws upon his upbringing in rural China in his approach to his subjects, who he describes as “ordinary, everyday folks.” Painting *en plein air*, the artist carefully composes his tableaux; in the studio, Liu combines recreations of photographs with imagined elements. The resulting paintings are tender reminders of our humanity, where viewers can see themselves in the joys and struggles of the artist's subjects.



**During periods of change, there's opportunity to do interesting things.** —Guan Xiao

## Guan Xiao

Born 1983, Chongqing Municipality, China

In her sculpture and video work, Guan Xiao juxtaposes discordant images, diverse cultural artifacts, and modern technology to create objects that are futuristic, referential, unsettling, and humorous. Working with traditional Chinese sculpted tree roots, 3D fabrications, and readymade industrial

objects, Guan Xiao epitomizes the next generation of artists from China, rooted in transnational culture and immersed in our technology-fueled present. Her video works mirror viewers' experiences of the Internet and personal memories, where seemingly unrelated images find inexplicable yet resonant connection.

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## Further Engagement

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**TECHNOLOGY TIP:** When your audience is gathered online and before the episode begins, request that participants remain in the meeting session after the episode concludes, to engage in discussions and activities related to the film.

### Discuss the episode

Which traditions do these artists engage with and confront, and what do they have to say about these traditions? What kinds of traditions are in your family or community? How do they relate to those discussed in this episode?

How does each artist engage with the history and future of Beijing? How does the real and a reimagined city influence their work in different ways? Consider your neighborhood, community, or city. How has it changed during the time you've lived there?

What glimpses of family are shown in this episode? How might they influence the artists' work? Does your family influence your work?

Each artist in the Beijing episode works with observation in different ways. How does each artist approach the idea or process of observation? How does observation fuel their work? With fellow participants, discuss how the act of observation plays a role in your lives.

### Discuss the artists

What is surveillance? How does Xu Bing comment on surveillance? In your life, when are you aware of surveillance happening?

How do Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen describe the changes they have experienced in Beijing? Describe their feelings about home. How do you define the word home? If your home has changed, how did you experience that transition?

In Guan Xiao's artworks, how does the use of materials allow viewers to see these materials differently and to engage with the "chewy" quality of her sculptures? How does her work relate to collage, in which many different elements can come together to form something new?

How and why does Liu Xiadong depict "ordinary, everyday folks" in his paintings? What about his paintings is extraordinary? How does Liu allow us to see these people in ways we may have not noticed otherwise?

### Go Further

In response to Guan Xiao's use of traditional and nontraditional objects as materials, challenge participants to create an artwork with readily available materials. Specify an amount of time during which participants can create an artwork. At the conclusion of this period, ask participants to share what they created, and discuss how juxtaposition plays a role in how we see the objects separately and collectively.

Ask participants to reflect on how their communities look different today than they did ten, twenty, perhaps fifty years ago. Ask them to find a local spot that has changed in some way, through some Internet research, and to create a hashtag or website to share "before" and "after" photographs. Ask participants who post to include details about what they remember or have recently learned about the place.

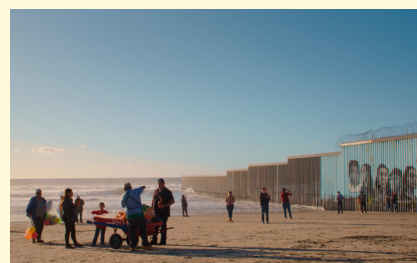
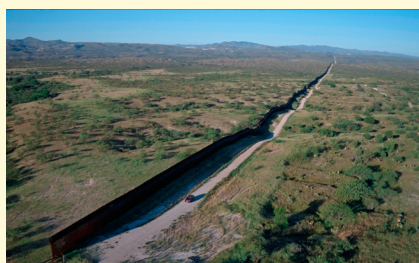
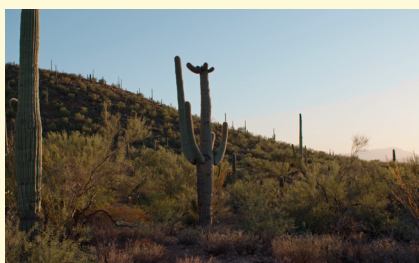




## Borderlands

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

A vast geography encompassing open deserts and densely populated metropolises, the borderland between the United States and Mexico has long been a site of not only political conflict and social struggle but also intense creative ferment. Taking a new curatorial and filmmaking approach, Art21 connects and juxtaposes a group of acclaimed artists as they work along the U.S.-Mexico border, interweaving their stories to chronicle the creative responses to one of the most divisive moments in the history of this area. From an epic interactive searchlight installation along the El Paso–Juárez divide to a deeply personal performance at the Tijuana border wall, these artists consider the border as an open wound, a theatrical stage, a political podium, a studio, and a contradictory landscape that features both ugliness and beauty. This episode explores how contemporary art can reveal the new and unexpected, asking viewers to question their preconceived notions of a place seemingly made familiar by mass media. Ultimately, the artists featured in this hour challenge themselves and audiences to embrace a more empathetic view of one of the most contested areas in North America.



Production stills from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 10 episode, "Borderlands." © Art21, Inc. 2020.

# Borderlands



## Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

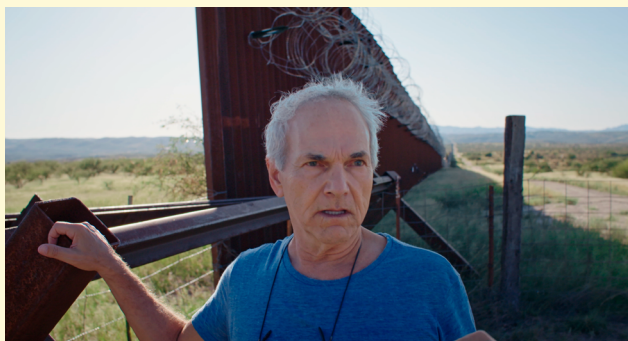
Born 1967, Mexico City, Mexico

An artist working at the intersection of architecture and performance art, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer creates participatory artworks that utilize technology like robotics, heart-rate sensors, and computerized surveillance tools in order to facilitate human connection. Technologically sophisticated yet deceptively simple in their execution, Lozano-Hemmer's spectacular, immersive works are often

installed in public places as a means of transforming these sites into forums for civic engagement. From an education in chemistry, Lozano-Hemmer's early career in a molecular-recognition lab influenced his conceptual and practical approach to creating art. As early as the 1990s, Lozano-Hemmer worked with custom software and surveillance technologies to create interactive artwork. His work often invites viewers to provide a biometric "snapshot" of themselves—whether their fingerprint, heartbeat, or portrait—that

the artist then transforms into a dynamic, collective landscape and representation of both anonymity and community. For his interventions in public spaces, Lozano-Hemmer transforms facades, plazas, parks, and skylines by adding audiovisual elements that viewers can control. The artist refers to this as "relational architecture," a practice that re-contextualizes viewers' understandings of public spaces and received narratives about them.

**I love it, when one has a pre-established notion of what one is going to see and it's wrong.** —Rafael Lozano-Hemmer



## Richard Misrach

Born 1949, Los Angeles, California

A leading photographer of his generation, Richard Misrach explores the collision of nature and culture through his large-format color photographs. Fascinated by the political and environmental transformation of the deserts of the American southwest, Misrach creates hauntingly beautiful photographs of arid landscapes that

contrast the natural and man-made tragedies found there: floods, fires, nuclear-test sites, the U.S.-Mexico border wall, and the traces of migrants who make the perilous journey north. Misrach began his career in Berkeley, California, in the early 1970s, photographing the anti-war protests happening throughout the city. Misrach realized that his early work failed to meet his social-activist ambitions and instead turned his camera to the deserts of southern California,

Nevada, and Arizona. His ongoing series, *Desert Cantos*, consists of groups of photographs that depict the ecological effects of human intervention in the desert landscape. A more recent chapter, *Border Cantos*, captures the pathos of the 2000-mile border between the U.S. and Mexico, including the border wall and the artifacts of migration—clothing, water barrels, ladders—left behind.

**One of the things I've learned from this series is that until you go see this place for yourself, you have no idea what's really going on there.** —Richard Misrach



# Borderlands



**When I look at the Borderlands, I see a clear demarcation of colonization. We've got to start including indigenous worldview in relation to the border.** —Kade L. Twist

## Postcommodity

**Cristóbal Martínez**, New Mexico and **Kade L. Twist**, California

Postcommodity is an interdisciplinary arts collective composed of Cristóbal Martínez and Kade L. Twist. Postcommodity creates site-specific installations, interventions, videos, and sound works, utilizing the members' shared Indigenous lens to reveal the incongruent histories embedded in our modern-day institutions, systems, and beliefs. The group often works closely with local communities to create poetic installations that

reimagine sites of conflict as places of curiosity that foreground Indigenous culture. Postcommodity was founded in 2007 by Twist, Steve Yazzie, and Nathan Young and acknowledges the important contributions of its previous collaborators, including Yazzie (2007–2010), Young (2007–2015), and Raven Chacon (2009–2018). The collective focuses on centering Indigenous perspectives and working in response to the land where their projects take place.



**A lot of my work is about visibility and more representation: allowing more people to see themselves or their struggles mirrored by the work.** —Tanya Aguiñiga

## Tanya Aguiñiga

Born 1978, San Diego, California

An artist, designer, and craftsperson, Tanya Aguiñiga works with traditional craft materials like natural fibers and collaborates with other artists and activists to create sculptures, installations, performances, and community-based art projects. Drawing on her upbringing as a binational citizen, who daily crossed the border from Tijuana to San Diego for school,

Aguiñiga's work speaks of the artist's experience of her divided identity and aspires to tell the larger and often invisible stories of the transnational community. Aguiñiga began her career by creating collaborative installations with the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, an artist collective that addressed political and human rights issues at the U.S.-Mexico border. The artist co-built and for six years ran a community center in Tijuana, aimed at bringing attention through

arts initiatives to injustices that the local community faced. Aguiñiga has maintained this spirit of activism and community collaboration throughout her career, going on to create many performances and installations that involve the participation of other artists, activists, and community members. In her installations, furniture, and wearable designs, Aguiñiga often works with cotton, wool, and other textiles, drawing upon Mesoamerican weaving and traditional forms.



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## Further Engagement

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### Discuss the episode

What materials do these artists use to engage the public in conversation and reflection related to the U.S.-Mexico border? Which material stood out to you? Why?

Describe what each artist in this episode hopes to achieve through their art. How does their work compare to that of other artists, with whom you may be more familiar?

Collaboration is a common practice for these artists. Describe the qualities that make these four artists similar to each other and how they differ, in their approaches to collaboration.

### Discuss the artists

Describe the major forms of communication that you employ in your daily life. What makes Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Border Tuner* a form of communication and interaction, one that is different from the examples you described?

Richard Misrach remarks, "Until you go see this place for yourself, you have no idea what's really going on there." Have you had a similar experience with a particular place? If so, describe it.

How does Tanya Aguiñiga encourage interaction and collaboration utilizing the border wall? Describe the physical borders that you engage with each day. How do these borders affect your movements, actions, and feelings?

Postcommodity often focuses on a particular place and the people who call it home. In your community, what cultural groups would be represented in a similar type of artwork? What symbols, materials, or music might be used to identify those groups?

### Go Further

Ask participants to choose a location in their neighborhood that has a contested history, to post images of the place (found online or in a local library) to a chosen social-media platform or website. If images are not already available, or if participants feel inspired, they can take new photographs of the place. Ask everyone to write a brief description of their chosen location and to comment on what each person has shared.

Think about communication and place, together. How might one communicate the idea or the feeling of a certain place without using words? What might it sound like or smell like? Ask participants to recreate their sense of place and share it with one or more others. How do their reactions compare to the creator's memory of this place?