

# ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant

ELLEN ROTHENBERG

FEBRUARY 6–APRIL 13, 2019

The James  
Gallery

THE  
GRADUATE  
CENTER  
CITY UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW YORK





## Katherine Carl in conversation with Ellen Rothenberg

**KC:** Starting with the specific place of this research project, I see the location of Tempelhof as a metaphorical archive. It contains so many layers of history and use; I imagine that so many stories would tumble forth if this place could speak. How did you access this knowledge through artistic means by engaging with objects of architecture, documents, infrastructure? What emerged from traversing the terrain and from observations and conversations?

**ER:** Tempelhof is not an archive. It's a large site in the middle of Berlin, the largest urban green space in the city. It's not contained or categorized. It's open and accessible space... but it also functions like many other sites in Berlin. There are multiple histories embedded in the site reverberating those pasts. It's the site of early air demonstrations by the Wright brothers and has a long military history. It was the site of slave and forced labor; the site of one of Europe's largest buildings, the airport terminal built by the Nazis—the same airport used by the allies during the Berlin Airlift; the site of housing for refugees from the east in the postwar period; and now, its current uses... as a site for art and cultural events, recreation, and refugee housing in the aftermath of the 2015 influx.

In many ways, Tempelhof is the opposite of an archive: messy, open, porous, a site for multiple uses... one doesn't access it through a database but through uncontrolled entrances; and it's huge: 300 hectares in the middle of the city.

I was introduced to the refugee center at Tempelhof by Dr. Felicitas Hentschke, but my real focus of engagement was behind the airport buildings near the airfield itself: the construction site of refugee housing for more than 1000 occupants that remained in progress through spring and summer of 2017. I was viewing everything from the perimeter, through a fence. These became my limits, but also a structure for looking and thinking.



*Hole*, 2018  
30" x 30"  
Ink-jet print mounted  
on Tricell panel



*Green Passport: EXPIRED*, 2018  
36" x 24"  
Ink-jet print

What does the infrastructure of the site—the holes, wires, etc.—come to signify in the actual site and in the act of displacing the site into the gallery setting? By making these items—which are sculptural and tactile—into a photograph, the strange holes and wandering wires seem to utter the beleaguered wish for the housing to be more than it is—to be a real support structure for the lives inside, to be a sturdy abode. Yet it reveals this architecture to be rhetoric, showing how inadequate and feeble the pretensions are, how unstable all of this is.



*New Citizens! (blue)*, 2018  
12" x 16"  
Ink-jet print

I wasn't sure *what* I was looking for. Instead of locking onto objects, features, or specific subject matter, I honed a working method, returning on multiple occasions, producing an extended presence, using the camera as a viewing and a note-taking device. I must have produced two thousand images over the course of four months.

What emerged from my continuous return was a response to watching the construction of these minimal, modernist, modular structures. I was transfixed by the activity of construction. They arrived flat-packed, but then took shape, volume, and interconnection by workers from Eastern Europe who were told not to talk to the public. That heightened the observational aspect... all the while behind me were runners, bikers, people on skateboards, a set of parallel acts and activities.

The only identifying information about what was going on was a sign ironically identifying the site as *Tempohome*, temporary housing for refugees.

Through that method, the photographs became my own research archive... a secondary site, helping to define what I saw.

That's a very good way of putting it...

In some ways it was the temporary infrastructure that I noticed initially, the portable sinks for refugees to wash themselves upon arrival at the airport, the lockers that were everywhere, and then on the construction site itself, the specificity of the infrastructure details: the drainpipe or the hole that went through the tarmac to support fence poles. They became places of indeterminacy. Whereas the gas and electrical systems—the wiring, the monitoring placed on the containers—echoed the state systems of control and surveillance.

I don't see the transposition of the site into the gallery as a simple one, since it also includes objects and images of immigration from the archive at the Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership.

As for the desires that you speak about, that perceptive view on your part... perhaps I wasn't consciously aware of that at the time. For me, it was a vast network of modular systems, and I was trying to understand what was being produced. It was hugely expensive for something that was temporary and echoed so many of the histories—camps and prisons... not homes, exposed and fenced off at the same time... demarcated, observable.

The image of the spinning coin thoroughly transfixed me. The coin at once commemorates Israel's heroic illegal immigrants as its agile mobility provides a counterpoint to the structure (albeit temporary) of the *Tempohome* installation. Your choice to include this politically charged object in the form of a photograph serves to slow it down so that viewers may reflect on the original meaning of the phrase and how this meaning has changed over time. What did you intend with the selection of this particular coin and its presentation as a photograph? This leads me to ask further questions about the construction of history through such an object: How is commemoration lived today? On social media? What slower modes do we have to build with? With the glut of images speeding at us, and right past us constantly, what advice do you have for reading images slowly today and creating images with friction that act on the viewer slowly?



My intention is to put these multiple objects, spaces, historical moments, and conditions into dynamic relation with each other. I intentionally decided not to include actual historical objects or documents from the archives and to photograph all archival materials in an oblique way in order to highlight the systems and hierarchies at work in the production; passports, immigration documents, letters of safe passage, all of these state produced documents are only seen from the outside. This oblique view, the enlargement of the image, the shift in scale from the original object to the represented image, they all do the same thing. They indicate my own distance and decouple the specifics of history or fixed historical stasis. They put these objects and images in conversation with the present. What does it mean to valorize illegal immigration at one point in time and put it in conversation with the current negative politicization of migration and immigrants not only here, but in many places in the world?

By slowing down, I see it perhaps more as an unpacking of the tightly layered meanings, ironies, and reverberations between all these moments in time.

It's in the space of the gallery that the slowing down occurs... it's a quiet and contemplative space. I employ that as a given, a place to consider all these interactive images, spatial elements, bodily habitations, architectures, presences, and absences.

The photographs themselves are presented in different modes: adhered directly to the wall, on substrates of cardboard presented as objects, conventionally mounted, scaled as architecture, and placed within the architecture of the gallery space—not in a linear narrative condition but, rather, a more open-formed relationship.

The floor plan demands an embodiment of space. The viewer occupies the space at scale, projecting oneself in these containers... all within sight of 5th Avenue and 35th Street in a building that is currently encased within temporary scaffolding and plastic fencing, not unlike the condition at Berlin's *Tempohome*.

*Illegal Immigrants* (no. 1-4), 2018  
36" x 24"  
Wall mounted ink-jet print

I see the installation here at the James Gallery as a jumping off point for communal activity about immigration, whether historical or contemporary, as well as imagined future inhabitation. This is similar to your project *elsetime*, in which the installation became a hub of performance activity related to your oeuvre. Because the site of Templehof is so charged, what does it mean to transpose it to the gallery space? Along similar lines, having *ISO 6346* physically span the gallery space recalls the site-specific installation, *Common Assembly*, that DAAR created in the gallery in 2012. Though they investigated a different topic of the Palestinian Parliament, the act of translating a charged site in a gallery space creates a friction that I find generative and possibly hopeful, but also vexing. What meaning is made by deliberately "objectifying" the *Tempohome* site and placing it in the gallery? How did you envision the installation would carry the layered, lived, political realities of that place that are evolving and dynamic?

I was very excited for the opportunity to show this work at the James Gallery, in the shadow of the Empire State Building, at the crossroads of a robust international, intellectual community at the CUNY Graduate Center. It's always been my intention that the presentation of my work is a beginning, an opening for discussion and responses by others. I have been committed to that interchange from very early in my artistic career and invested in it as a principle for most all of my work.

It's important to think that we have it within ourselves to employ an imaginary future and perhaps an imaginary past as well, to produce our own empowerment. Nothing comes without imagination first... and my work demands that each viewer produce those strands of connection, of coherence, of continuity between objects, images, and historical moments. All that must be placed in service of an ethical future that we must ourselves produce using the same stuff. I'm looking forward to what the work produces and what the CUNY Graduate Center community can do with it.



*Al Capp: Let's Git a Mob Together*,  
2018  
15" x 22"  
Ink-jet print

Detail of *Tempohome Stack*,  
2018  
19.5" x 13"  
Wall mounted ink-jet print

## ELLEN ROTHENBERG BIOGRAPHY

Ellen Rothenberg's work is concerned with the politics of everyday life and the formation of communities through collaborative practices. From her performances to her installations and research projects, Rothenberg has probed formal boundaries for what they can *produce*, designing responsive structures that encourage participation. Her work has been presented in North America and Europe: at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts and The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Museum of London, Ontario; The Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen; Royal Festival Hall, London; The Brukenthal National Museum, Sibiu, Romania; among others. Awards received include NEA Regional Fellowships, The Bunting Institute Fellowship at Radcliffe College Harvard University, The Massachusetts Artist Foundation Fellowships, Illinois Arts Council Fellowships, and grants from The Charles Engelhard Foundation, The LEF Foundation, and NEA Artists Projects. As Adjunct Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and inaugural Faculty Research Fellow at the Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice at SAIC, Rothenberg has produced a hybrid pedagogy in her teaching. Working with established communities, and forming new ones, has become an essential part of her working process. She has worked in collaboration with the Chicago Torture Justice Memorial Project, Future Force Geo Speculators, and *Chelen Amenca*, Romania. *SHADOWED!*, a new book on Rothenberg's work, was published by The Green Lantern Press in 2018.

### THE JAMES GALLERY

The Graduate Center, CUNY  
365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street  
New York, NY 10016  
[centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery](http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery)

Hours:  
Tue-Thu, 12–7pm  
Fri-Sat, 12–6pm  
Free and Open to the Public

The Amie and Tony James Gallery, located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, is dedicated to exhibition-making as a form of advanced research embedded in the scholarly work of the Graduate Center across multiple disciplines. The gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussion, actions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists, and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries.

Curator: Katherine Carl  
Installation: Lanning Smith  
Design: Sonia Yoon

Special thanks to:  
Dan and Jesse Eisenberg, Cindi Katz, Bobby Gonzales, Sonia Yoon, Odile Compagnon, Janel Fung, Elnaz Javani, Chris Lowery, Charles Scott, John Flaherty, Ionit Behar, Dr. Felicitas Hentschke of THF Welcome, Marina Naprushkina of Neue Nachbarschaft, Bettina Klein, Kate Rabinowitz, Allison Kuo and students in Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, the PhD Program in Art History and the Center for the Humanities at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

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Inside images: *ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant*, 2018, installation views, Spertus Institute, Chicago. Photos by Tom Van Eynde.

Top left:  
Detail of *Tempohome Stack*, 2018  
19.5" x 13"  
Wall mounted ink-jet print

Bottom left:  
*Drainpipe*, 2018  
27" x 18"  
Ink-jet print mounted on Tricel panel

Top and bottom right:  
Detail of *Carrier*, 2018  
dimensions variable  
Documents, shoes, pillow, mailbox, ratchet straps, bungee cords

Middle right:  
*Infrastructure Wall (detail view: Fit auf dem Feld)*, 2018  
24.4" x 96"  
Ink-jet prints, cardboard, and  
Tricel panels mounted on wooden frames

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CURATED BY KATHERINE CARL



The James  
Gallery



Ellen Rothenberg, *ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant*  
Installation views at the James Gallery,  
The Graduate Center, CUNY.  
Courtesy of The James Gallery and the artist, 2019.  
Photos: Cary Whittier.



# PROGRAMS



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## **Inside the Box: A Conversation on the Life of Artists' Archives**

WED, FEB 6, 6:00 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

Lisa Le Feuvre, Holt-Smithson Foundation;  
Keith Wilson, Center for the Humanities,  
The Graduate Center, CUNY

How can the task of managing an artist's estate be understood and refreshed? What is the balance between managing the materials and less tangible elements like the artist's persona or reputation? Keith Wilson and Lisa Le Feuvre discuss the legacy of land artists Nancy Holt (1938–2014) and Robert Smithson (1938–73). Founded in 2017, the Holt-Smithson Foundation is an artist-endowed foundation that aims to continue the creative and investigative the creative legacies of Holt and her husband, Robert Smithson, through public service from its base in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Co-sponsored by the PhD Program in Art History at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

## **Curator's Perspective: Nicolas Bourriaud**

FRI, MAR 8, 6:30 PM | ELEBASH RECITAL HALL

Nicolas Bourriaud, Montpellier Contemporain (MoCo)

As part of Independent Curator's International's *Curator's Perspective*—an itinerant public discussion series featuring national and international curators—Nicolas Bourriaud will present on the theoretical framework underpinning his current work as the Curator of the 16th Istanbul Biennial that will take place in fall 2019. For the last 32 years, the Istanbul Biennial has engaged an exhibition model that enables a dialogue between artists and the audience through the work of the artists instead of a national representation model. He will contribute to the Biennial's history of strong curatorial statements since its creation in 1987. Seeing the city itself as “a crossing point,” Bourriaud has said he will consider the special significance of Istanbul in today's “global political era marked by binary thought, and try to build an exhibition that measures up to our historical situation.”

Co-sponsored by Independent Curators International (ICI).

## **Records of Resistance Listening Party**

WED, MAR 13, 6:30 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

LISTENING PARTY: Josh MacPhee, archivist and artist

In the early 1960s, 12" long-playing albums and 7" "singles" took over the recording industry. The Civil Rights Movements took notice. The Congress for Racial Equality released *Sit-In Songs: Songs of the Freedom Riders* in 1962. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Freedom Singers quickly followed, releasing their first single and album—both titled *We Shall Overcome*—in 1963. Over a dozen recordings of Martin Luther King, Jr. were released in the 1960s. In the 1970s, music becomes a key part of the struggle against the rightist coup in Chile, and in the 1980s the antiapartheid movement grew through recorded music. Journey into politicized sound with Josh MacPhee for a collective listening session and discussion of the cross-over between mass-distributed pop music and political movements.

Co-sponsored by Interference Archive, the Film Studies Certificate Program of the Graduate Center, CUNY, and the Art Gallery of the College of Staten Island in conjunction with the exhibition *if a song could be freedom... Organized Sounds of Resistance*.

## **Translated Movements:**

### **The Unlikely Paths of Israeli Folk Dance**

MON, MAR 18, 6:30 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

PERFORMANCE: Hadar Ahuvia, dancer/choreographer

A new piece created specifically to be performed in the space of the exhibition *ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant* in the James Gallery continues choreographer Hadar Ahuvia's exploration of appropriation, translations, and transmissions of Israeli folk dance.

## **ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant**

WED, MAR 27, 6:30 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

EXHIBITION RECEPTION AND GALLERY TALK: Ellen Rothenberg, artist; Katherine Carl, James Gallery and Center for the Humanities, the Graduate Center, CUNY

*ISO 6346: ineluctable immigrant* focuses on the current crisis of migration and the forces of global capitalism by considering connections between past and contemporary issues of migration. The exhibition draws from research Rothenberg pursued in Berlin at Germany's largest refugee camp, currently housed in the monumental Tempelhof airport, a disused site that was originally designed and built by the Nazis. The exhibition also includes objects and documents, such as passports, birth certificates, comics, and photographs, which represent earlier Jewish immigration and movement uncovered by Rothenberg in the Spertus Institute in Chicago.

## **Shift: blood and earth and soil**

THU, MAR 28, 2:00 PM-7:30 PM | THE SKYLIGHT ROOM

### **SYMPOSIUM:**

Fascist and anti-fascist positions are rapidly coming to a head in a face-off over the politics of blood and soil, intimately linked by oppositional claims to (the) E/earth. As identification with soil, land, and place imbricates those who both espouse and resist hateful nationalisms, such ideologies are used to define borders, control the movement of bodies, and reconceive the regime of the visible. This symposium, held to celebrate the launch of Issue 11 of *Shift: Graduate Journal of Visual and Material Culture*, "BLOOD AND EARTH AND SOIL," convenes the journal's graduate student contributors, scholars, and artists with global practices related to the issue's theme. "The very notion of soil is changing," Bruno Latour recently wrote in *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. This symposium seeks to explore how these shifting conceptualizations of and claims to land, heritage, and state have been expressed in visual and material culture across time.

Keynote: Elizabeth Povinelli, Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies, Columbia University

Speakers include: Julia Bozer, Institute of Fine Arts, NYU; Alison Boyd, Smithsonian American Art Museum; Alyssa Bralower, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Banu Cennetoğlu, artist; David Joselit, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Seung-Min Lee, artist; Jackson Polys, artist; Teresa Retzer, scholar; and Siona Wilson, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Organized by: Christopher Green and Dana Liljegren, PhD Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Co-sponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Art History at the Graduate Center, CUNY, and the Doctoral Student Council at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

## **Life/Signs in the Clamoring Mouth: Memory, Politics, & Poetries of Ghostly Mattering**

THU, APR 4, 6:30 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

READING AND CONVERSATION: *mónica teresa Ortiz*, poet and *heidi andrea restrepo rhodes*, poet; Ashna Ali, PhD Program in Comparative Literature, the Graduate Center, CUNY.

We are incessantly subject to the ghost as an intrusion of histories of conquest and loss, their vociferations coursing in our mouths. Both liberating and terrifying, haunting is a gift, a mirror to our survival, our defiances, and that of generations before us. It is too, a responsibility bestowed, for that which haunts us also entrusts us with what we will make of it all, urging us to labor, to conjure ungovernable life against the hold. The ghost is the bell ringing in the throat, the clamoring signs of existence multiplied in its absence. The ghost is that which we house in our bodies, that which we become to a multitude of tomorrows in the silence of the wound and its volumes. Here, inside “the wreckage of centuries” (rhodes) may “poetry be a bold enemy of fascism” (ortiz): an archive of ferocious evidence, of life otherwise, counterfeited, insisting.

Co-sponsored by the Women of Color Network, the Thought Club, and the Postcolonial Studies Group at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

## **The Making of a Slum: A Discussion on Immigration, Housing & Health Policy in New York City, Past & Present**

WED, APR 10, 6:30 PM | THE JAMES GALLERY

PANEL DISCUSSION: Steve Brier, Professor of Urban Education and Senior Academic Technology Officer, The Graduate Center, CUNY; Nancy Carnevale, Associate Professor of History, Montclair State University; Katherine Laguardia, Assistant Clinical Professor, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

The discourse surrounding the Lung Block illustrates a typical pattern of slum-making and gentrification, and in many ways typified the plight and perceived perils of the Lower East Side immigrant in the popular imagination. At this time—when anti-immigrant sentiment has been brought to the fore on the political stage; the very real connection between health and housing continues to be explored; and affordable housing and gentrification remain among the most contentious topics in local debate—the Lung Block story has many parallels in the present.

This panel on architectural and public health policy responses to poverty and disease at the turn of the 20th century is part of a series of events developed around the exhibition organized, *The Lung Block: A New York City Slum and Its Forgotten Italian Immigrant Community* at Department of Records building and the Graduate Center,

CUNY. The project draws upon by Stefano Morello's and Kerri Culhane's scholarship examining the progressive narrative of the Lung Block as the slum-epicenter of disease, contrasting it with the lived experience of the majority Italian immigrant residents.

Co-sponsored by New York City's Department of Records, The Calandra Institute, and Queens College Makerspace.

## **Erasures: Excision and Indelibility in the Art of the Americas, the Fourth Annual Symposium of Latin American Art**

THU, APR 11, ALL DAY | THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY  
FRI, APR 12, ALL DAY | NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
SKYLIGHT ROOM AND THE JAMES GALLERY

Barbara Browning, Performance Studies, New York University  
and Ken Gonzales Day, artist

What can and cannot be erased? This question emerges when monuments are destroyed, cultural artifacts vanish, or the faces of the disappeared continue to interrogate government violence and corruption. Observable in countless examples, is that the excision—willful or unwitting—of objects and histories can be both destructive and productive, open and heal wounds, obfuscate and expose memory, and challenge and reinforce the permanence of indelibility.

Tragedies such as those noted above and subsequent actions to confront them shape this year's symposium theme. Erasure is commonly understood as an obliteration of content or removal of all traces, often forcefully. It can manifest through strategies of elimination, cleansing, or effacement as aesthetic practice, or it might instead emerge in issues surrounding medium, as in the ephemerality of site-specific or performative work. It can likewise be invoked through cartographic, historiographic, or archival omissions, or as a result of natural and man-made disasters or iconoclasm. Yet it is imperative not to neglect erasure's productive and emancipatory potentials. Through broad and interdisciplinary contributions from a diverse group of scholars, the symposium will promote conversations about the risks, rewards, and knowledge that arise when absence comes into contact with socio-political realities. Beyond physical and spatial considerations, we must also interrogate history and the void that is left by historical silence, highlighting the unsaid, the unspoken, and the invisible.

Organized by: Sonja Gandert, Tie Jojima, and Ana Cristina Perry, PhD Program in Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY; and Brian Bentley, Francesca Ferrari, and Madeline Murphy Turner, The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

Presented by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) and the John Rewald Endowment, and co-sponsored by the Doctoral Student Council at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

## **Animated Objects and Resistant Bodies**

THU, APR 18, 6:30 PM | MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE

PERFORMANCE AND CONVERSATION: Zoe Beloff, artist, Media Studies and Art, Queens College, CUNY; Toy Theater, artists; Camel Collective, artists; Natalia de Campos and Thiago Szmrecsányi, artists.

This evening's performances are the live component to the exhibit at the Gallery of the College of Staten Island, entitled *Playthings and Performing Objects*. This event explores how objects and images can be constituted to manifest themselves and enlisted toward statements and positions that resist current political culture. The evening's performances and films feature not only resistant bodies and voices but also explore ways in which animated objects and moving images can serve to form a phalanx against encroaching right-wing forces in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere. Included in the event is Zoe Beloff's film *Exile*, a new Toy Theater performance of *Terror as Usual* by Great Small Works, and performances by Camel Collective and Natalia de Campos and Thiago Szmrecsányi.

Organized by: Edward D. Miller and Valerie Tevere, Media Studies, College of Staten Island, CUNY.

Co-sponsored by the Film Studies Certificate Program at the Graduate Center, CUNY and the Art Gallery of Staten Island, College of Staten Island, CUNY.

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