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STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

THE NOYES MUSEUM OF ART OF STOCKTON UNIVERSITY PRESENTS:

# IF WALLS COULD SPEAK: ASYLUM SEEKERS

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By Ada Luisa Trillo

## Artist Statement:

IF WALLS COULD SPEAK is a glimpse into the besieged hopes, harsh uncertainties, and blunt realities—but also the enduring dignity—of Central American asylum-seekers forced into a cruel and dangerous waiting game by the "Remain in Mexico" policy. The individuals and families in these photographs have experienced unthinkable traumas and faced impossible decisions. I hope that viewers here in the United States can begin to understand the odysseys many have undertaken to provide a brighter future for themselves and their children – only to be mistreated and sent back across the border to one of the most dangerous cities in North America to be a refugee.

I shot many of the portraits in this series while visiting Casa del Migrante, a Catholic-run migrant shelter in Juárez Mexico. Nestled along a dusty dead-end street deep within the sprawl of Juárez, the Casa provides food, shelter, healthcare, and other services. The scenes within—of friends chatting, kids laughing, and three meals a day—stand in stark contrast with life for many migrants outside the shelter's gates, where death may very well be the least of their worries. Rape, kidnapping, and extortion of vulnerable refugees are daily occurrences in Juárez. The Casa houses approximately 400 asylum-seekers, most of whom were deported when the United States' "Remain in Mexico" policy took effect in January of 2019; they represent a small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of people affected by the ruling. The appearance of calm inside the shelter belies a deep sense of anxiety and fear; asylum-seekers are stranded in limbo, waiting for their turn to ask, again, for refuge in the United States.

IF WALLS COULD SPEAK is my way of showing what hope, and the loss of it, looks like for the asylum-seekers of our era. The stories on these walls are both heartbreaking and complex, they defy generalizations that seek to divide us. Through the lens of my camera, I hope to bring awareness and inform those who may have never been to the border, may not have ever met a refugee. I hope my art will spark a conversation where there has been too much confusion and mistrust.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Napolinario*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Napolinario and his mother were kidnapped and held for three months by gang members from their neighborhood in Guatemala before fleeing north. He is 12 years old and has not seen his father in nine years, who is currently living in Seattle Washington. Napolinario and his Mother turned themselves in at the US border where they stayed four days at customs and border protection in El Paso Texas. Afterward, they were returned to Mexico where they await their asylum hearing at La Casa del Migrante, a Catholic-run shelter.

Napolinario y su madre fueron secuestrados y retenidos durante tres meses por pandilleros de su vecindario en Guatemala antes de huir al norte. Napolinario tiene 12 años y no ha visto a su padre en nueve años, quien actualmente vive en Seattle Washington. Napolinario y su madre se entregaron en la frontera de Estados Unidos donde permanecieron cuatro días en la aduana y protección fronteriza en El Paso Texas. Posteriormente, fueron devueltos a México donde esperan su audiencia. Ellos están refugiados en La Casa del Migrante, un refugio de la Iglesia Católica.





Ada Lusía Trillo  
*Quinceañera*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Azucena and her family were waiting at the Juarez Migrant Shelter when I took this picture. Their asylum court case was about to be processed, and they were looking forward to being reunited with their father in California. Azucena's journey was not easy. She told me she was almost kidnapped by the Mexican police, but she managed to get out of the police car when they stopped. They found safety when they arrived at the shelter.

Azucena, since she was a little girl, had the dream of having a Quinceanera which is a celebration a girl has in Latin America when she turns 15. Thanks to donations Azucena was able to have her childhood dream a quinceanera. The guests were the 400 plus migrants and asylum seekers staying in the shelter, she got a custom-made dress by a local tailor and the food was spaghetti and fried chicken. A week before the supreme court's asylum ban Azucena along with her brother and mother were allowed to have their case processed in the U.S and reunite with her father in California. However, her sister Emy is separated from them because she is 18 and is being processed as an adult.

Azucena y su familia estaban esperando en el Refugio de la Casa del Migrante de Juárez cuando tomé esta foto. Su caso en la corte de asilo estaba a punto de ser procesado y estaban ansiosas por reunirse con su padre en California. El viaje de Azucena no fue fácil. Me dijo que estuvo a punto de ser secuestrada por la policía mexicana, pero logró salir del auto policial cuando se detuvieron. Encontraron seguridad cuando llegaron al refugio.

Azucena, desde pequeña, tenía el sueño de tener una Quinceañera que es una celebración que tiene una niña en Latinoamérica cuando cumple 15 años. Gracias a las donaciones Azucena pudo tener su sueño de infancia una quinceañera. Los invitados fueron más de 400 migrantes y solicitantes de asilo que se alojaban en La Casa Del Migrante, un sastre local le hizo un vestido a la medida y la comida consistió en espaguetis y pollo frito. Una semana antes de la prohibición de asilo de la Corte Suprema, a Azucena, junto con su hermano y su madre, se les permitió procesar su caso en los Estados Unidos y reunirse con su padre en California. Sin embargo, su hermana Emy está separada de ellos porque tiene 18 años y está siendo procesada como adulta.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Emi*  
Juárez, México  
2019

Emi is the oldest daughter of Mayda Candi Perez. She was separated from her mother and sister at the US-Mexico border because she is 18 years old and therefore considered an independent adult. She is currently being held at a detention center in Texas waiting for her asylum case to be processed.

Emi es la hija mayor de Mayda Candi Perez. Fue separada de su madre y su hermana en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México porque tiene 18 años y, por lo tanto, se la considera una adulta independiente. Actualmente se encuentra detenida en un centro de detención en Texas esperando que se procese su caso de asilo.







Ada Lusía Trillo  
*El Gordito*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Jason's nickname was "El Gordito" age twelve traveled from Honduras with his mother and his fourteen-year-old brother. Both he and his mother Sandra, age 44 are diagnosed with mental illness. Jason told me he was terrified of drowning while they crossed the Rio Grande River and that he tripped several times.

When I spoke to his mother Sandra, she told me about the cruelty she experienced back in their home country. She expressed she experienced violence and cruelty. She was unemployed and relied on her brothers who is a fisherman to give her and her family some of the catch of the day. Their Asylum date was scheduled for September 30th.

El apodo de Jason era "El Gordito" a los doce años viajó desde Honduras con su madre y su hermano de catorce años. Tanto él como su madre Sandra, de 44 años, son diagnosticados con una enfermedad mental. Jason me dijo que estaba aterrizado de ahogarse mientras cruzaban el río Grande y que tropezó varias veces.

Cuando hablé con su madre Sandra, me contó sobre la crueldad que experimentó en su país de origen. Expresó que experimentó violencia y crueldad. Estaba desempleada y confió en sus hermanos, que son pescadores, para que le dieran a ella y a su familia parte de la pesca del día. Su fecha de asilo estaba programada para el 30 de septiembre.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Christmas Day at the Shelter*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Dulce, three years old, left El Salvador with her family fleeing gang violence. The gangs threatened to kill her father, an agriculturist if he refused to traffic drugs. Her father pawned the family farm to get enough money for their trip to the border. When they surrendered at the border, the Customs Border Protection took them into custody. Dulce was sick with intestinal parasites but did not receive medical attention at the US detention facilities. The family was returned to Mexico to wait for their asylum court date.

Dulce, de tres años, salió de El Salvador con su familia huyendo de la violencia de las pandillas. Las bandas amenazaron con matar a su padre, un agricultor, si se negaba a traficar drogas. Su padre empeñó la granja familiar para conseguir suficiente dinero para su viaje a la frontera. Cuando se rindieron en la frontera, la Oficina de Aduanas de Protección Fronteriza los detuvo. Dulce estaba enferma de parásitos intestinales pero no recibió atención médica en los centros de detención de Estados Unidos. La familia fue devuelta a México para esperar la fecha de la corte de asilo.





Ada Lusía Trillo

*Jesus*

Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México

2019

Seven- year old Jesus is a hemophiliac, he travelled with his single father from Guatemala, where they could not afford to get Jesus treatment. They lost their asylum case and were returned to Mexico where they are waiting to be flown back to Guatemala by the OIM (Organización Internacional de las Migraciones.) Jesus' condition is advanced, and though the people at Casa del Migrante offered him some necessary treatment, they fear they will not survive the trip home.

Jesús, de siete años, es hemofílico, viajó con su padre soltero desde Guatemala, donde no podían pagar el tratamiento de Jesús. Perdieron su caso de asilo y fueron devueltos a México, donde están esperando que la OIM (Organización Internacional de las Migraciones) los lleve en avión de regreso a Guatemala. La condición de Jesús es avanzada, y aunque la gente de la Casa del Migrante le ofreció algún tratamiento necesario. , temen no sobrevivir al viaje a casa.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Catherine and Dakota*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Catherine and her daughter Dakota. "I came here illegally because I'm scared of living in my country of Nicaragua. We are living in a revolution, if people protest against what is going on, the police will arrive and disappear you. I'm 19 years old, we came because we were very scared of the situation on our way to the USA. My husband made the mistake of taking pictures of the license plates of the vehicles that smuggled us, then they told him to be careful and mind his own business because his family was very beautiful. I feel scared because the license plates were from the Mexican police. My asylum date is August 26th. Its been 27 days of journey and those are the number of days my daughter has been sick with diarrhea and nothing heals her."

Catherine y su hija Dakota. "Vine aquí ilegalmente porque tengo miedo de vivir en mi país de Nicaragua. Estamos viviendo una revolución, si la gente protesta por lo que está pasando, llegará la policía y te desaparecerá. Tengo 19 años, nosotros vinimos porque teníamos mucho miedo de la situación camino a los Estados Unidos. Mi esposo cometió el error de tomar fotografías de las placas de los vehículos que nos pasaban de contrabando, luego le dijeron que tuviera cuidado y se ocupara de sus propios asuntos porque su familia Fue muy lindo. Me da miedo porque las placas eran de la policía mexicana. Mi fecha de asilo es el 26 de agosto. Han sido 27 días de viaje y esos son los días que mi hija ha estado enferma de diarrea y nada la cura."







Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Jackeline and Cynthia*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Jackeline and Cintia are members of the LGBT community. The couple fled Honduras in fear of the discrimination they faced day-to-day. The journey was treacherous. Although they travelled for the sake of survival, for four days, they went without food. When they finally arrived at the Northern U.S.-Mexican border, the women were denied right to an asylum number. Thus, they could not cross the United States border--despite the legality of how they. When I spoke with them, Cintia expressed that "Their dream was crushed. We lost all hope we are returning to our country." On June 8th, with the help of OIM (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones of Mexico), the duo managed to find their way back to Honduras.

Jackeline y Cintia son miembros de la comunidad LGBT. La pareja huyó de Honduras por temor a la discriminación a la que se enfrentaban en el día a día. El viaje fue traicionero. Aunque viajaron para sobrevivir, durante cuatro días se quedaron sin comer. Cuando finalmente llegaron a la frontera norte de Estados Unidos y México, a las mujeres se les negó el derecho a un número de asilo. Por lo tanto, no pudieron cruzar la frontera de los Estados Unidos, a pesar de la legalidad de cómo lo hicieron. Cuando hablé con ellos, Cintia expresó que "Su sueño fue aplastado. Perdimos toda esperanza de regresar a nuestro país ". El 8 de junio, con la ayuda de OIM (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones de México), el dúo logró encontrar su camino de regreso a Honduras.





Ada Lusia Trillo

*Ismael*

Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),

Juárez, México

2019

Ismael is from the state of Michoacan, Mexico and had spent the last ten years with his family in the United States. Working as a chef in Seattle, he was detained by the police for a driving violation, then taken into custody for not having the proper documentation. Afterwards, he was sent to Tacoma, Washington for four months to await his court hearing. He was returned to Mexico but was told by a lawyer he can't apply for asylum because he did not apply within the first year of entering the U.S. His reason for leaving Mexico was to escape the dangers of living in the Narco-State of Michoacan.

Ismael es del estado de Michoacán, México y había pasado los últimos diez años con su familia en Estados Unidos. Trabajando como chef en Seattle, fue detenido por la policía por una infracción de manejo y luego detenido por no tener la documentación adecuada. Posteriormente, fue enviado a Tacoma, Washington durante cuatro meses para esperar su audiencia en la corte. Fue devuelto a México, pero un abogado le dijo que no puede solicitar asilo porque no lo solicitó durante el primer año de haber ingresado a Estados Unidos. Su razón para salir de México fue escapar de los peligros de vivir en el Narco Estado de Michoacán.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Eating at the Migrant Shelter*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

This photograph was taken at the dining hall of the Migrant shelter of Juarez Mexico. The border with El Paso, Texas. The refugees staying at the shelter are fed beans and rice twice a day and a pastry and coffee or milk for breakfast.

Lucinda is from San Pedro Sula, Honduras and is escaping extortion from MS-13, she said they had gained control of her neighborhood. The gang was responsible for the murder of several members of her family and multiple deaths in her community. Lucinda is a single mother and is seeking asylum in the U.S. for herself and her two young children. She crossed the Rio Grande River to get to the point of entry and surrendered herself with her children to CBP. After they were held in custody at the El Paso Texas immigration facility, where she says they had no access to a shower and the conditions were horrible. Five days after she was returned to Mexico to wait for her asylum hearing date.

Esta fotografía fue tomada en el comedor del albergue de migrantes de Juárez México. La frontera con El Paso, Texas. Los refugiados que se alojan en el refugio son alimentados con frijoles y arroz dos veces al día y un pastel y café o leche para el desayuno.

Lucinda es de San Pedro Sula, Honduras y está escapando de la extorsión de la MS-13, dijo que habían tomado el control de su vecindario. La pandilla fue responsable del asesinato de varios miembros de su familia y múltiples muertes en su comunidad. Lucinda es madre soltera y está buscando asilo en los Estados Unidos para ella y sus dos hijos pequeños. Cruzó el Río Grande para llegar al punto de entrada y se entregó con sus hijos a CBP. Después de que fueron detenidos en la instalación de inmigración de El Paso Texas, donde dice que no tenían acceso a una ducha y las condiciones eran horribles. Cinco días después fue devuelta a México para esperar la fecha de su audiencia de asilo.





Ada Lusía Trillo

*Olga*

Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México

2019

Olga was pregnant when she left El Salvador, giving birth in Tapachula, Mexico the border with Guatemala. They made it to the U.S. border where a coyote (smuggler) cross them by a tunnel. She felt her baby was too small to cross by the river or desert. They were arrested soon after they reached the U.S and were returned to Mexico.

She fled domestic violence fearing her alcoholic husband would end up killing her and her unborn baby in one of the beatings he gave her.

Olga estaba embarazada cuando salió de El Salvador, dando a luz en Tapachula, México, la frontera con Guatemala. Llegaron a la frontera de Estados Unidos donde un coyote (contrabandista) los cruzó por un túnel. Sintió que su bebé era demasiado pequeño para cruzar por el río o el desierto. Fueron arrestados poco después de llegar a los Estados Unidos y fueron devueltos a México.

Huyó de la violencia doméstica por temor a que su esposo alcohólico terminará matándola a ella y a su bebé en una de las palizas que le dio.







Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Loss of Hope*  
Casa Del Migrante (Migrant Shelter),  
Juárez, México  
2019

Sandra is twelve years old. She is from Guatemala and hopes to reunite with her father, who lives in Alabama. Along with her mother and two sisters (ages 8 and 4). When they reached the border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection took them for five days and then released them in Mexico to wait for their asylum date. Sandra says the imprisonment was terrifying. They are currently in a holding pattern waiting for their third asylum court date on September 17. She feels she is never going to see her father again and wants to return home.

Sandra tiene doce años. Ella es de Guatemala y espera reunirse con su padre, que vive en Alabama. Junto con su madre y dos hermanas (de 8 y 4 años). Cuando llegaron a la frontera, la Oficina de Aduanas y Protección Fronteriza de Estados Unidos los tomó durante cinco días y luego los dejó en México para esperar su fecha de asilo. Sandra dice que el encarcelamiento fue aterrador. Actualmente se encuentran en un patrón de espera esperando su tercera fecha de corte de asilo el 17 de septiembre. Ella siente que nunca volverá a ver a su padre y quiere regresar a casa.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Pedro*  
Juárez, Chihuahua  
2019

After witnessing a quadruple murder and reporting it to Honduran authorities, three gang members were arrested, and Pedro (56) became a target. In retaliation, the gang ambushed and opened fire on Pedro's son. He survived, but a friend who happened to be with him was shot and permanently disabled by his injuries. Gang members then informed Pedro and his son that if they stayed in Honduras, they would be killed. They escaped to the US-Mexico border and began the asylum process with the help of Grupo Beta, the humanitarian arm of Mexico's main immigration agency. They'd been waiting to formally enter the United States and ask for asylum for months.

Después de presenciar un asesinato cuádruple y denunciarlo a las autoridades hondureñas, tres pandilleros fueron arrestados y Pedro (56) se convirtió en un objetivo. En represalia, la banda tendió una emboscada y abrió fuego contra el hijo de Pedro. Sobrevivió, pero un amigo que estaba con él recibió un disparo y quedó permanentemente discapacitado por sus heridas. Luego, los pandilleros informaron a Pedro y a su hijo que si se quedaban en Honduras los matarían. Se escaparon a la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México y comenzaron el proceso de asilo con la ayuda del Grupo Beta, el brazo humanitario de la principal agencia de inmigración de México. Llevaban meses esperando para entrar formalmente a Estados Unidos y pedir asilo.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Monica*  
Juárez, México  
2019

Monica (18) travelled to the US-Mexico border from Guatemala with her one-year-old daughter, Onady, in hopes of reuniting with her husband, who was living legally in the United States. Back in Guatemala, Monica's mother-in-law had been abusing the baby, so Monica's husband paid for a coyote to get Monica and Onady into the U.S. After crossing near El Paso, Monica turned herself in to the U.S. Border Patrol and spent several days in CBP detention. There, she described experiencing unsanitary conditions and abuse at the hands of U.S. officials. Shortly afterward, Monica and her daughter were returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols and ended up at the Casa del Migrante in Juárez. When I met her, Monica told me that she had lost all hope and given up the dream of reuniting with her husband. She had been waiting several days to return to Guatemala on a bus chartered by the International Organization for Migration.

Mónica (18) viajó a la frontera México-Estados Unidos desde Guatemala con su hija de un año, Onady, con la esperanza de reunirse con su esposo, quien vivía legalmente en los Estados Unidos. De regreso en Guatemala, la suegra de Mónica había estado abusando del bebé, por lo que el esposo de Mónica pagó un coyote para llevar a Mónica y Onady a los EE. UU. Después de cruzar cerca de El Paso, Mónica se entregó a la Patrulla Fronteriza de Estados Unidos y pasó varios días en detención CBP. Allí, describió haber experimentado condiciones insalubres y abusos a manos de funcionarios estadounidenses. Poco después, Mónica y su hija fueron devueltas a México bajo los Protocolos de Protección al Migrante y terminaron en la Casa del Migrante en Juárez. Cuando la conocí, Monica me dijo que había perdido toda esperanza y había abandonado el sueño de reunirse con su marido. Había estado esperando varios días para regresar a Guatemala en un autobús fletado por la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Mayda and Her Children*  
US/ Mexico Border Wall

Candi Mayda and her two children stand by the Border wall. They're awaiting their asylum date and hoping to be reunited with Candi's oldest daughter, Emi, who was deported back to Mexico while the rest of her family was kept in a US detention center.

Candi Mayda y sus dos hijos están junto al muro fronterizo. Están esperando su fecha de asilo y esperan reunirse con la hija mayor de Candi, Emi, quien fue deportada de regreso a México mientras el resto de su familia permaneció en un centro de detención de Estados Unidos.







Ada Lusía Trillo  
*Delmi García and Her Family*



Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Swimming to Freedom*  
US/ Mexico Border Rio Grande River



Many desperate migrants, like this young boy, attempt to cross the US-Mexico Border by swimming through the dangerous Rio Grande River.

Muchos migrantes desesperados, como este joven, intentan cruzar la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México nadando a través del peligroso Río Grande.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Bridge of the Americas*  
US/ Mexico Border



The Bridge of the Americas is a group of bridges that cross the Rio Grande and the Texas State Highway. This border passage connects the cities of Juarez, MX and El Paso, Texas. Once migrants finally make it to the Bridge of the Americas, the promise of asylum is not guaranteed. Due to several adjustments of the U.S. immigration policy, the daily number of migrants permitted to enter the country is "limited." The bridge that connects Ciudad Juárez, to El Paso, Texas bears the direct effects of "metering" and other oppressive U.S. immigration policy.

El Puente de las Américas es un grupo de puentes que cruzan el Río Grande y la Carretera Estatal de Texas. Este paso fronterizo conecta las ciudades de Juárez, MX y El Paso, Texas. Una vez que los migrantes finalmente llegan al Puente de las Américas, la promesa de asilo no está garantizada. Debido a varios ajustes de la política de inmigración de los Estados Unidos, el número diario de migrantes autorizados a ingresar al país es "limitado". El puente que conecta Ciudad Juárez con El Paso, Texas, tiene los efectos directos de la "medición" y otras políticas opresivas de inmigración de Estados Unidos.





Ada Lusia Trillo  
*Border Wall*  
US/ Mexico Border Wall

“Nether Delinquents nor Illegals We Are International Workers”

“Ni Delincuentes Ni Ilegales Somos Trabajadores Internacionales.

## About the Artist:



Ada Trillo is a Philadelphia-based photographer, native to the Juarez-El Paso binational metroplex. In her work, she focuses on borders of inclusion and exclusion as they are experienced through people in forced prostitution; climate and violence-related international migration; and US exclusions, resulting from long-standing borders of race and class. Through the elements of documentary and fine art photography, Trillo's goal is to bring attention to the impact that these borders have on exploited and marginalized people and amplify their voices. She utilizes photography as a platform to document our times by capturing both our most joyous and painful moments; This art has the power to lay bare our common humanity and dignity.

Recently featured in The Guardian, she is the recipient of a Leeway Foundation Art and Change Grant, The Center For Emerging Visual Artists Fellowship, and Fleisher Art Memorial Visual Artist-in-Residence. She has also been awarded First Place in Editorial Photos with the Tokyo International Foto Awards, The me&Eve Grant with the Center of Photographic Arts in Santa Fe, and First Prize of Focus Photo LA.

Trillo has exhibited internationally in Luxembourg, England, and Italy, and her work is included in the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She holds degrees from the Istituto Marangoni in Milan and Drexel University in Philadelphia.

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