

National Museum of Women in the Arts
Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara
Guide by Cell Audio Guide Transcripts



202-747-3417

Welcome to the National Museum of Women in the Arts' cell phone audio guide for Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara, on view through May 14, 2017.

The Women's Museum is grateful to Jami Porter Lara for contributing to this audio guide.

To hear from the artist and the curator of Border Crossing, look for the blue cell phone icon on the labels in the exhibition and press the item number indicated followed by the pound (#) key. Interrupt any audio recording simply by

pressing another item number and the pound (#) key.
Press the star (*) key for instructions at any time.

**Virginia Treanor, associate curator, National Museum
of Women in the Arts, welcome (1:26)**

204#

Welcome to the exhibition Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara, organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Porter Lara's works are expertly crafted vessels hand-built out of clay from the New Mexican landscape. The striking forms of these vessels, which are all inspired by the quotidian plastic bottle, are equaled in their originality only by Porter Lara's ambitious concept that serves as a framework for understanding these pieces.

While visiting an area along the U.S.–Mexico border, Porter Lara found discarded plastic bottles used by migrants to carry water through the harsh environment.

Drawing parallels between these objects and the remains of ancient pottery also found in this region, Porter Lara came to view the bottles as contemporary artifacts. She calls attention to the similarity in function between these bottles and ancient vessels that were also used to contain water.

In her inspiration, materials, and technique, Porter Lara's body of work is inextricably linked to the Southwest—its past, its present, and its future.

Through her work, Porter Lara asks us to consider and question borders of all kinds, not only between countries, but between ourselves and others; art and trash; nature and artifice.

On behalf of the National Museum of Women in the Arts,

I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Clara M. Lovett Emerging Artists Fund and the Judith A. Finkelstein Exhibition Fund for making this project possible.

**Jami Porter Lara discusses her two-liter bottle shapes
(1:49)**

205#

By now you probably know that the inspiration for the work in Border Crossing came from time that I actually spent at the U.S.–Mexico border in southern Arizona, walking around and finding traces of things that people had left behind as they had passed through. The main thing I found were plastic two-liter bottles and right in that vicinity it was also possible to find potsherds, pieces of ancient artifacts that had been left by people who had passed through up to 2,000 years before. I started to think about the essential sameness of those two objects, that the potsherd and the plastic bottle were functionally the same. They were vessels that carried a precious substance that

was essential to human survival and were left behind when they no longer functioned. And that was the beginning of my thinking about the plastic bottle as a contemporary artifact and also the beginning of my desire to create an object that would condense that whole history of human vessel-making and history of human need into a single object.

You know, when people see the forms and recognize the plastic bottle, I always want to remind them that this isn't a recycling-awareness campaign. It's not a screed against trash and how terrible it is. It's actually something quite opposite, which is an attempt to pull the plastic bottle a little closer to nature and maybe a little bit closer to what we perceive as beautiful, so that we might see that it is actually connected to the natural world and also to our own human creativity.

Jami Porter Lara, LDS-MHB-KABR-0316CE-01, 2016

(:54)

206#

This sculpture is one of several in this exhibition that indicate my interest in what happens when you modify a vessel in such a way that it is no longer practically functional. So it goes from being a container of physical substances to a container for ideas, or beliefs, or history. We can really see that when we look at ancient artifacts that are based on functional vessels but can't practically function because of the positioning of handles [or] spouts and how they continue to be containers, except now what they contain are imagined histories and invented stories. So it's in that spirit that I created this piece, which has the base of a two-liter bottle and a large looping handle with two opposite-facing necks.

Jami Porter Lara, LDS-MHB-DBBR-0316CE-01, 2016

(:43)

207#

This sculpture, which has twin bases and twin necks connected by a large arching body, was inspired by something that I saw when I was looking at images of ancient ceramic artifacts from the Americas.

I'm really interested in how vessels that are modified in such a way that they can't really function as vessels become ritual objects and become these mysteries, or these containers, that we want to fill with meaning.

It's a reminder for me that vessels are containers—not just of substances but of ideas or beliefs—and reflects my belief that the things that we make are microcosms of our own values.

Jami Porter Lara rattles Go On Now, 2016 (:10)

208#

(Rattling sound of Jami Porter Lara shaking a vessel from Go On Now.)

Jami Porter Lara, MHB-6SBR-0916CE-01, 2016 (1:01)

209#

This piece with the six necks is part of a series in which I explore ideas about hybridity or mutancy.

I think that the plastic bottle provides an interesting opportunity to consider how the boundaries or borders that we perceive between what is human and natural and technological don't actually exist at all.

So, humans created plastic, plastic's in the environment, now it's in our bodies, in the form of estrogens and other compounds, and those chemicals are actually changing us a species, which will change our behavior and ultimately affect the things that we make. I think that that unbroken circle is both interesting and troubling, but ultimately a reality that we will have to acknowledge if we are going to meaningfully confront the problems with human material culture today.

Jami Porter Lara, Making it Manifest, 2014 (1:19)

210#

Making it Manifest is a map. In the beginning it didn't have a name. It was just a four-by-eight sheet of paper that I tacked up on my studio wall because I needed to find a way to condense all of the complex ideas behind the work that you see in Border Crossing into a 200-word project

statement, something that's asked of me as an artist fairly often and something that's very hard for me to do.

So I wrote my chief concern across the top and then drew these two cartoons versions of myself, on the left, swirling in this vortex of undifferentiated ideas, and on the right, smiling and holding a finished project statement, which is where I wanted to end up.

I would not say that the process was quite that straightforward, but out of making this map I was able to see the connections and the logic behind what I was doing and found that this was a tool that I could actually use to narrate the progression of thinking through the project.

It's something that I would highly recommend to people who consider themselves visual thinkers and it's something that I will use over and over again in my practice.

Jami Porter Lara, LDS-MHB-LPBR-0416CE-01, 2016

(1:25)

211#

LDS-MHB-LPBR-0416CE-01 is a really inorganic-sounding name for a ceramic vessel that looks a lot like a piece of fruit. This is one of many pieces that I've created in which I've intentionally emphasized the really organic qualities, making them gourd-like or plant-like, seed-like or fruit-like, because I'm interested in pulling our perception of the plastic bottle closer to the realm of nature. I don't believe that there are fixed boundaries between what is human and natural and technological. By merging the iconography of the plastic bottle with a form that looks like something that we might find in nature, I'm hoping to pull our perception closer to the possibility of seeing that we as humans and everything that we make are actually part of the natural world.

Another really practical motivation for this particular form is actually my frustration that one of the most beautiful parts of the plastic bottle, which is that pentagon-shaped bottom, or that five-pointed bottom, is always on the bottom. This time I just wanted it to be on the top.

**Jami Porter Lara, LDS-MHB-WVBR-0416CE-08, 2016
(:51)**

212#

The inspiration for this piece is an icon of Pueblo pottery called the wedding vase. A typical wedding vase has a curved base that arches up into two parallel wide openings that are connected at the top by a high arching handle.

In my case I was interested in working with those two opposite-facing openings and it took me awhile to arrive at something that I found interesting. I think ultimately the

result is something that tends toward the figurative or the totemic. Some people say that it evokes for them a uterus.

There's one funny story about this piece, which is that my friend Kylie bought an early version of it; placed it on a high shelf and for several days her three small dogs would not stop barking at it.