



NATIONAL MUSEUM
of WOMEN *in the ARTS*

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Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara
National Museum of Women in the Arts | Feb. 17–May 14, 2017

First East Coast exhibition featuring Jami Porter Lara's plastic-bottle inspired work

WASHINGTON—The National Museum of Women in the Arts ([NMWA](http://nmwa.org)) presents the exhibition ***Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara***, on view from Feb. 17 through May 14, 2017. This will be the first time that work by Albuquerque-based Jami Porter Lara (b. 1969) will be shown on the East Coast of the United States. Porter Lara uses a millennia-old process to make pottery resembling a ubiquitous icon of modern life—the plastic bottle. *Border Crossing* features 25 sculptures, of which three have never been exhibited.

Porter Lara's art blurs the line between what we see as natural and manufactured, illuminating the bottle as a precious object—a vessel that carries life-sustaining water. Through this lens, she exposes the porous nature of many types of “borders,” including the permeable boundary between art and rubbish. Her sculptures are visually dramatic, in part because they play against common ideas about industrialization and the creative history of the Southwest.

“We are thrilled to be the first East Coast venue to present the work of Jami Porter Lara,” said NMWA Director Susan Fisher Sterling. “Part of our institution’s mission is to discover intriguing new and emerging artists. We’re excited to introduce Jami’s visually arresting and emotionally potent re-thinking of Southwest pottery to a larger audience.”

While exploring a remote stretch of the United States–Mexico border, Porter Lara discovered many discarded two-liter plastic bottles used by migrants to carry water through the harsh environment. Nearby, she noted the remains of similarly discarded items: pot shards from ancient cultures that had been cast into a midden, or trash heap. This juxtaposition inspired Porter Lara to consider the contemporary distinction between artifact and trash and how the plastic bottle might be seen as a “contemporary artifact.”

“My hope is to connect the plastic bottle to a long lineage of vessels that have been used to carry water through deserts, and in so doing, to reveal our basic connection to the long lineage of humans who have—driven by



necessity or desire—traveled these lands before or despite national boundaries,” said artist Jami Porter Lara. “I want to expose the porous nature of ‘borders’ as well as the ‘nature’ of art and garbage, and to record my interest in the permeability of all things human, natural and technological.”

Porter Lara spent time in the town of Mata Ortiz in Mexico, known for its revival of indigenous ceramic construction and design. Using the techniques she learned there, Porter Lara formed her first clay sculpture by shaping the bottom into the distinctive five-knobbed base common to plastic bottles and finishing the top with a narrow, threaded mouth.

Her sculptures assume a range of forms. Some of her vessels look like the disposable plastic bottles they reference. Others resemble classical urns, Pueblo pottery or modernist sculpture. Some evoke organic associations—gourds, organs or birds. All of her sculptural forms are hybrids, rejecting the idea of purity and standardization.

Porter Lara’s sculptures refer to industrial objects that are designed to be disposable but persist in the environment. Her clay vessels are handmade through a labor-intensive process, but they evoke the inscrutable sheen of the machine-made. Porter Lara’s materials consist of little more than mud and fire. She harvests clay from a site near her home, and then soaks, strains and dries it. Each vessel is built by hand from coils of clay, polished to a high sheen with a stone and pit-fired in her front yard. She does not use glazes. For Porter Lara, her processes—digging, shaping, burnishing and firing clay—are critical to her thoughts about her work.



Environmental concerns underpin Porter Lara’s work in unexpected ways: she rejects the current narrative of contemporary environmentalism that posits humanity as separate from, and inherently harmful to, nature. Her work asks us to reframe our relationship with the environment as an experience that can be balanced, beneficial and sustainable.

Porter Lara says, “I think it’s essential for us to be able to understand ourselves as creative and connected beings in order to have the courage to take on the huge task we have ahead of ourselves in dealing with the environmental crises we are facing.”

In celebration of Jami Porter Lara’s exhibition at the museum, NMWA will purchase four of her works with the Members’ Acquisition Fund.



Border Crossing is organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA). The exhibition is made possible by the Clara M. Lovett Emerging Artists Fund with additional support provided by the Judith A. Finkelstein Exhibition Fund.

Jami Porter Lara

Born in 1969 in Spokane, Washington, Porter Lara has lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico, since 1980. Rejecting the notion that humanity is the opponent of nature, Porter Lara is a conceptual artist whose approach to making remains deeply tied to her concern with cultural inheritances and with being a citizen of the natural world. Her work is widely collected and has been featured in *American Art Collector* magazine, *Hyperallergic* and on PBS stations nationwide. Recent exhibitions include the Albuquerque Museum of Art and Art History; the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Wendover, Utah; and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. She is represented by Central Features Contemporary Art in Albuquerque and Stephanie Breitbard Fine Arts in San Francisco.

Related Programs

Free Community Day

Friday, February 17, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

In celebration of the opening day of our new spring exhibitions, visit us during a FREE, extended-hours Community Day. Take this opportunity to explore our two new exhibitions, [Border Crossing: Jami Porter Lara](#) and [New Ground: The Southwest of Maria Martinez and Laura Gilpin](#), along with our [newly installed collection](#). Free. No reservations required.

[Artists in Conversation: Jami Porter Lara](#)

Thursday, April 6, 6:30–9 p.m.

Join artist Jami Porter Lara and guests in conversation over light refreshments. Porter Lara discusses her background, artistic process and philosophy, and works featured in *Border Crossing* during this informal and intimate in-gallery experience.

Participants have ample time to explore the galleries, learn about Porter Lara's work and engage in small-group conversations. \$25 general; \$15 members, seniors, students.

Reserve online at <https://nmwa.org/events/artists-conversation-jami-porter-lara>.



National Museum of Women in the Arts

The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) is the world's only major museum solely dedicated to celebrating the creative contributions of women. The museum champions women through the arts by collecting, exhibiting, researching and creating programs that advocate for equity and shine a light on excellence. NMWA highlights remarkable women artists of the past while also promoting the best women artists working today. The museum's collection includes over 5,000 works by more than 1,000 women artists from the 16th century to the present, including Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, Alma Thomas, Lee Krasner, Louise Bourgeois, Chakaia Booker and Nan Goldin.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., in a landmark building near the White House. It is open Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday, noon–5 p.m. For information, call 202-783-5000 or visit nmwa.org. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for visitors 65 and over and students, and free for NMWA members and youths 18 and under. Free Community Days take place on the first Sunday of each month. For more information about NMWA, visit nmwa.org, [Broad Strokes Blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

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Image credit lines:

Jami Porter Lara, *LDS-MHB-3SBR-0916CE-01*, 2016; Pit-fired clay, 16 x 8 in. diameter; Courtesy Central Features Contemporary Art; Photo by Addison Doty

Jami Porter Lara, *LDS-MHB-LPBR-0416CE-01*, 2016; Pit-fired clay, 9 x 7 in. diameter; On loan from Emilie Porter-Rand and Marc Basiliere; Photo by Geistlight Photography

Jami Porter Lara, *LDS-MHB-WVBR-0416CE-08*, 2016; Pit-fired clay, 11 x 10 x 3 1/2 in.; On loan from Debra Baxter, Photo by Geistlight Photography

Jami Porter Lara photo © Jessamyn Lovell