
MIRROR VI

DAVID COTTERRELL

A TWO-CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION

A research project focusing on the subject of the Bracero migrant workers and its contemporary relevance within a contested landscape.

This Page and Facing:
Filming on location in California/Baja California



Mirror VI : Border, is a two-channel video installation designed for presentation in museum or gallery contexts.

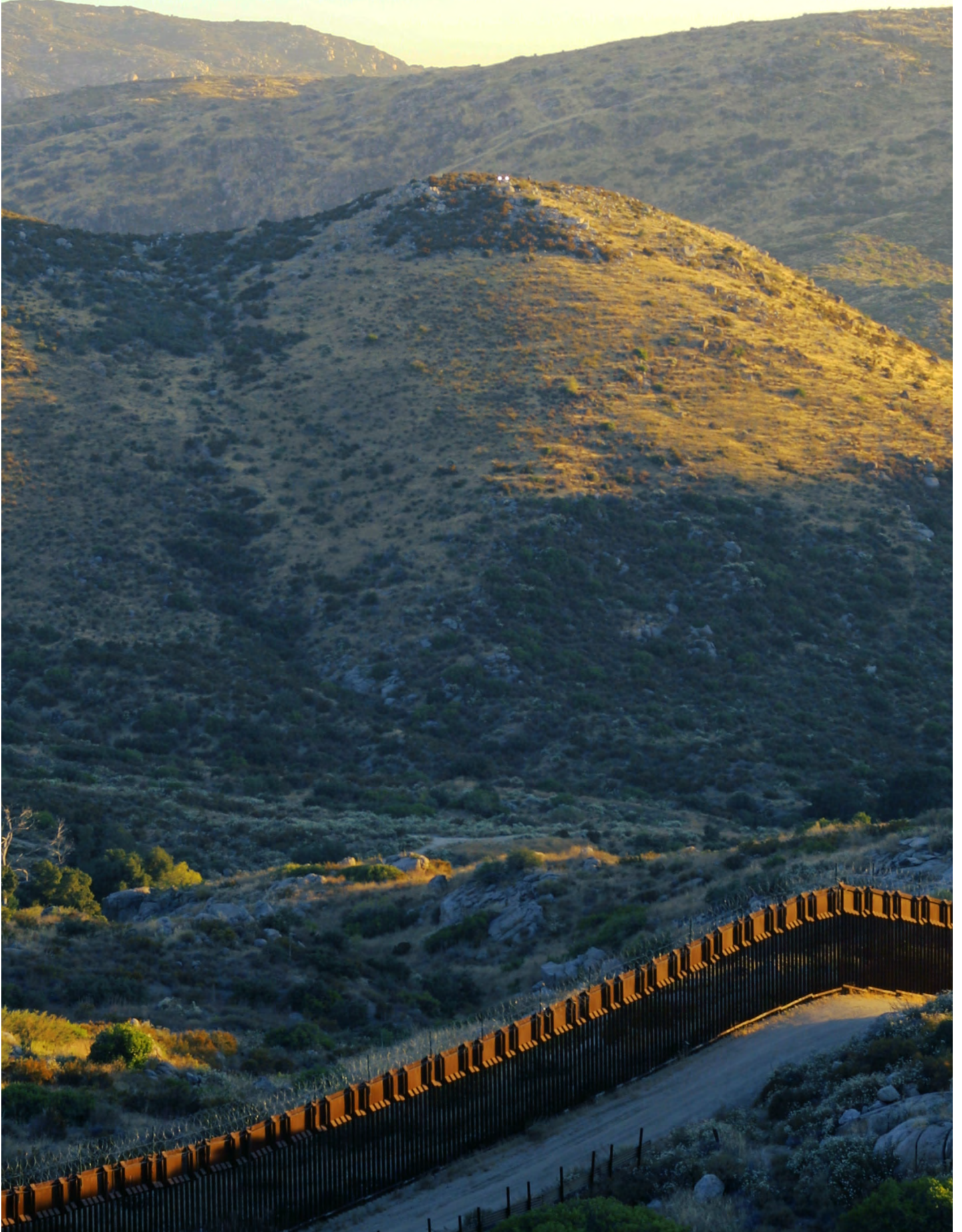
The research focuses on the issue of migrant labour, its ongoing economic imperative, and its enduring status as a target for social and political prejudice. The project is situated at the busiest border within the USA, where there are an estimated sixty million documented crossings (each way) per year. The Tijuana-Tecate area has been the focus for much of the politics of xenophobia directed at the perceived threat of mass migration into the USA, but it also houses a vast array of US manufacturing plants that rely on the free movement of money, goods, and workforce across this border.

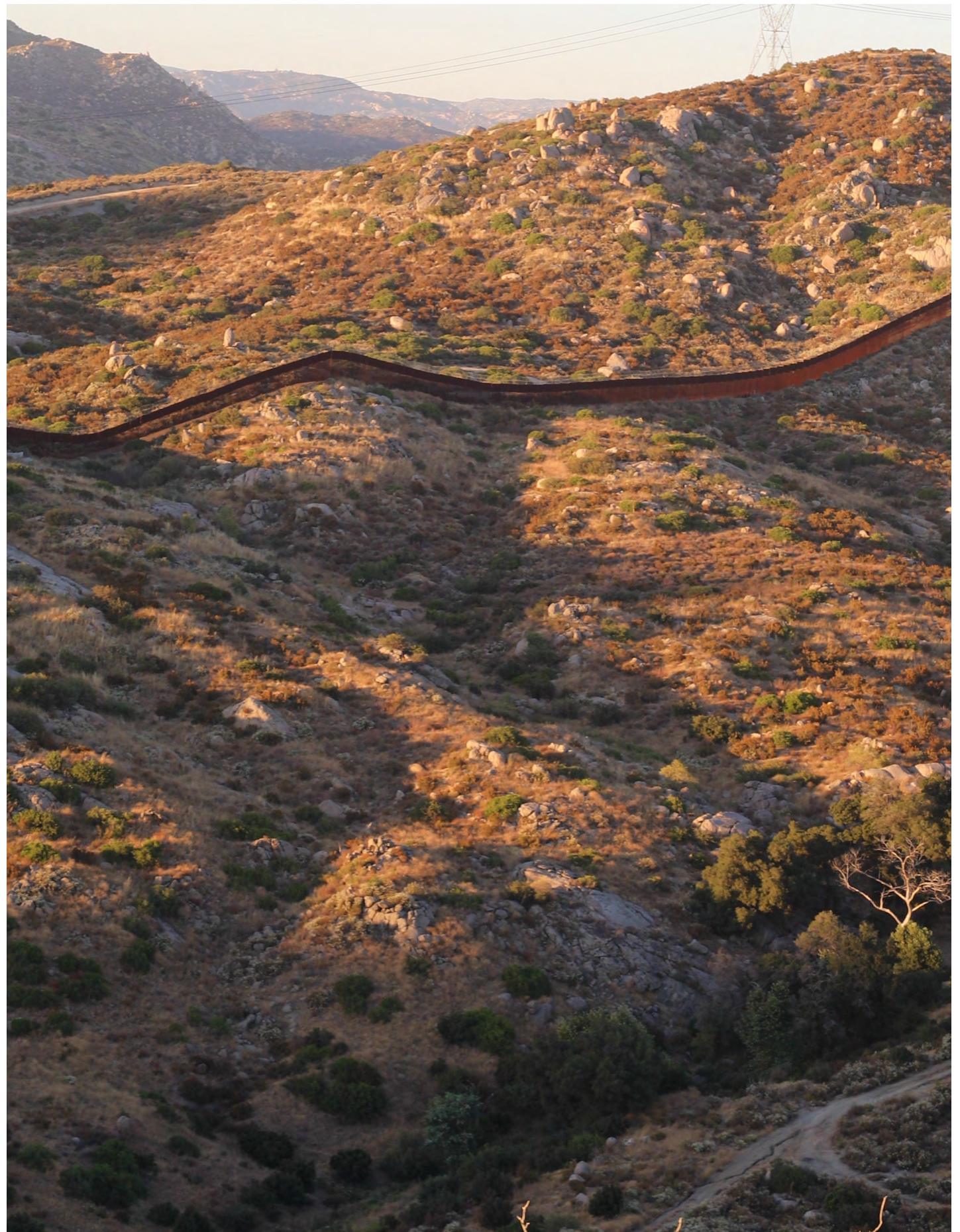
The project references a historical narrative, which is a poignant allegory for some of the complex relationships that persist. In 1942, the US Congress established the 'Bracero' program, permitting millions of Mexican workers temporary visas to visit and work as farm labourers in the USA. Many welcomed the opportunity, but they found that they were often subject to harsh conditions, prejudice, and suspicion. Despite valuing the labour resource, the US government was anxious about any damaging testimonies causing damage to its ongoing recruitment drives and was also sensitive to the fear of US communities of these temporary visas being used to encourage longer-term settlement of the migrants. As a result, the US postal service was instructed not to deliver many of the Bracero men's letters back to their families in Mexico. In 2020, Stanford University published twenty-four of these undelivered hand-written letters and raised awareness of this historic censorship.

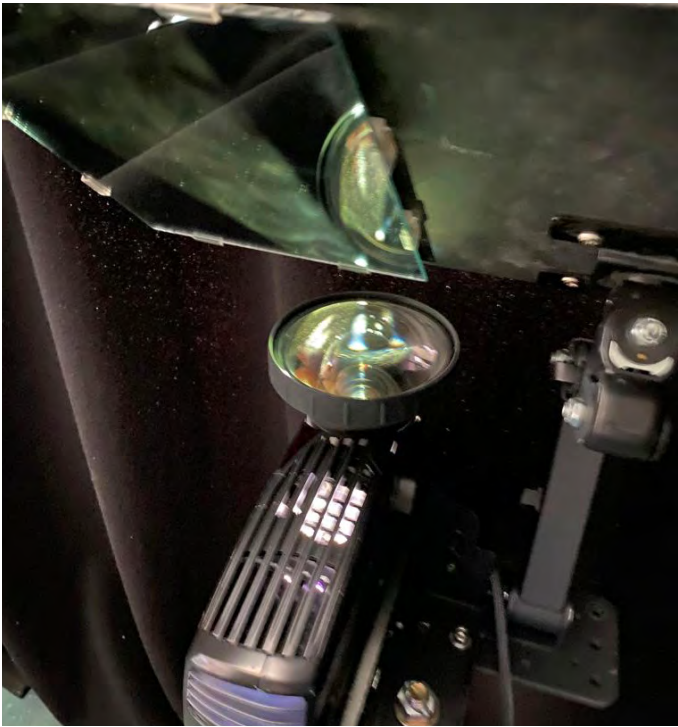


The artist, David Cotterrell, sought to symbolically broadcast these letters across the fortified Southern US border. The original texts were transcribed, and two modified systems were designed to enable the automated broadcast of morse-code messages using car and truck headlights.

Over a period of two years of field research, Cotterrell identified locations that allowed line-of-sight connections between both sides of the border. Through liaison with the Mexican Military, Federal Bureau of Land Management, and US Border Patrol, reluctant permissions were gained to broadcast messages and film the results within the contentious border landscape.







Mirror VI : Border was envisaged as an immersive projection. It is made visible to the audience through co-located views of each side of a remote conversation. The intermittent light signals visible within the centre of each view are translated into text as each character is revealed.

The installation is realised as silent dramatic dialogues and is presented as a split-screen, single-channel 8k video stream or two synchronised 4k projections. At Casa Wabi, it would be accompanied by a photographic series and a live Morse code broadcast system, which enables the messages to be further relayed from the roof of the gallery to casual audiences in the city.

This Page:
Installation views (details) from 2-channel HD video projection as installed at Empathy & Risk C.I.C. (London, UK, 2023).



EQUIPMENT

MacMini
Custom Mirror Systems
4K Projectors and Screens

x 1
x 2
x 2

SUPPLIER

David Cotterrell / Venue