

# Statement

The decisions of early artists and photographers who explored and documented the American Southwest still resonate with us today. As our ancestors marked their journey, recorded their conquests, and sought to prove the American dream as their destined right they took great advantage of the subjective nature of their mediums, misrepresenting or wholly ignoring many people. From these early artworks, photographs, and later films, a framework guiding how to view and understand the region took shape. Our perceptions have shifted little from that early-engineered myth of the west.

Borderland Collective was created in response to this myopic history. Through participation and collective creation we work to realize a more complex narrative of the American Southwest, challenging the power that Edward S. Curtis, John Wayne, and their successors still hold over our conception of this region. This is achieved by working with young people in public schools across the Southwest, facilitating opportunities for them to explore and document their own personal, familial, and cultural lives through photography. *The Will to Believe in Something More* is a selection from our ongoing image archive and represents our ambition to bring forward critical dialogue by providing an alternative history and more inclusive portrayal of our homeland.

The photographs in this exhibition were all made by youth ranging in age from 8-20 years old living in Southwest Texas and Central New Mexico. Among them include young women navigating between Native American tradition and urban culture in Albuquerque, East Asian and African refugees new to America and searching for a sense of place in San Antonio, and young men who ranch in Mexico on the weekends but call Presidio, Texas home.

Singularly each image compels us to be accountable to the photographer's view of the world, as they ask us to look closely and reflect on what they see as significant. Collectively the photographs function as a catalyst for an inclusive discourse on the formation of identity and the nature of representation (historic and current) in both the Southwest and broader contemporary America.

By engaging with these pictures we inherently measure the space between our own lives and the people and places of these photographs. In so doing we are given an opportunity to experience new moments, transcend expectations, find commonalities, be empowered by young people, and reflect upon the possibility of something more. The exhibition serves as an index of place and time, but also of questions about who we are, where we live, and how we represent ourselves, affirming art's ability to function not only as an idolized end-product but also as a transformative space for critical inquiry, self-realization, and cultural exchange.

Jason Reed, Curator  
Director of Borderland Collective

# Exhibition Information

## San Antonio, TX

Photographs taken in 2009-2011 by youth ranging from elementary to high school age all living at the Wurzbach Manor apartment complex in North San Antonio. Most of these youth are refugees from countries such as Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, and Burma. The project was conducted in collaboration with teacher and community organizer Kerry Hauptert. Exhibition Participants: Chris, Shelly, Methode, Abdullah, Minani, Felcite, Paw Moo, Say Say Eh, Dorothea, Mi Noe Noe, Azizah, Habiba, Abakar, and Ali

## Albuquerque, NM

Photographs taken in 2008 by middle school youth in and around Albuquerque who were all attending the Native American Charter Academy, an urban, tuition-free public charter with students from more than 37 different tribes. The project was conducted in collaboration with teachers Marisa Salazar and Arlyn John. Exhibition Participants: Cheyenne, Corrine, Pamela, Stephanie, Kayne, Alyssa, Kyndra, Taylor, Nez, and Starla

## Big Lake, TX

Photographs taken in 2008 by high school youth living in and around Big Lake, a small oil and ranching town in West Texas. The project was conducted in collaboration with Ryan Sprott, Borderland Collective co-founder and co-director, and a teacher in Big Lake at the time. Exhibition Participants: Samantha, Krista, Roxanna, Emilee, Yessenia, Jake, Melina, and Andrea

## Presidio, TX

Photographs taken in 2009 by middle school youth living on the US/Mexico border in Presidio, a remote town in Southwest Texas. The project was conducted in collaboration with teacher and community leader Theresa Chambers at Franco Middle School. Exhibition Participants: Ana, Vivi, Alexis, Ablyn, Hector, Ashley, Nazareth, Karen, James, Justin, Jesus, Alexis. Samantha, and Kevin

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Borderland Collective is a social art project that facilitates the participatory exploration and documentation of geographic and sociocultural borders. Fueled by collaborations between artists, teachers, youth, and families we use art as a means to trouble notions of who holds knowledge and what stories are told, providing an inclusive representation of the contemporary American experience. We are housed at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas where the work is archived digitally and in print. More information at [borderlandcollective.org](http://borderlandcollective.org)