

# ***TOWARD COMMON CAUSE: WENDY EWALD AND AMALIA MESA-BAINS***

A Guide for Closer Looking



## **Glossary**

**Archive** is a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people

**Cabinets of curiosities** (Wunderkammer) were small collections of extraordinary objects which, like today's museums, attempted to categorize and tell stories about the wonders and oddities of the natural world

**Chicana/o/x** is a person of Mexican origin or descent who lives in the United States

**Collaboration** is the act of working together, especially on a goal or shared project

**Culture** is the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group

**Generation** is a group of people born and living during the same time

**Identity** is who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world, and the characteristics that define you

**Immigration** is the movement of people living in one country into another and is a key part of human history

**Latinx** is a gender-neutral term for people of Latin American descent

**Migration** is the permanent change of residence by an individual or group

**Narrative** is a spoken, written, or visual account of an event or a series of connected events

**Portrait** is a representation of a particular individual or group of people, usually intended to capture their likeness or personality

**Represent** is to show or describe something, or to be a sign or symbol of something

**Transhistorical** is the quality of occurring throughout human history, not merely within the frame of reference of a particular form of society at a particular stage of historical development

**Vernacular** is the language or dialect spoken by the people in a particular country or region

**Vernacular photography** are images by amateur photographers of everyday life and subjects, commonly in the form of snapshots



# Toward Common Cause: Wendy Ewald and Amalia Mesa Bains

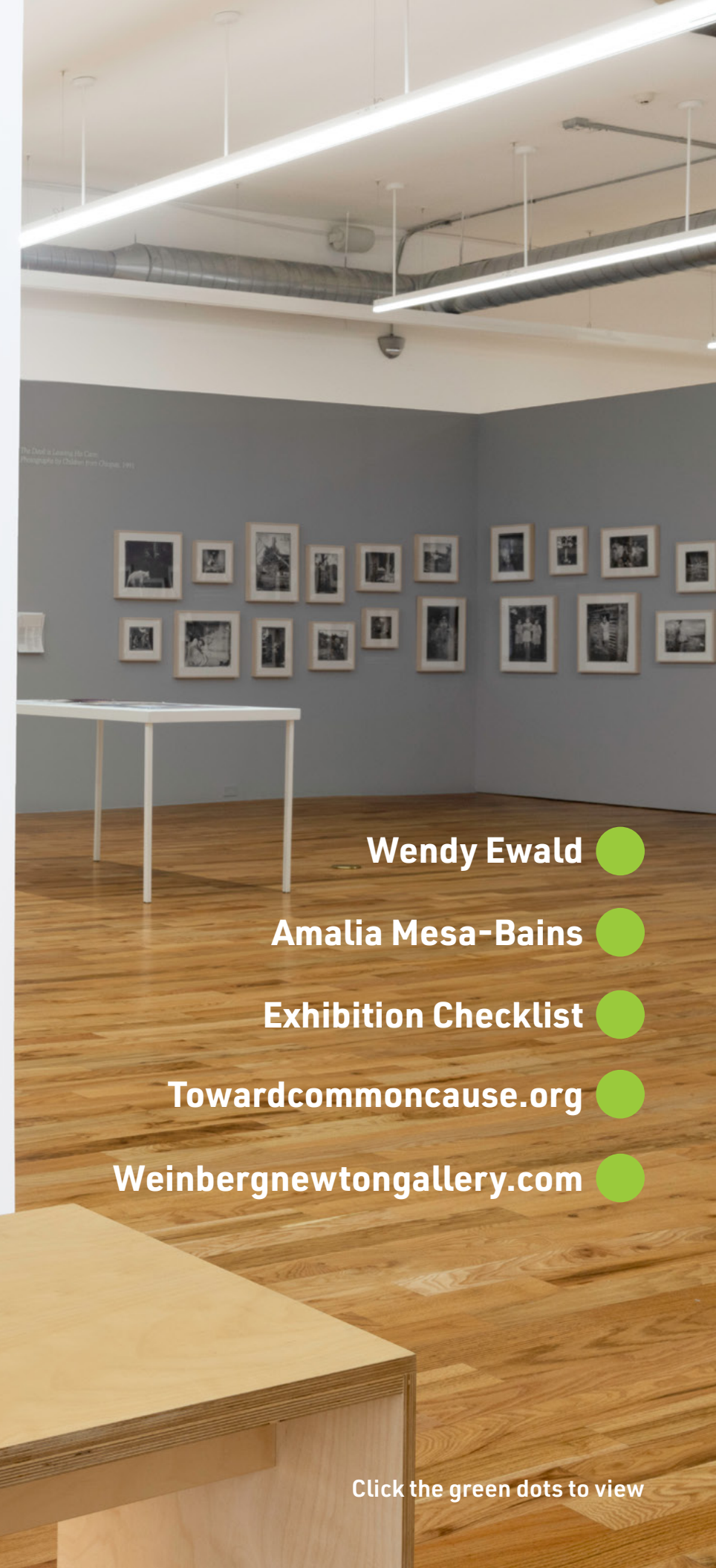
*Toward Common Cause: Art, Social Change, and the MacArthur Fellows Program at 40* explores the extent to which certain resources—air, land, water, and even culture—can be held in common. Raising questions about inclusion, exclusion, ownership, and rights of access, the exhibition considers art’s vital role in society as a call to vigilance, a way to bear witness, and a potential act of resistance. Presented on the 40th anniversary of the MacArthur Fellows Program, *Toward Common Cause* deploys the Fellows Program as “intellectual commons” and features new and recontextualized work by twenty-nine visual artists who have been named Fellows since the award program’s founding in 1981.

The installation here features newly commissioned works by Amalia Mesa-Bains and Wendy Ewald. Mesa-Bains’ *Dos Mundos* reflects on the historical constitution of the Mexican-American community. Her own family settled in South Chicago in the early twentieth century; her *Circle of Ancestors* installation (1996) is currently on view at the National Museum of Mexican Art. Ewald presents two collaborative photographic projects: *Daily Life and Dreams in the Pandemic: A Project with the Centro Romero Youth Program* (2020–2021) and *The Devil is Leaving His Cave: Photographs by Children from Chiapas* (1991). The first is a newly commissioned work developed in partnership with 15 young people at Centro Romero, an immigrant service organization on the city’s Northwest side. The exhibition features the students’ own photographs and stories, made and recorded during their year working with the artist, alongside portraits taken by Ewald and the students. *The Devil is Leaving His Cave* is likewise a collaborative photographic endeavor, made with Mayan and Ladino children in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1991. Together these projects provide a glimpse into the historical and contemporary realities of life within the Latinx communities of Chicago and beyond.

*Toward Common Cause: Art, Social Change, and the MacArthur Fellows Program at 40* is organized by the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago in collaboration with exhibition, programmatic, and research partners across Chicago. *Toward Common Cause* is supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and curated by Abigail Winograd, MacArthur Fellows Program Fortieth Anniversary Exhibition Curator, Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago. Additional support has been provided by the National Endowment of the Arts and the Diane Dammeyer Initiative, Columbia College Chicago.



Spanish translations are available here:  
Traducciones al español disponibles aquí:  
<https://towardcommoncause.org/en/for-translators/weinberg-newton-gallery/>



Wendy Ewald ●

Amalia Mesa-Bains ●

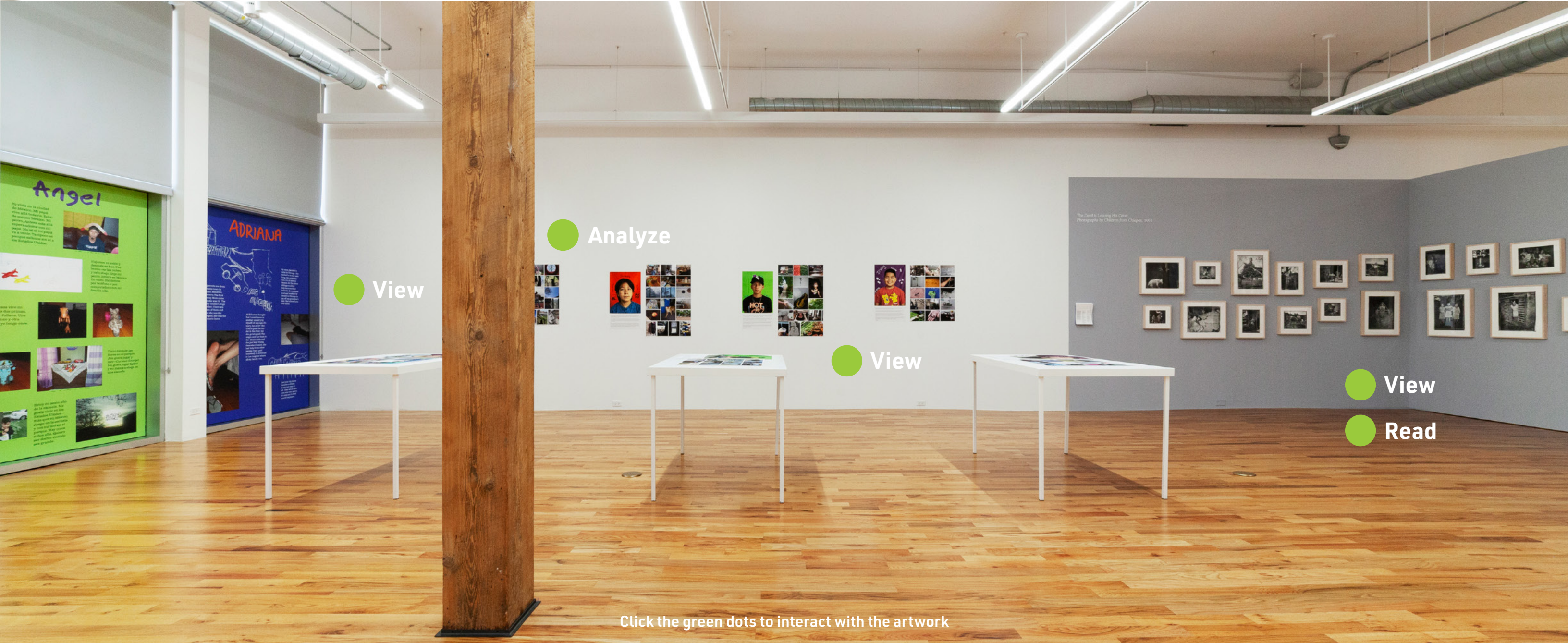
Exhibition Checklist ●

Towardcommoncause.org ●

Weinbergnewtongallery.com ●

Click the green dots to view





What role does photography play in your life?  
What can we learn from photographs?  
Which aspects of your identity are visible to others and which are less visible?  
What are the differences between how you see yourself and how others see you?

About Wendy Ewald



# AMALIA MESA-BAINS



Where does history come from? Who chooses which stories get told and which stories are erased?  
Why is storytelling important?  
How do culture and memories shape our identity?  
Why do art and culture matter? Who decides which objects are important?

About Amalia Mesa-Bains

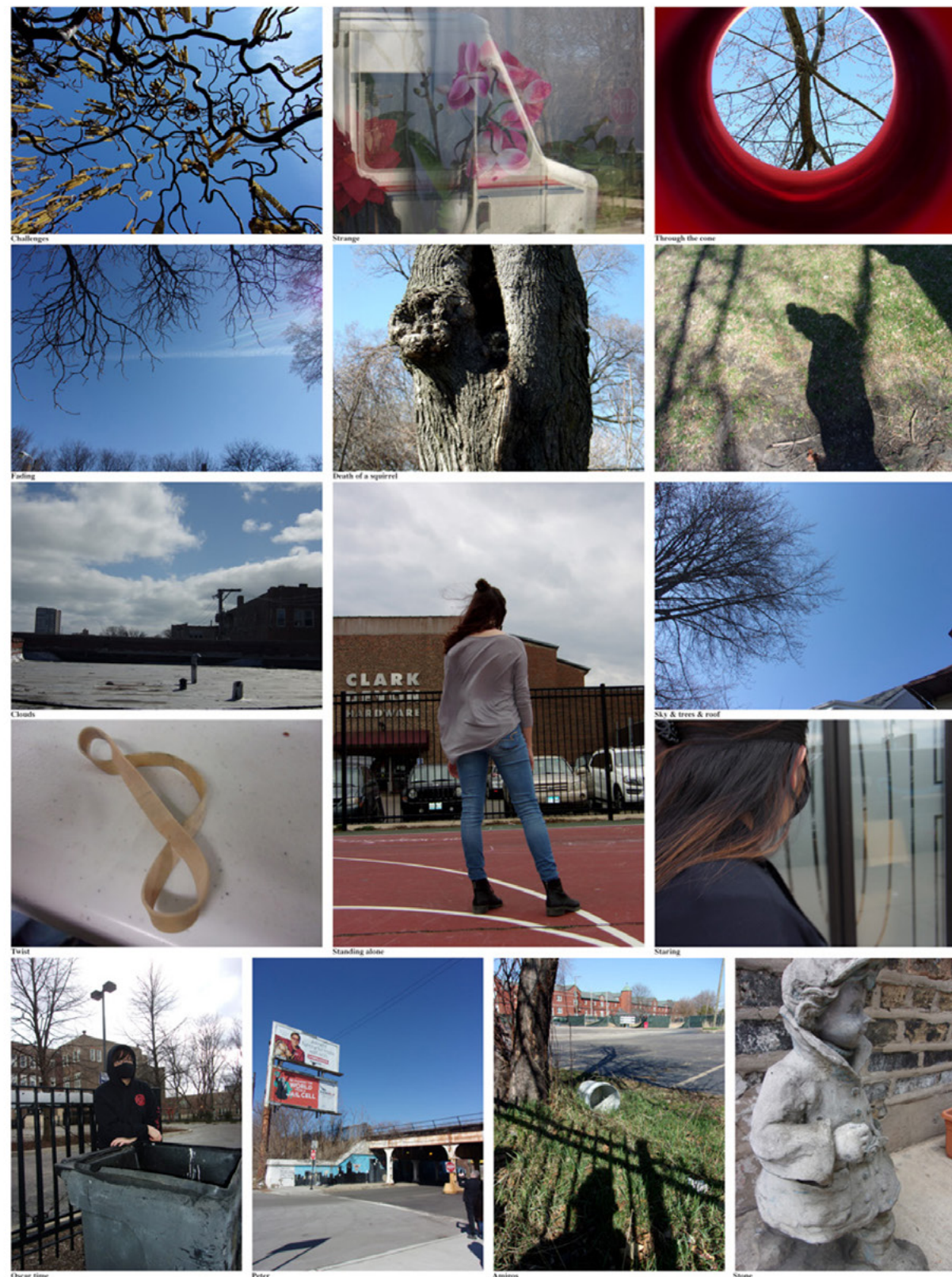




People wonder why I title the photo in the middle, *Standing Alone but Tall*. When you look at a photo that you took, you will have different views from other people. They might say, “Oh, that’s just a random woman standing in a basketball court and she’s just turned around, staring at the Clark Devon Hardware.” What I am trying to say, is that maybe that person went through a lot. And you didn’t know anything because that person didn’t tell you or show their emotions.

Every adult told me to stand straight and tall, but I always thought of standing tall and not messing around. But now, I actually understand they meant don’t give up, even if things are hard and you are tired of everything. Just DON’T give up. Things might go along, and you might actually live a peaceful life at the end. Everyone has their own stories, even me. And they might be surprising to people when they start getting to know you.

—Noelia



Noelia, 2020 - 2021, Archival pigment prints

# NOELIA AND WENDY EWALD

What do you learn from looking at the photographic portrait?

What do you learn from looking at the grid of photographs?

What do you learn from reading the text?

Whose point of view do you think each of the three parts—portrait, grid, and text—is from?

What is the mood of each?

Do the photographs and text communicate a narrative? If so, what is it?

Which form (visual or written) of storytelling do you think is most successful? Why?

What do these photographs remind you of? Why?

How can you connect this artwork to your own life?

How might your interpretation of this artwork be different from someone in another culture or generation?



# AMALIA MESA-BAINS



*Religion, 2021, Shadow box, 30 x 40 x 6 inches*

What materials did the artist use to create this artwork? Where do you think they came from?

What do you recognize? What is new to you?

How are the materials arranged? How do they relate to each other?

Describe how the artist uses color in different parts of the artwork.

What other details do you notice?

Is the passage of time represented here? If so, how?

Does the artwork communicate a narrative?

What can the artwork tell you about the artist? What do you see that makes you say that?

Does the piece bring to mind any of your own life events or memories?

How might your interpretation of this artwork be different from someone in another culture or generation?