



The Infiltrators

Hannah Waiters

“Every deportation can be stopped.”

-Adapted from the National Youth Alliance Activist

Alex Rivera and Cristina Ibarra are masters at directing docu-thrillers charged with reenactment. Their ninety-minute film, *The Infiltrators*, was shot in digital format and is accessible for a broad audience thanks to its presence on [online viewing platforms](#). The reenactment is based on the true story of Marco Saavedra, Viridiana Martinez, and other activists with protected statuses organizing with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance to destabilize ICE's detention and deportation systems, described in the film as “the largest law enforcement agency the world has ever known.” *The Infiltrators* follows Marco and Viri's experience in ICE's cruel deportation system known as Broward Detention Facility in Florida, where they deliberately became detained. On a mission to stop unjust immigrant deportations, the team of radical DREAMers infiltrated the detention center and invaded the filtration systems of these highly complicated structures. The language of “otherness” explored through interrogative investigations of the Broward Detention Center was exercised through visual metaphors of the landscape. Opening the film was a cinematic filter of spine-chilling infrared night vision imaging of the border between the U.S. and Mexico—a brilliant choice to set the tone for what was to come.

Considering the prohibition of filming within the Broward detention center, Rivera and Ibarra made the film's production based on recreating encounters between inmates and their allies. Fictional characters played an important role in elevating real footage of invading and escaping through ICE's internal structures' cracks as an outsider. Motivated by loopholes in deportation systems that endure in the 2020

administration, the artists and activists reclaim the system's kidnapping of undocumented citizens in this film—a phantom act in the U.S. “I am undocumented and unafraid,” said Marco upon entering the detention center. Early in the film both Marco and Viri willingly risked their lives and turned themselves into the detention center to free those captive. They consistently referred to the body of individuals in the center as a family, emphasizing their impassioned fighting for each unprotected immigrant's release.

Time is a plot device used in this film as both a resource and an enemy. When Marco, Viri's, and the National Youth Alliance's efforts were rewarded, the results yielded slow progress. Upon their arrests and arrivals at the deportation center, both Marco and Viri made relationships with the confined community. Throughout the film, one saw glimpses of deportation lists, and as the film progressed, one saw more names marked as “released.” The team used time as a resource to postpone deportations, which eventually led to immense emancipation. However, when the center detected these system infiltrations, both Marco and Viri were notified of their release. After refusing their own freedom, both Marco and Viri's most significant maneuver was teaching the community to help fight for one another's freedoms from the inside out.

CCA screened this film 23 days before the election. CCA's *Make. Act. Resist* event series showcased *The Infiltrators* amid this tumultuous election era to mark the significant socio-political shifts in the American landscape in 2020. Undertaking a screening and conversation of this ethical magnitude and complexity would not be possible without the CCA faculty's enthusiasm, support, and insight. Film historian Nilgun Bayaktar, architect and historian Irene Chang, and acclaimed filmmaker Jeanne Finley hosted a forum discussion that accompanied the screening. For instance, in the forum, Bayaktar presented research on the film's imagery that denoted space through binaries of urbanization and horizons, amplifying the insider/outsider structures laid out from the beginning of the film. Significantly, I was moved to write about this screening as it adds to the framework of documentary representation and puzzles how fictitious counterparts can be used in activism. The film uses historicism, anecdotes, reenactment, and unique biographies as methodologies to encourage hope in those facing similar dire circumstances. This film guided a lesson in how one fights for individual and collective freedom from a standpoint where such liberties are far out of reach.

This screening of *The Infiltrators* was organized in collaboration with the CCA Exhibitions Department and *Make. Act. Resist*, presented in partnerships with CCA

Fine Arts Division, CCA Humanities and Sciences Division, CCA Critical Ethnic Studies Program, and CCA Film Program with generous support from Creative Citizens in Action, the President's Diversity Steering Group, and the CCA Libraries

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Hannah Waiters is a visual researcher, curator and interdisciplinary artist on the staff of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco where her research expands scholarship on curatorial interpretation of selected works in European Paintings permanent collection. Hannah is currently pursuing a MFA and a MA in Visual and Critical Studies.