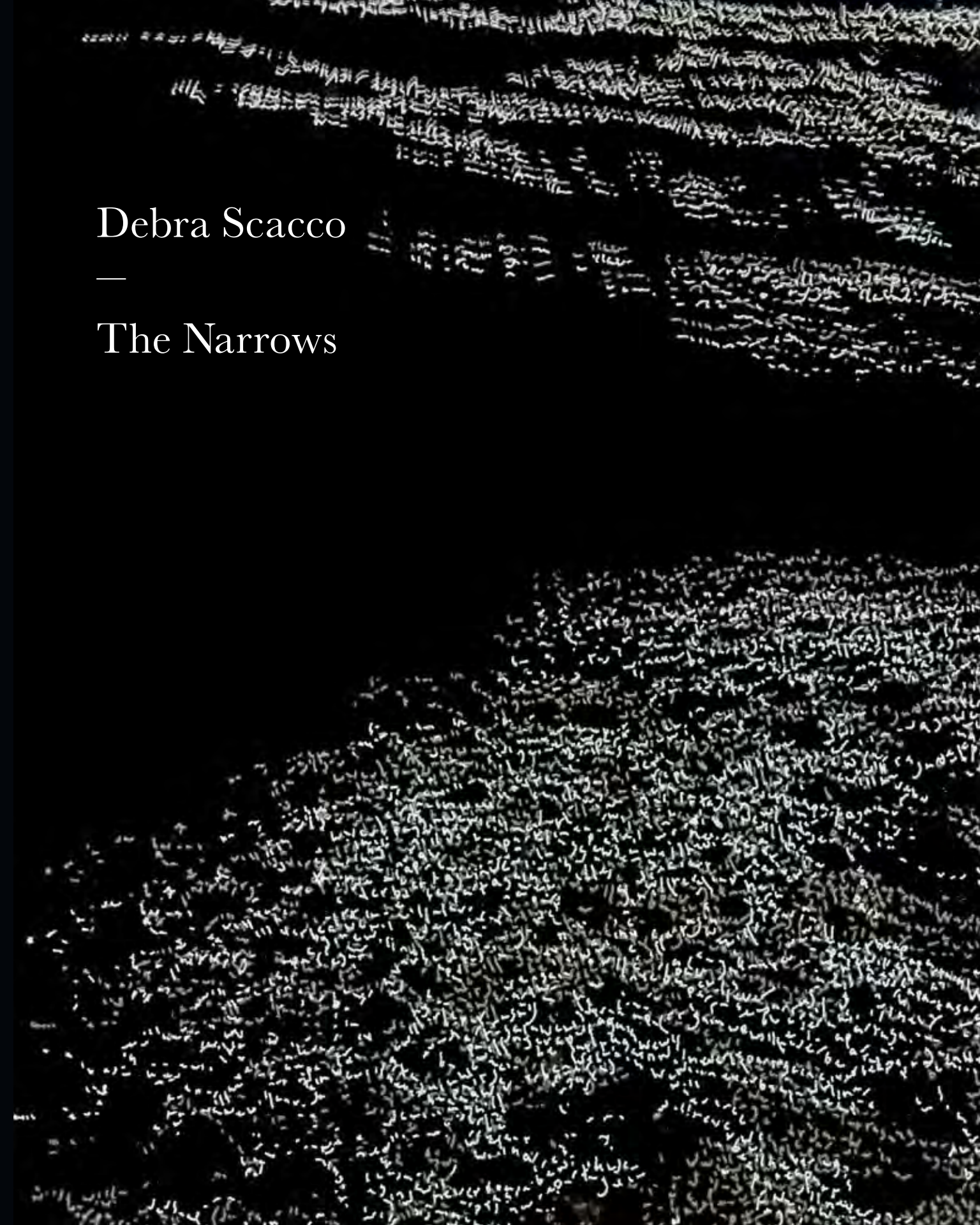


Debra Scacco

—

The Narrows

Based on Debra Scacco in conversation with Deb Klowden Mann in the context of The Narrows — January 21, 2018

Debra Scacco: My work has always been about place and boundaries. Previously I've explored this through my cultural history. My father is from Sicily and came to New York in 1949. My mother's father is from southern Italy and came through Ellis Island in 1921.

In 2012, I was the first artist-in-residence at Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island Museum, in conjunction with New Jersey City University. I spent one month with historians in the Ellis Island archives and have been building on this research since. *The Narrows* is the outcome of many years of thought, research and exploration on topics of immigration, identity and cultural perception.

The Narrows is a thin strip of water between Brooklyn and Staten Island. I'm from Staten Island and much of my family lived in Brooklyn. So not only is the Narrows very special personally, but it's also the point from which immigrants on their way to Ellis Island would first see the Statue of Liberty. Seeing the Statue was an iconic moment of understanding how close you are to a new life; but also a reminder that you are not yet there. Many immigrants vividly recall the moment they first saw the Statue from this waterway. They were full of hopes, fears and dreams; and the Statue had come to symbolize a new life and freedom.

The work examines systems of power that have profound effect on individual lives; and discusses the tangible connections between the system and the individual. The engravings are each based on a single oral history, sourced predominantly from the Ellis Island Oral History Project. I have focused on immigrants processed at Ellis Island prior to the Immigration Act of 1924: an act that drastically reduced immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, deeming Italians, Eastern European Jews and Slavs as racially inferior. The Act also severely restricted the immigration of Africans and banned new immigration of Arabs and Asians entirely. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a precursor to this sweeping racially-biased policy. I wanted to tell stories from before this line was drawn in the sand.

Olympic, 1920 (detail)

The Narrows — January 21, 2018

The pattern in each engraving is derived from my own photographs of the Narrows. The marks that form the contours of the drawing are letterforms. Each piece is a phrase inspired by a single oral history told by an immigrant that came through Ellis before the 1924 Act. I've now read and listened to hundreds of histories, and did my best to choose passages that were most representative of the overall immigrant experience at that time. The more I research, the more it is reinforced that the story is the same for most: fleeing persecution, reuniting a family, seeking something better. Most are following the very human instinct to make life as fruitful as it can be.

There are 29 engravings, as there were 29 questions on the immigrant entry form at the time. The presence of a number of objects in close proximity is important: to reflect the rhetoric of mass intended to instill fear in the existing population. Yet at the heart of each one of the many is an individual's story.

The installation piece (*Architecture of Separation*) is based on Ellis Island's Stairs of Separation: the final departure point for an immigrant after being processed. Once your fate had been sealed by an immigration officer, you were directed to a three-aisle stairway. One aisle proceeds to Manhattan, one directs you to trains to another part of the US, and the third returns you to the port from which you came. Many recall those denied entry committing suicide by jumping in the water; they couldn't bear the journey back. Many individuals sold everything to make the journey in the first place; or came from countries ravaged by war, natural disaster, or simply no prospects to return to.

The installation is based on this stairway, creating the form from monofilament, embroidery thread and wooden deadeye anchors*. Much like the deadeye system, the piece uses tension to create strength and structure. The copper lines that form the stairs are composed of seven strands of embroidery thread, which is where it gets very personal…

I chose embroidery thread as all the immigrant women in my family worked

*A deadeye is a nautical tool that is used to create tension in rope.

in textiles. And throughout my research on early twentieth century Italian women immigrants, the importance of textiles was a recurring theme. At that time, women in Italy were typically not allowed to be educated, but many were sent to convents to learn how to sew. In the case of many immigrant women (not just Italian), textiles and sewing was an acceptable way to make a living. It's a feminist history I hadn't previously considered: when working while female is not culturally acceptable but is a necessity, the cultural permission to work in a suitable career was (and still is) a lifeline. I chose seven strands as each one represents a member of my immediate family that came by boat from Southern Italy. This is the personal history that led to my interest in the Immigration Act of 1924.

The key aim of the Act was to exclude Southern and Eastern Europeans. With the recent influx of Italians and Jews in particular, the face of America was changing, instilling fear in those who sought to maintain America's predominantly Northern European "roots". *Puzzle for the Feebleminded (Feature Profile Test)* is a scaled up replica of a piece now in the Smithsonian. From 1912 to 1916, this puzzle was given to immigrants on arrival as a form of mental testing, giving inspectors a tangible way of deeming mental stability. Prior to the puzzle, an IQ test was given to new arrivals. Many new immigrants were not educated, did not speak the language, were nervous… The idea of taking an IQ test when your fate is about to be decided is truly awful. So in some ways, the puzzle was considered a fairer way of judging mental capacity.

At this time, eugenics (a pseudoscience that perpetuated ideas of racial superiority) was on the rise. Feeblemindedness was a convenient and unquantifiable way to keep 'undesirables' out. You could be deemed feebleminded if you were hysterical, overly emotional, not emotional enough, appear sullen, etc. It's worth noting that, due to the overwhelming number of arrivals, medical inspections were at first visual. If you were thought unwell, you would be immediately removed and quarantined. No question, no conversation. So you may have just physically lost a family member. You don't know where they've been taken, and you are then

Above: *Architecture of Separation*

Below: Stairs of Separation, Ellis Island

Puzzle for the Feebleminded (Feature Profile Test)
—
Teak
25.75 x 18 in, 2018

given a test to complete. If you appear hysterical, you are deemed feebleminded, marked in chalk with an X and sent for further mental testing. So this little puzzle is incredibly significant. And of course, if assigned an immigration officer with a racial bias, your fate is sealed by this small set of wooden blocks.

In the back room is *The Narrows*, a video work I shot in 2017 depicting the boat journey between Ellis Island and Manhattan. In many ways, these were the waters of freedom. This is the crossing every new arrival hoped to make. The piece is a single shot: no editing, no alterations. The video is accompanied by firsthand audio interviews with early twentieth-century Italian women immigrants. There's something so powerful about hearing a voice… Time jumps from past to present. Having an unfiltered view of the water whilst hearing these stories is important: a direct articulation of both the narratives and the research behind the work.

Deb Klowden Mann: For both Debra and me, writing for this show was more intensive than usual. We of course wanted to give weight to the work itself, but also to highlight the way it relates to the current political climate, and struggles regarding the identity of our country and what it means to be American. We talked a lot about 'good' immigrant stories, who is allowed to become part of the American canon, how that happens over time, how that happens based on the color of your skin and whether or not you can visibly assimilate to what's perceived as the dominant culture. A phrase Debra used that really struck me was 'structures of permissibility': that there is a space in the process of immigration where who you believe you are and what you're hoping for your future is forced to confront these structures of permission which will either welcome you, or turn you away. Can you tell us a little about a little about that in relation to the work?

DS: In the making of this work, I was thinking a lot about institutional structures of permission: both in a historic context, and in the context of my own immigrant experience. I lived in London for 16 years. I am not for a moment comparing myself to an individual moving through Ellis

Island. But as an immigrant, wherever you're from and whenever you arrive, one key similarity is being at the will of a structure of permission. I was granted a series of visas ranging from two to six months. Despite doing everything that had been requested of me, I was continually allotted these tiny windows of time. Meaning I made frequent trips to the Home Office, each time asking for approval to stay in the city I now thought of as home. Thankfully that process came to an end when I received my Italian passport. But I had these few years of being constantly at the will of others, asking for permission to simply live my life.

A very personal part of the Ellis Island research was remembering this time; remembering the physical structures of the building intertwined with seeking permission to live. When looking at historic photographs of Ellis, note the permanent architecture is arched and open. Yet the temporary architecture is a series of rigid metal pens that route people through the process. I was quickly reminded of my own experience: shepherded from line to line, not knowing if it was good or bad, if it meant staying or leaving. I spoke the language and had the ability to ask questions about what was being requested of me; many in this situation do not have that privilege. It led me to examine how questions and experiences are framed specifically to exercise power, to permit or deny.

The thinking around language also relates to our current situation. Consider how language changes through the decades: what do we perceive as culturally acceptable? How do we phrase these ideas in a way that feels permissible for public consumption? How do we rephrase these ideas in a way that instills fear? So these structures of permission exist on many levels: physical, emotional, verbal, political. Yet they are all parts of the same machine.

DKM: Could you speak to the reasoning behind the glass and the mirror? I feel like these material choices relate to what you were just discussing.

DS: It does relate. Materials are very important to my ideas and process.

"The pens at Ellis Island, Registry Room (or Great Hall). These people have passed the first mental inspection."

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library.

The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1902 - 1913

Debra Scacco in conversation with Deb Klowden Mann

I felt this work needed to be somehow solid: somewhere between window and monument. In this in-between space, you're always one step removed from the life you seek; always at the will of another. And then when granted permission to remain, you're one step removed from acceptance because of your cultural identity. The materials echo both duality and permanence.

The use of glass was important in creating a solid, unchangeable object. As with etching in stone or marble, the engraving happens through the process of erasure; these marks are permanent, immovable. The mirror echoes the past in the present. As in the LA River works (pictured right), you are an interruption with it and it with you. The reflection forces you to communicate with the work differently. And of course the works continually change in accordance with light. With the engravings, I hoped to create a contradiction: an object which is in equal measure grounded, stable, delicate and intangible.

The wood is teak, as found on boats in the early twentieth century. The stories themselves are very intimate, making the small scale feel appropriate. I hope the experience of interacting with the work is a very personal one.

Audience member: With work so research-heavy, when in your mind do the art pieces form?

DS: I wish I knew. I tend to go down research rabbit holes. Like a lot of artists, I get obsessed with certain subjects. After years of making work about boundaries in Italy, Sicily and America, a residency opportunity came up at Ellis Island Museum (which of course became the basis of this show). I've been considering and continuing this research for years. I initially worried it felt too direct, too political. Then last year [after the 2016 American Presidential election] it was instantly apparent that now is the time to tell these stories. I also wrestled with materiality because I was at first thinking about how to *interpret* these stories; when in reality my job is *tell* these stories. It took time to find the right way to do this.

Rio de Porciúncula
(1769 - present)
—
Ink on Duralar
168 x 54 x 41.5 in, 2015

Origins: Los Angeles River
1815/1825

—

In situ at Los Angeles
State Historic Park

—

Mirror finish steel, concrete
57.5 x 36.25 x 39.5 in, 2017

To a large degree I collect materials I'm attracted to, and eventually the right circumstances to further explore the materials arise. In making *Origins* (pictured left) I worked with steel and concrete. Similar to *The Narrows*, *Origins* explores this idea of monuments to a forgotten history. So I began considering harder, more permanent materials for *The Narrows* as well. It then dawned on me that the pairing of glass and mirror holds the very qualities of heart of the work itself.

Audience member: Each engraving is based on a single story. What was the thinking behind not including the text in the title of the work?

DS: Each engraving is titled with the name of the ship and the year of passage. Much of the language is dense and heavy. In my previous experience of making language works, I find this can cloud a viewer's initial reaction. So the titling structure creates an emotional engagement with the object first, before there is a chance pass judgment on the story behind the piece. Once you are interacting with the object, you already have an emotional connection and may consider the story differently.

DKM: I think this choice inverts the process of categorization. As you said, language is such an interesting thing. It's both how we invite connection in, and is also often used to keep people out. So forcing them to have that emotional connection before gaining access to the language does a great job of inverting that process.

Audience member: Building on the idea of categories: did you think that about only telling women's stories?

DS: I did, yes. The focus was first Italian women in the early twentieth century. This is where the bulk of my research was and is also how I entered this work. Then, in writing about the show, I realized if I am to discuss the immigrant story, it must be better representative of the cross-section of women, men and children that shared the experience.

I'm sure at some point I will return my focus to Italian women. But for this work, for the time that we're in, for the story I know to be so important to tell, it felt important to give voice to the many nationalities coming through Ellis at that time.

DKM: I'd like to speak to the earlier questions about at what point the artworks start to form. I'm very lucky that I get to jump in and out of the timeline for artists as they're creating bodies of work. I remember in my very first studio visit with Debra several years ago, she talked about the desire to work with glass. But within her practice everything needs a reason, including the material. So glass wasn't going to happen until there was a concrete reason. It was very exciting to be there as a number of different bodies of work have come to fruition; until we arrived at this place where the story that needs to be told and the rules intertwine.

DS: That process to me is very important. My curiosity tends to driven by two distinct strands. One is research. The other is material. I always joke that I'm a sentimental minimalist. My art hero is without a doubt Louise Bourgeois; but I went to Marfa and never wanted to leave those perfect Judd structures. Now, after 20 years of collecting ideas and materials, these two strands organically gravitate towards each other.

The reasoning for scale is also important. I knew the work should be based on the architecture of Ellis. While the physical construction is seemingly simple, I went through a roster of formal possibilities to arrive at the correct one; and to ensure that the one I choose is in support of the ideas behind the work. The proportions of the engravings derive from the proportions of the windows at Ellis Island. So while the structure is modest and intimate in scale, direct reference to the building's architecture is still present.

Audience member: Are the engravings readable?

DS: With my eyes, yes they are. [laughs] I don't know that you can read every word, but you can certainly see the hooks and loops, and decipher certain words. Also, with the contours of wave patterns being inconsistent, the text is continually fragmented. But the language is there if you look.

DKM: There are three drawings in the front office (ref p29-31) which are in keeping with Debra's past work using language . While it's difficult to decipher the writing, once you get into it you start to see how it moves within the space, which again is according to specific rules.

An interesting result of engraving in glass is that the language is slightly harder to decipher. A recurring comment with Debra's language works is people ask what language it is. I find this really fascinating. It happens even more frequently with the engravings; people can tell that it might be repeating marks, or language they think could be Arabic or a different alphabet entirely.

DS: I've been working with language for many years, and have been making maps with language for many years. One of the first maps I made was a map of London, but only north of the Thames (ref p18). It was fascinating to see people immediately try to identify this land mass. We see a map and crave immediate recognition of an existing geography. We see letter forms we don't immediately identify and assume it must be another language. When we recognize something as familiar, the human instinct is to either access instant understanding or deem it as 'other'. Yet by giving things time, we may recognize them as more familiar than we had originally thought.

Audience member: You're talking about a very human experience, but you're portraying it in a very environmental way. I know the environment is also an interest of yours. Can you talk about the environment of the work, and why you represented it this way?

DS: I've always been interested in how we interact with place, and the role memory plays in the act of recognition. In one oral history, a woman coming from Italy discusses the fear she felt when seeing the color of the water in the Narrows. She describes it as gray and mucky, while she had

Where do we go from here
—
Ink on tracing paper
25 x 35 in, 2010

come from the beautiful blue of the Mediterranean. For her, the color of the water was her signifier of place.

For me, water is distance. Water is what has separated my family both personally and historically. Yet when I lived abroad I never had to feel every mile of the ocean. When traveling on land or traveling at sea, you physically cross every mile. Of course many without means are still crossing in this way, often at the risk of their own lives. Yet for those of us more fortunate, we do not feel distance in this way. The movement of the water represents feeling the distance of this journey.

Another important point is this: as our environment changes, we will continue to have climate refugees. There will be necessary changes in policy based on unpredictable natural disasters. In the last month alone, we've experienced wildfires, floods, and mudslides in our own state [of California]. The relationship between the movement of people and the natural world is more important than it has ever has been. And for the most part these two issues, in discussion and policy terms, are kept separate. On one side we have the EPA. On the other is immigration reform. We act as though they are isolated issues while, in the same breath, we're sending earthquake refugees back to El Salvador after 16 years of legal residency.

The more I learn, the more I understand the importance of the connectedness of these issues. A part of the work I'm doing — with *The Narrows*, with the LA River, with the residency I've founded for artists working with environmental ideas — is connecting the dots. The work is encouraging the understanding that all issues are connected; and encouraging research and dialogue around the multifaceted nature of it all. This broader perspective is vital; especially as policies change and our environment continues to become more fragile and less predictable.

Audience member: I think the water plays such a large part in this story. My mother came from Italy, and was on a ship for weeks. She was sick the whole time, and still remembers it vividly.

I also think a lot of people are reminded of their own stories by this work.

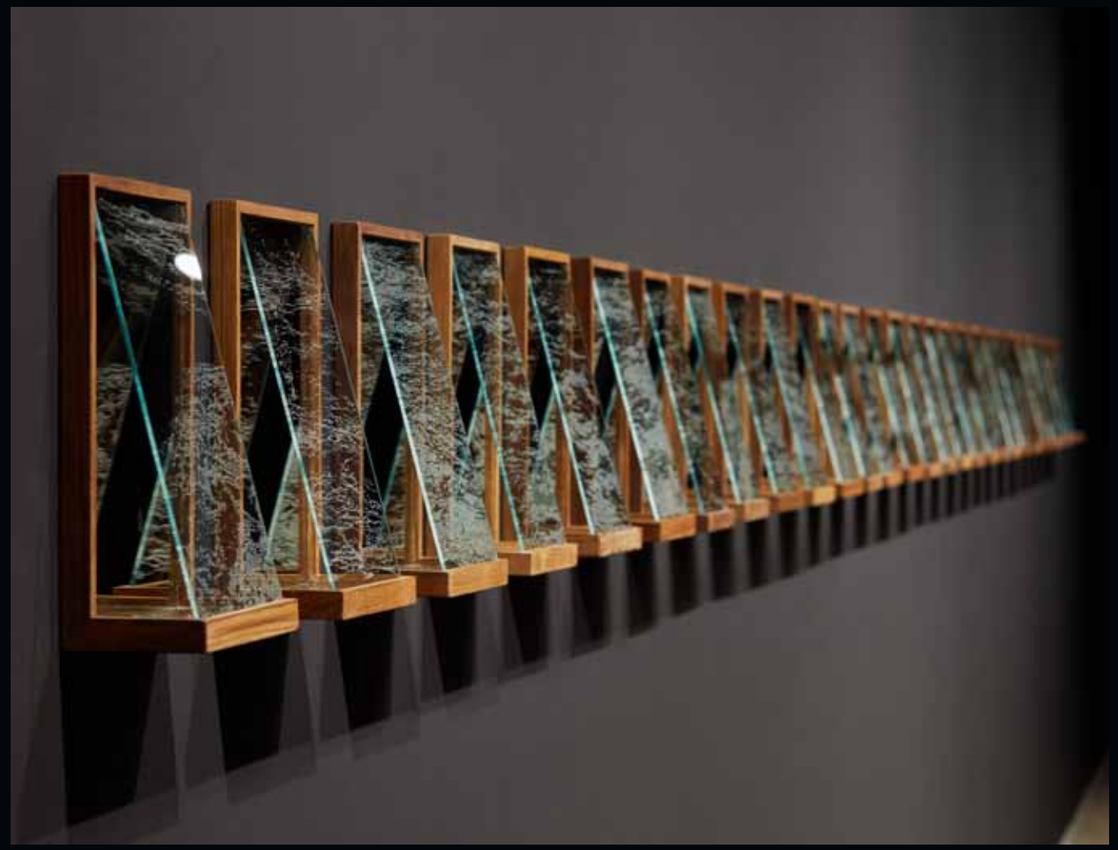
DS: The National Parks Service estimates 40% of Americans can trace their lineage back to Ellis Island in some way. So there's a significant portion of the population that have a connection to this process. In speaking with people about this work, you quickly learn how many connect to it on a very personal level. A privilege of making this work is that people become open to sharing their story. You can see a shift in demeanor when placing themselves, their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, within these very personal stories. So while this is of course connected to politics and policy, at the heart of it is the story of one person's experience in coming to this country.

DKM: Thinking about water as the only mode of transportation at that time… While that's not the case now, it still is for the case for many without means; for those not able to come through official structures of permission. And so whether it's on a boat or the physical act of placing your body in the hands of the water, water is a huge part of that experience for so many people, historically and currently.

DS: I'm glad you raise the issues of means, as there's an important point I haven't yet raised. If you traveled first or second class, you didn't have to go through Ellis Island. You were examined on the ship and immediately released. Ellis was for steerage passengers only. So even then, by the very act of being sent to Ellis, you were already in a system of permission due to your economic status.

Audience member: In talking about your process, it sounds like there's a reason for everything. Because it sounds like you're a very careful, methodical maker, I wonder if you find surprises in your work? And do you like finding surprises?

DS: I tend to find surprises when I agree to things outside of my direct practice. For example, a project with a rigid time constraint may lead to a



The Narrows
—
Installation view
Klowden Mann, 2018

new way of mark making. Or if I help somebody with a project, that may introduce me to a new material. I do also collect materials that I like, and they eventually find their way in when the time is right.

Audience member: What about surprises in meaning?

DS: Yes, absolutely. I've been researching this show for some time, so had become fixated on what it would be. But the more I got into it, the more it opened up and actually circled back completely to where I started years ago.

Across the oral histories, there are stories of not knowing your father, conflicted identity, assimilation… But one of the stories that hit me the hardest was one of constructed memory. This incredible woman is emotionally speaking of tumultuous water, her fears on the boat, being reunited with her father. And intermittently she says 'as my sisters tell it'. She was four when she made the journey from Italy to New York. She has built her identity and her personal history on a process that she went through, but does not remember firsthand. These emotional recollections are the result of a lifetime of absorbing these stories, creating the memory of physically being there grows through impression after impression.

We are all (myself included) given stories by our family that become woven into the fabric of who we are and how we present ourselves; often constructing our identity at least in part from secondhand narratives, and editing over time to best serve the person we have become.

This idea of constructed memory has been in my work since the moment I started over twenty years ago. So having this return through someone else's story was a truly wonderful surprise.

Audience member: One extraordinary thing you've done is create this sort of impact and response in the viewer. The systems of permission are referred to but not present. As we stand in front of the stairs we imagine ourselves there, facing one stairway when everyone else in our family has been sent to another. The way we look at this language which to my eyes is illegible echoes what it might feel like to be illiterate on arrival. And then to have the inner-self reflected back through the mirror… You created an opportunity for people, regardless of background, to empathize and experience even for a minute what some of that process might feel like.

Beyond this, everybody recognizes and has a relationship with water. Everybody understands these patterns. And there's a poetry to then staring into that abyss though the video.

I know this work is about so many stories, but it keeps bringing me back to my own.

DKM: We're told so often about the importance and power of storytelling. And yet our understanding of history and the way that we teach history is grounded in the idea of sharing objective truth. But if there's anything this period of time politically has shown us it's that we're still extraordinarily hungry for feeling; and that people believe what they feel more than they believe what is holding them objectively. Which brings us back to the power of telling each other's stories while staying grounded in objective truth and history.

Audience member: And I think that as the story resonates within each person, that's the place where change happens.

DS: I believe most everything comes from a story. I started researching immigration bills and laws to better understand the shape and structure of my own family, how we came to be in three different countries. I wanted to understand the story of my family; if our separation was a conscious choice or a direct result of systems of power. This quickly led me to the Immigration Act of 1924 and its focus on Southern and Eastern Europeans. I then merely scratched the surface of Angel Island and complete Chinese exclusion. I discovered history I never learned through the pursuit of a story. We must start to reconcile the dark truths of our history. We often consider

Ellis Island as a part of the great American story. But cultures now considered "American" were then victimized and persecuted. This is not the history I learned as a child. But it is our truth. And now — viewing this history through the lens of our current political climate, and with the resurgence of prejudices old and new — we have to acknowledge that the cycle is repeating itself. It's the same story with different bodies as targets. If we tell these stories, maybe we can impact the cycle. I am only one artist. But I have a voice; and I feel a responsibility to tell these stories.

Audience member: Have you thought about putting these ideas into the world in a public way? The work is very relevant for the times we live in.

DS: Yes, I'm very interested in public art. When I began making work about the LA River, discussions of social/cultural history and the very concrete history of place arose immediately. Speaking with the public at Los Angeles State Historic Park (the site of *Origins*) and hearing people, as a result of the work, discuss the history of the river and how the shape of the land has changed is a true joy, as is witnessing new public interactions with the landscape. This experience has been hugely reaffirming that this work can and does have impact. I would love to create more (and more ambitious) work in the public realm.

Audience member: But you don't want to lose the poetry by making the work more accessible.

DS: I don't think you have to. The poetry is what enables the conversation. If I say directly, 'This terrible thing happened in 1924', nobody would listen. I believe the poetry allows access to the conversation. We can then discuss the ideas in a non-confrontational way because we're discussing them through the lens of the artwork and the history behind it. That's an important part of what I hope this work can do. I want to present our history without judgment and enable people to draw their own conclusions.

For example, just ten days ago, our President cited people from Norway as ideal immigrants. Rewind to 1924: like now, the face of America was changing. The purpose of the Immigration Act of 1924 was "to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity"*. The President's specific mention of Norway is a direct reference to the language used to support the 1924 Act, which believed the Nordic race to be superior, and sought to exclude all others so as not to compromise the American gene pool. In this context, mentioning Norway is not just mentioning Norway, but is code for returning to a white America. Jeff Sessions openly praised the 1924 Act, noting its ability to attract a better quality of immigrant. I am shocked time-and-again as we rapidly move towards repeating this dark period in our history.

Our situation continually reinforces the undeniable parallel, so we must be clear about the outcome. The 1924 Act was the pinnacle of the pseudoscience of eugenics, which is the absolute belief in the existence of a superior race. Eugenics, exported from turn-of-the-century America, was the basis of Hitler's manifesto. I know comparisons to Hitler are very sensitive and oftentimes controversial. But this is not a personal comparison. This is an undeniable historical truth.

I am working hard to present these facts in a non-confrontational way. The engravings are people's stories. The installation is derived from architecture. The puzzle is a replica. The video is the water and the voices are those who came through Ellis Island. I have altered none of this information. If you choose to ignore our history, there's not much I can do about that. But let's at least have the conversation about what actually happened, and make our decisions based on this information.

I often struggle to maintain my composure when discussing policies I know are causing harm to millions of people, including many I love. In thinking about how to do this, I realize the answer for me personally is: I have to be better at history. If I understand better where we have been, I have the power to communicate facts in a way that is measured and non-emotional. When I make direct comparisons to what came before (and associated consequences), and the actions being taken by our government today, it

*U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian. Retrieved 2012-02-13.

becomes more difficult for others to defend current ideas and actions. The parallel I like to draw is this: if you get into a car accident at exactly the same spot day-after-day, you'd be foolish to continue taking that route. So if we drive down the road of our past, we are foolish to think it will not lead to the same destination. But we must know our *true* history to recognize the parallels. Only then can we have these very difficult conversations in the context of the American experience.

Audience member: You mention parallels. And you mention 12 million people came through Ellis Island. It occurred to me that's the number of people killed in four years in the Holocaust. 12 million in four years. For every person that crossed the water, there was a person who was never given a chance to escape. I find that your work is so open in that regard. You can't contain it; history comes through in multiple layers.

DS: Wow. Thank you. These parallels are incredibly important in providing a true sense of scale. The more I get into this research, the more I recognize that I have a lot of work to do.

We spoke earlier about the importance of firsthand stories. I was lucky enough to know my great-grandmother who came through Ellis in 1921 with my grandfather and great-uncle as young boys. My father, his mother, and sister arrived by ship at a Manhattan port in 1949, to later be joined by my grandfather. The generation above my parents spoke very little English. We lived in a tight knit Italian community, where I was lucky enough to have access to these experiences, these stories. It's incredibly important to learn from this history and keep this legacy alive. In my own small way, I'm doing my best to do this.

Audience member: As someone who appreciates consideration and precision, the structure of the work really appeals to me. I appreciate how the work invites us into the black hole, and invites us to have epiphany after epiphany. We're animals; so we do react from feeling, and we are instinctively xenophobic, hence the tenet of the "good immigrant" being highly assimilated. Yet we're now deporting our most highly assimilated immigrant, which is someone who came to this country as an infant [referring to DACA]. They're as American as they can possibly be. It's this turning on its head that's so awful. And brings up, at least for me, that all borders are imaginary.

Water unlike land goes wherever it wants to go because it's a planet; and so the structures that we try and pose are ways to reassure ourselves that we have our heads and our minds and our bodies around structureless nests. All of it is imaginary.

I want to see this work as public as possible. Some people will dive in and others won't, but it's so important to be having these discussions.

DKM: I feel like that is a fantastic note on which to end our discussion. Thank you so much for being with us today.

I long for what I believed you to be VI

—

Ink and gouache on paper
21.5 x 13.75 in, 2016/17

I long for what I believed you to be III

—

Ink and gouache on paper
21.5 x 13.75 in, 2016/17

I long for what I believed you to be I

—

Ink and gouache on paper
21.5 x 13.75 in, 2016/17

The Narrows

—

Installation view, 29 works
Glass, mirror, teak
12 x 7.9 x 4 in, 2018

Presidente Wilson, 1923

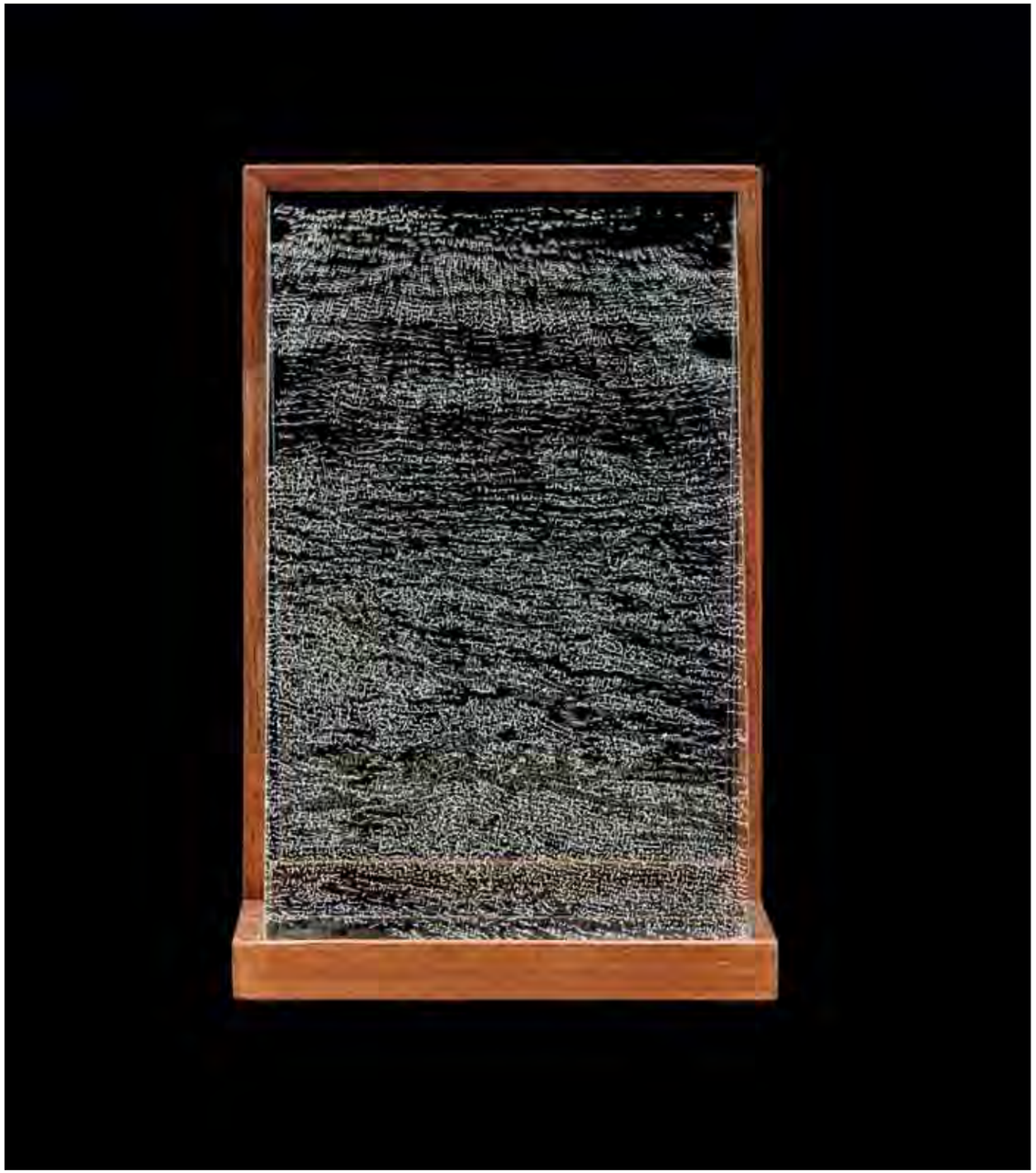
—

We will never be apart again.

Baltic, 1924

—

I missed my home. I missed my family.
I never went back. I never saw them again.



Graf Waldersee, 1906

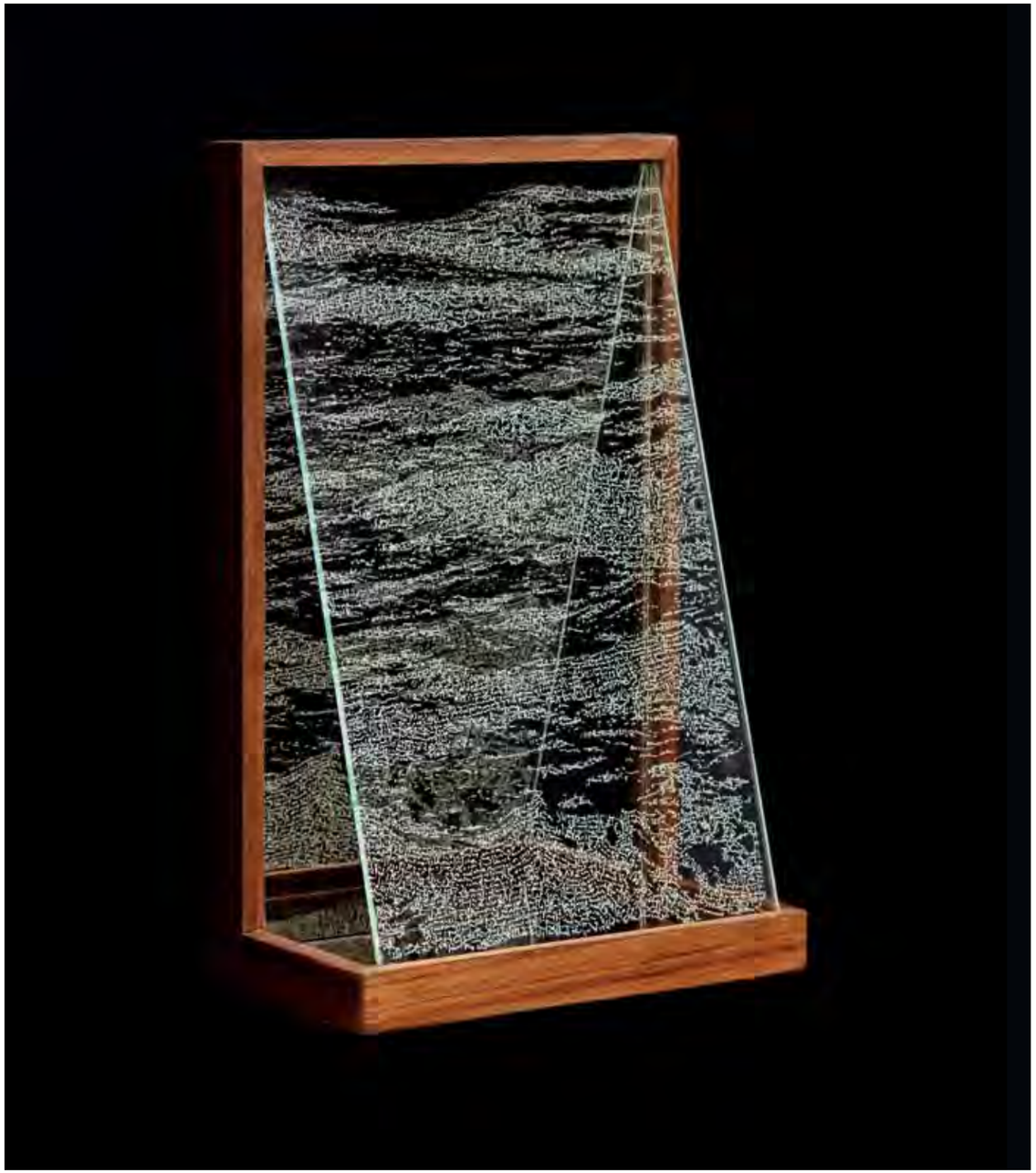
I remember only the farewells, the embraces and the tears. We were bound for places about which we knew nothing at all, and for a country that was totally strange to us.

Hansa, 1923

When you leave you can never go back again.

Olympic, 1920

My father made us go to the docks to watch the wounded soldiers come in. I never got that sight out of my mind. He wanted us to see firsthand the tragedies of war so we would be grateful for the little we had.



Zeeland, 1920

It's like I have two lives. You plant roots in the ground, and then you transplant them permanently. You put an end to your past and forget about your childhood.

Dante Alighieri, 1920

—

My first memory of Ellis is when they tried to separate me from my father. I was absolutely frantic. They had already taken my mother away. And now they were going to take me from my father.

Algeria, 1921

—

We arrived in New York a day before a new quota act went into effect. If I came two days later, I probably wouldn't have gotten in. Those are the vagaries of fate.

Wellington, 1919

—

When I got here I was so scared. I was alone and the rules had changed.
I didn't know what would happen to me.

Madonna, 1920

—

My grandmother begged, “Don’t go. Don’t leave me.”

Pesaro, 1920

—

I feel like I'm in the middle of the ocean. When I'm there I want to be here. When I'm here I want to be here.

Caronia, 1920

—

I saw freedom for the first time.

Celtic, 1920

—

By the time my father sent for us, the war had broken out. We were not able to leave. I never knew my father until I finally came to America.

Florida, 1907

—

As we came through the Narrows, we were all clustered on the foredeck for fear of separation, and looked with wonder on this land of our dreams.

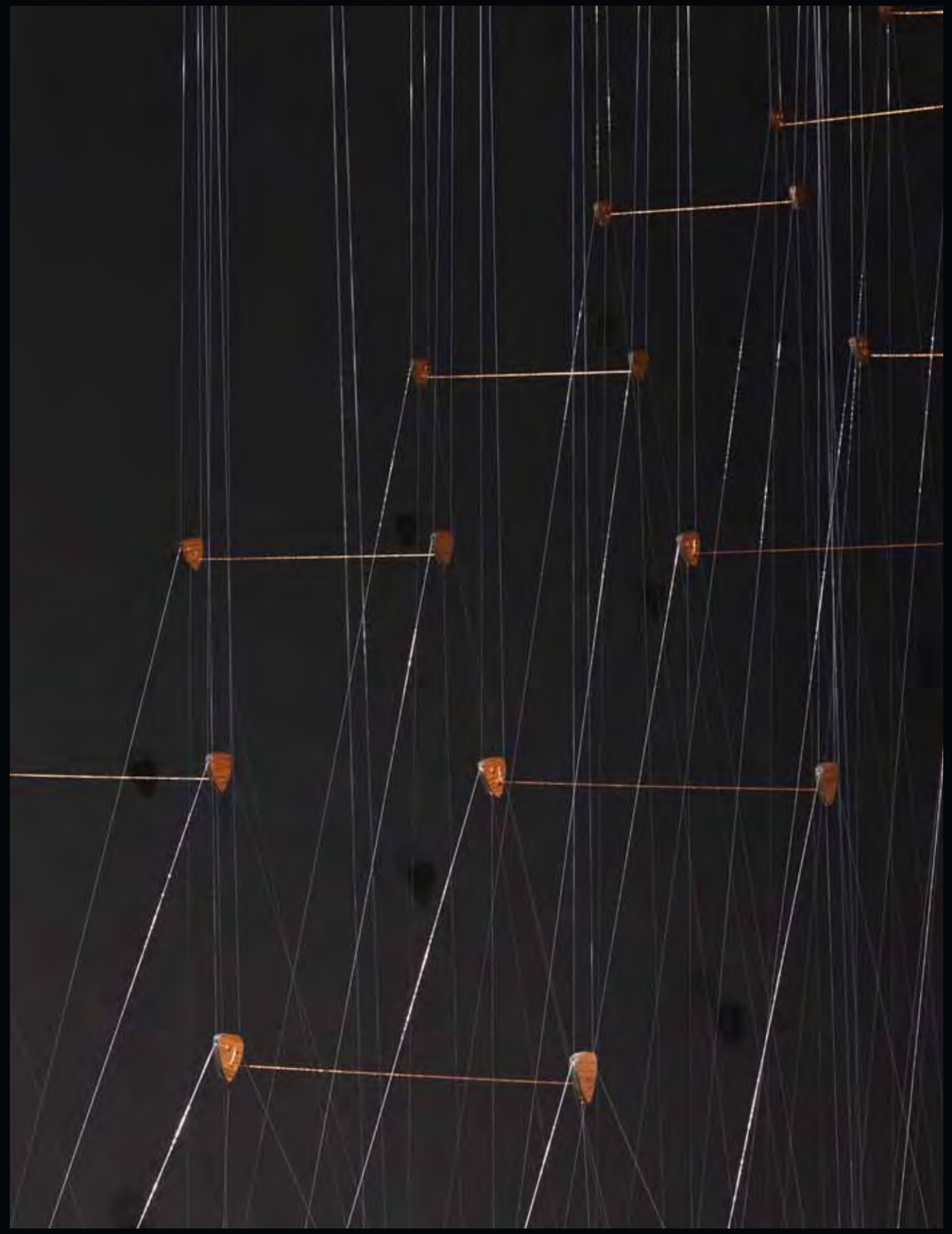
Etruria, 1906

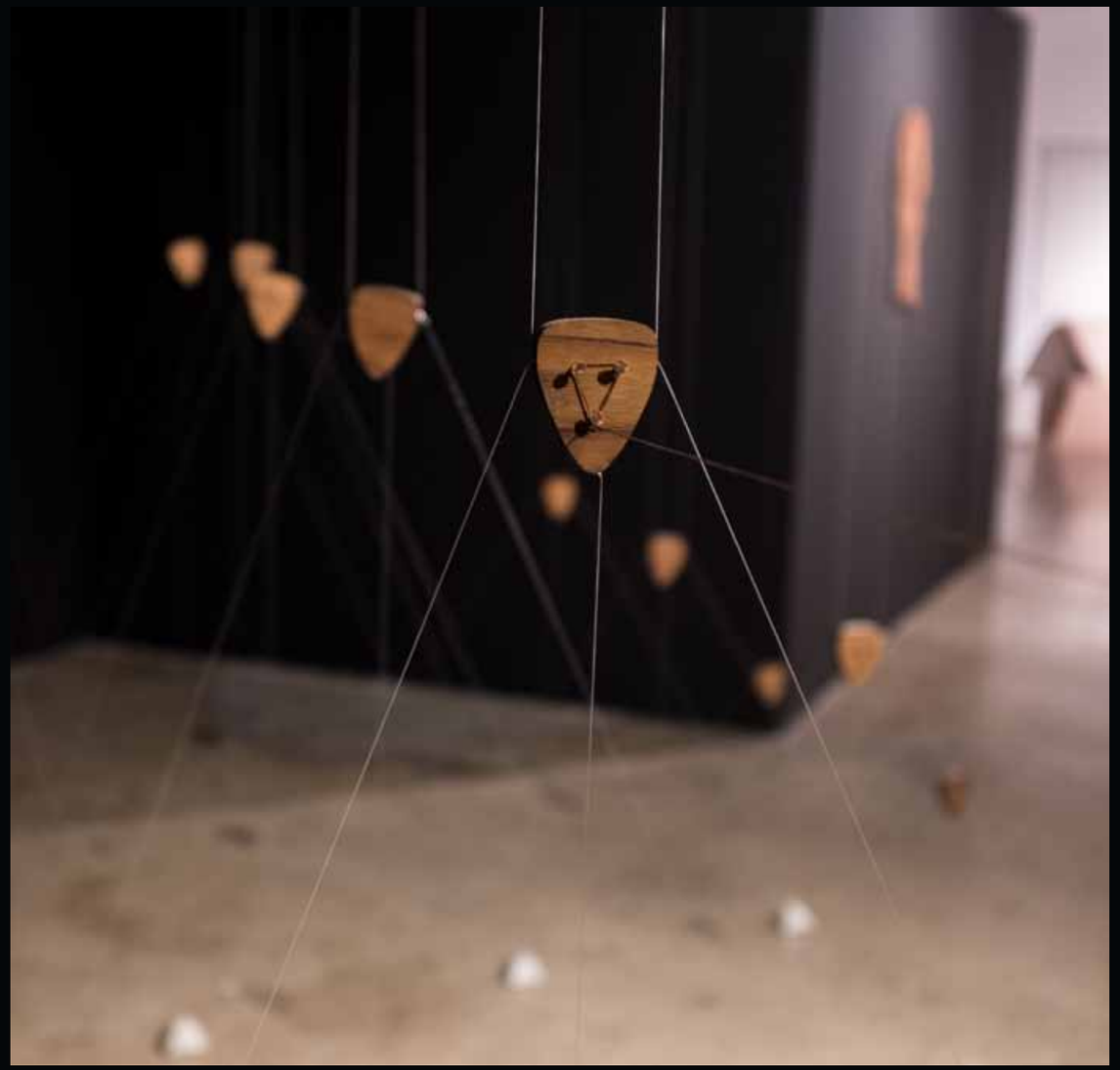
Everything was destroyed. There was nothing left.

Architecture of Separation

—

Teak plywood, concrete, embroidery thread, fishing wire, hardware
12 x 12 x 9.5 ft, 2018





The Narrows

—

Installation view

Colombo, 1922

—

My mother made me wear my best dress on the boat. When we got to America, I would finally meet my father.

King Alexander, 1919

—

We lived all the time in fear.

Duca D'Aosta, 1920

—

The steamboats are leaving our native land. What is our destiny?
Where are we going? We're leaving for parts unknown.

Duilio, 1924

—

You can't go back. Everything looks different.
Everything feels different. You are different.

Ohio, 1924

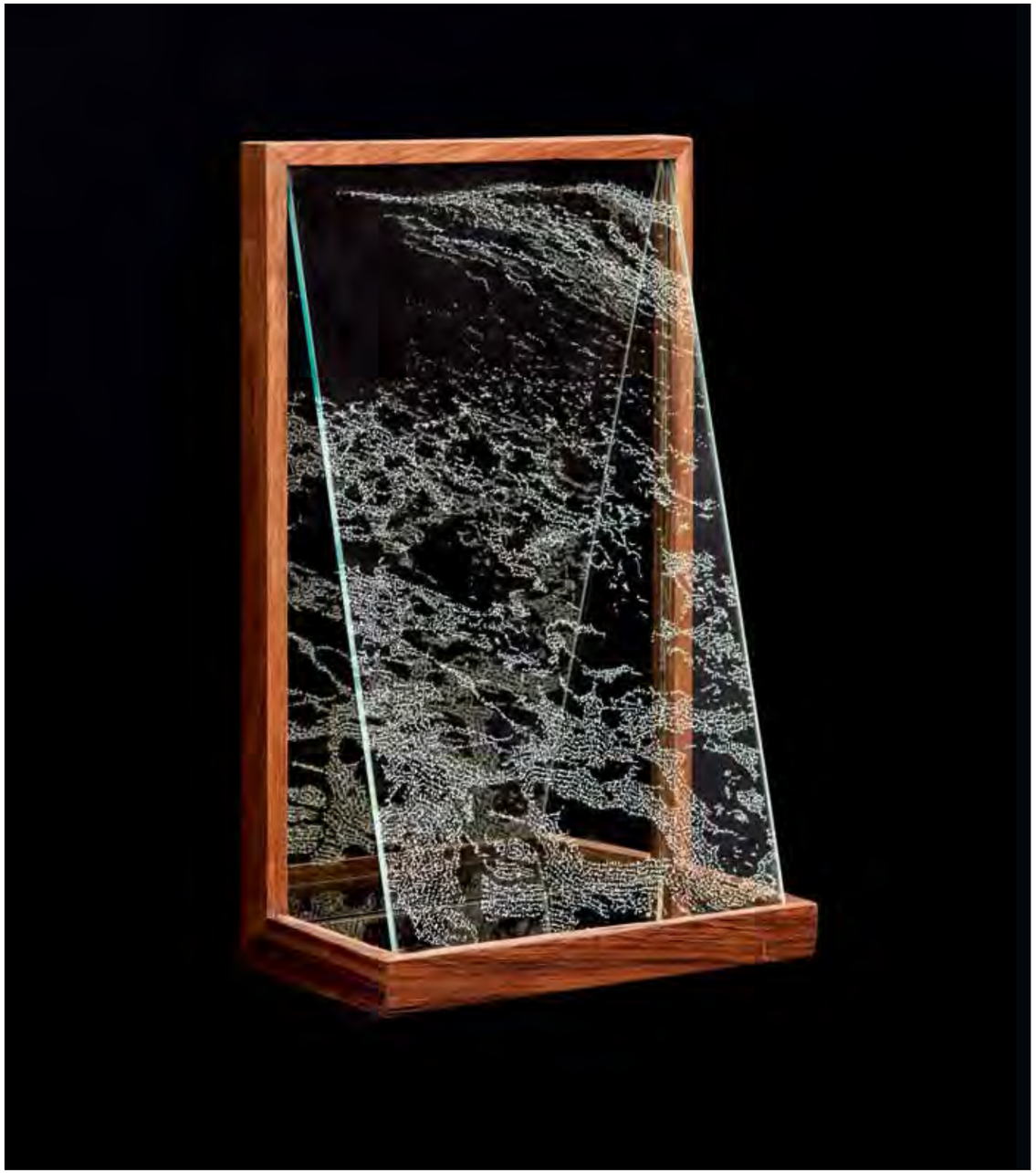
—

I'm going. Even if it costs me my life.

Mount Clay, 1921

—

Leaving was such an empty feeling.



Roma, 1920

—

I don't remember much about the journey because all I could think about was finally seeing my father again. This was the only thing that mattered to me.

President Fillmore, 1923

—

When she left for America, my mother realized she would never see her mother and father again.

Carmania, 1922

—

I feel people all around me so desperate to cross this little body of water.

Nea Hellas, 1920

—

I am now a stranger there.

Rijndam, 1921

—

I couldn't go back. I think in English.
I dream in English. I am an American.

Parris,1911

—

At that moment, a single chalk mark can determine the rest of your life.

Conte Rosso, 1922

—

I remember looking through the porthole and seeing my family on the dock waving and crying. That's the last I remember of those shores.

Ansonia, 1924

—

It's scary being separated from your family.
I cried for my mother all the time.

The Narrows

—

Video with audio
11m 48s loop, 2018

The Narrows

—

Installation view

Klowden Mann

Debra Scacco
The Narrows

Jan 7, 2018 – Feb 17, 2018

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