

## **Showing Border Identities**

### **How Art & Media Portray ‘Crossers’ in Canada and the United States**

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Border scholars note that policies of border walls, perimeter security and integration all have implications for how national and borderland identities are articulated and co-exist (Konrad and Everitt 2011). Border imaginaries construct subjects in powerful ways through their interactions with border crossers. For instance, the border of Mexico and the United States (U.S.) is often portrayed as a ‘fence’ or a ‘river’ in visual artistic representations. People who cross it are marked by their interactions using metonymic signifiers that reflect this identity; they are referred to as *alambristas* (‘wire-crossers’) or *mojados* (‘wets’) (Fox 1999). This research explores visual expressions that show the impact of borders on the construction and articulation of border-crossers’ identities.

The Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* reminds us that the study of concrete examples is important because they contain specific knowledge that expresses universal values and claims (Chouliaraki 1999). Therefore, rather than beginning with a broad analysis of how borders are portrayed in visual culture, this paper examines three specific examples where the Canadian and U.S. borders construct the identity of particular border crossers. The paper uses a two-part analysis. First, it explores how the visual media represents these ‘crossers.’ Second, it analyzes artistic expressions that show how subjects’ encounters with border(s) affect and construct their identities. These artistic expressions challenge the attempts of visual media to portray a universal perspective by representing several ‘angles’ of an issue, known as ‘a-perspectival objectivity’ (Boltanski 1999). Thus, this research seeks to create new knowledge about how media and artistic expressions create dialogue (and sometimes conflict) as they articulate border crossers’ identities.