

## Screens Series: Rodrigo Valenzuela

In his videos and photo-based works, Rodrigo Valenzuela addresses issues and experiences common to working-class people living in the United States, paying special attention to recent immigrants and those of Latinx heritage. Valenzuela, who immigrated to the US and worked odd jobs as an undocumented laborer before returning to school to study art, brings to his works a keen awareness of the challenges faced by people who have entered the country hoping for a better life. He often works with nonactors on unscripted scenes, constructing his videos through an editing process that highlights how individual and collective experiences exist in communion or in tension with one another.

In *Diamond Box* (2013), Valenzuela trains his camera on a group of Latino men whom he approached in the parking lot of a Home Depot, where they had gathered in search of temporary work. In an intimate yet austere setting, the men take turns recounting their stories of migration; the camera, however, never reveals the speaker, instead attending to the faces of the apparent listeners. This narrative technique—in fact achieved by editing together multiple scenes of single speakers—allows the artist to narrate his own story of migration as a kind of filmic autobiography. His video tells the stories of others, but their fragmented experiences double as testimony for his own.

In *Prole* (2015), Valenzuela focuses on a different group of men: Latino workers who have gathered to play soccer in an empty warehouse. Their uniforms are emblazoned with a union logo, and they eventually abandon their match to take up discussions of labor: how they view their work ethic, how they present themselves as workers to their American bosses, and what they feel is at stake in organizing as a union. Debate emerges within their conversation, highlighting how American culture's emphasis on self-reliance and individualism conflicts with initiatives that foreground collectivism and the common good.

With a title that alludes to nonspeaking roles, Valenzuela's *Tertiary* (2018) depicts a group of aspiring actors while calling attention to the all-too-common practice in the film and television industries of populating scenes with people of color but relegating them to roles as extras. As the artist has noted, the artifice of "diversity" in casting is worsened by another form of discrimination: the facial recognition technology on most digital cameras has been calibrated for white-skinned faces and thus struggles to properly capture the faces of those with darker skin. In the narration that unfolds in *Tertiary*, these issues give way to broader reflections on recognition, visibility, and belonging in civic society and popular media.

**Rodrigo Valenzuela** (b. 1982, Santiago, Chile) lives and works in Los Angeles, where he teaches at the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture. Recent solo exhibitions include Orange County Museum of Art, Santa Ana, CA (2018); Portland Art Museum, OR (2017); McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Charlotte, NC (2017); Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita (2016); and Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2015). Group exhibitions include the Kitchen, New York (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (2018); Drawing Center, New York (2017); Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2016); Tacoma Art Museum (2016); and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2016). He received a Core Program fellowship from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and his recent residencies include Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, MacDowell Colony, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Center for Photography at Woodstock, and the Vermont Studio Center. He is the recipient of the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant (2017), an Art Matters grant (2016), the Artist Trust Arts Innovator Award (2014), the Texas Contemporary Award (2014), and a University of California Institute for Research in the Arts grant (2013).

"Screens Series: Rodrigo Valenzuela" continues the New Museum's Screens Series, a platform for the presentation of new video works by emerging contemporary artists, and is organized by Natalie Bell, Associate Curator.

**Rodrigo Valenzuela**

***Diamond Box, 2013***

HD video, sound, color; 4:16 min

Courtesy the artist and Upfor Gallery

**Rodrigo Valenzuela**

***Prole, 2015***

HD video, sound, color; 8:47 min

Courtesy the artist and Upfor Gallery

**Rodrigo Valenzuela**

***Tertiary, 2018***

HD video, sound, color; 2:29 min

Courtesy the artist and Upfor Gallery