

REPRESENTING LA FRONTERA: A LITERARY AND ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF THE LIMINAL SPACE IN TOM LEA'S WORK

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HYPOTHESIS

The concept of the border has long been associated with division, delineation, and boundaries—geographical lines that separate nations, cultures, and peoples. Yet, beyond its physical demarcations, the border also functions as a liminal space, a threshold where transformation, ambiguity, and negotiation occur. As a liminal space, the border Mexican-American border embodies a state of in-betweenness, where identities are challenged, hybridized, and redefined, and where cultural, social, and psychological boundaries are both reinforced and transgressed. This ambiguous territory is constantly depicted in the works of the painter and author Tom Lea.

METHODOLOGY

Having it being both a critical and creative project, I read the literary works of Lea and other border authors from the southwest. Moreover, the exploration of Lea's pictorial work opposite to the contemporary Texan landscape worked as a trigger for the completion of the project.

RESULTS

The outcome of my research was the making of three creative and academic responses: a ten-page critical essay, a ten-page poetry project and a fifteen minute video presentation that places Lea's pictorial work, pictures from the El Paso region during his lifetime alongside pictures of the region today.

CONCLUSIONS

Tom Lea's body of work—particularly his novels—offers a profound, lyrical exploration of the border and *latinidad* as a space of cultural hybridity and resilience. His poetic language, layered symbolism, and thematic depth elevate the border from a mere geographical boundary to a living landscape of human endurance. His stories evoke the land's lasting memory—its scars and hopes—and affirm that resilience arises from the synthesis of diverse influences and shared histories. Through his art and words, Lea creates a compelling narrative of the border as a space where human spirits are tested, healed, and renewed.

LITERATURE CITED FOR THE PROJECT

Lea, T. *The Brave Bulls: A Novel*. Pocket Books, 1949.

Lea, T. *The Hands of Cantu: A Novel*. Hammond, 1964.

Lea, T, et al. *Tom Lea: An Oral History*. Texas Western Press, 1995.

