

## Peña's Bending

As David Peña bends steel through the act of welding, the work of preserving memory is underway. Welding requires vast transfers of energy that reveal instabilities in the state of matter. Incredible quantities of energy are concentrated on the steel, melting it from solid to liquid, if only for a moment, so that the steel may be bent, distorted, dismantled impermanently to be reshaped again. A sinuous form emerges, one that has moved fluidly through the history of ornament. The Sankofa, an organic abstraction of a bird, is here turned into a web of tendrils. The sensual shape contrasts with steel's solidity. Under heat and force, steel reveals itself to be surprisingly reactive to being touched.

Underlying the material transformation of welding is a human body, soft and seeping. Welding's corporeal nature leaves the traces of the body, including the stories and emotions it carries. In the welding pools, areas where molten metal builds up before it solidifies, memory, too, pours in.

In Peña's work, the accumulation of all these physical and mental exertions are held, tenably, in the shape of a fence. Fences are often made to disrupt passage and create enclosure. Rather than dividing, Peña's fence mediates connections across material forms and familial histories. It converses with an older fence, made generations earlier by Peña's *abuelo*, Encarnación Montes. This older fence, made in the 1970s, surrounds the Montes family home located in Barrio Logan, San Diego. Encarnación Montes worked as a welder and piping manager for National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO), which made ships used by the US Navy and for oil drilling.

Peña's own fence complicates these histories by twisting and turning the central motif of Montes' fence. The presence of the archive cannot be understated in Peña's practice, which with every welded joint remembers, in form. Photos and letters are present in the memory work, but also the distances crossed, the time passed. It may seem counter-intuitive that a fence forges, rather than severs, connections. However, in this contradiction, like that between organic sensuality and steel's solidity, undulating openings are constructed. At the core is a practice of care sensitive to finding holes loose enough to stretch and let healing come through. Tenderness bulges through the impasse.

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