

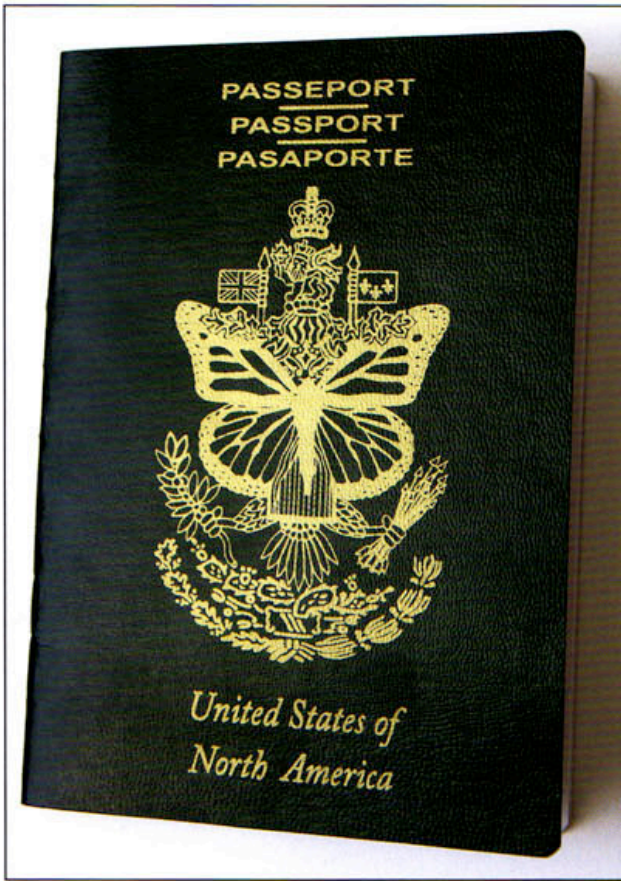
# united states



united states

July 15, 2012, to February 24, 2013

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum



Erika Harrsch, *United States of North America—Passport*, 2009–10  
 Courtesy of the artist and Artgate Gallery, New York

**Erika Harrsch: United States of North America—Passport**

Performances on November 2, 3, and 4, 2012

Nature and the human body as the interface of our experience with the natural world are central themes in Erika Harrsch’s work. For several years she has explored the Monarch butterfly as both symbol and subject of her investigations into our subjective experience of the sublime. Her interactive project *United States of North America* expands upon these interests, initiating a dialogue about nationality, immigration, and identity.

On November 2, 3, and 4, 2012—immediately preceding the presidential election—Harrsch will open a passport office at The Aldrich. Her installation offers visitors the chance to secure a fictitious passport that allows safe passage through the three North American Free Trade Agreement countries—Canada, the US, and Mexico—or what she calls the “United States of North America.” By spinning a wheel of fortune, visitors can try their luck in getting a passport, a reference to the arbitrary process of the US green card diversity lottery. Possible outcomes of the spin include winning, being declined, or being identified as an illegal alien. The playful nature of the game underscores the emotionally charged, often anguishing experience of navigating these bureaucratic procedures. Her passport tracks a world in constant mobility, where the idea of nationality is both incomplete and outdated, as, in the artist’s view, is the NAFTA treaty.

Harrsch explains that the installation was influenced by a four-year project filming the sanctuaries of the butterfly. “The Monarch,” says Harrsch, “follows a mysterious progression that takes several generations to complete; they take advantage of each nation’s landscape for its life’s purposes.”<sup>4</sup>The Monarch’s is a multi-national, multi-generational migration between Canada and Mexico, mimicking the cyclical flow of people along the same path. While seemingly driven by economic imperatives, the human migration is not so different from that of the butterfly. Each defies the geopolitical to obey the biological imperatives of procreation and sustenance.

-RT

<sup>4</sup> Harrsch artist’s statement, 2012.