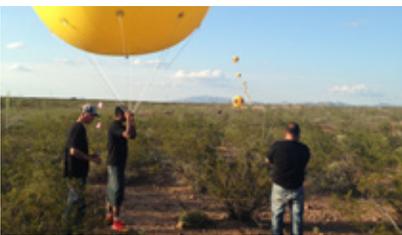


# THROUGH THE REPELLENT FENCE: A Land Art Film

## VIEWER DISCUSSION & EDUCATION GUIDE



**Top:** Big Beard Films and film participant Chris Taylor shooting at Michael Heizer's Double Negative.

**Above:** Installing The Repellent Fence on the Mexico side.

**Right:** The Repellent Fence as seen late afternoon from outside Douglas, AZ

Photos courtesy of Big Beard Films.



### Program Synopsis

*"Through the Repellent Fence* is an adventure in the artistic process blended with a road trip of discovery visiting sites and diverse perspectives to explore how land art can generate community interaction and perceptual shifts in how we interpret, engage and draw inspiration from our natural world."

### Background

As the film's official site <http://throughtherepellentfence.com> states,

*"Through the Repellent Fence* follows art collective Postcommodity as they strive to construct Repellent Fence, a two-mile long outdoor artwork that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border. Postcommodity consists of three Native American artists who 'put land art in a tribal context.' Aided by the communities on both sides of the border in 2015 the artists installed a series of 28 huge inflatable spheres emblazoned with an insignia known as the "open eye" that has existed in Indigenous cultures from South America to Canada for thousands of years. The spheres were evenly spaced apart and extended north and south of the border a mile in each direction. 'It's a metaphorical suture stitching together cultures that have inhabited these lands long before borders were drawn.'

### In Their Words

**"The intention of the Repellent Fence is to dialogue with the complex realities of the border experiences of indigenous peoples, which includes those who are geographically divided by the United States/Mexico border."** — Postcommodity Art Collective

## Directors Statement

### Sam Wainwright Douglas

I wanted to make this film to dispel the misconceptions about the U.S. - Mexico border and to add nuance to the narrative. Life in the borderlands is so much more complex and richer than the mainstream media and most of our politicians seem to understand.

This is a border story that has not been told: Indigenous artists giving voice to the shared history of Indigenous people who have traveled back and forth for thousands of years, reminding the world that being Indigenous does not stop at a border.

And, the art Postcommodity created is beautiful, participatory and brings people together. It's an art project at its finest: invigorating the public, finding common ground and reinforcing the bond between people and place.



## About the Filmmakers

### Sam Wainwright Douglas – Director/Editor

Sam is a director and editor working in Austin, Texas. Recently, Sam directed and edited *Honky Tonk Heaven*, which premiered and won an audience award at South by Southwest 2016. Sam edited and co-produced *No No: A Documentary*, which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival, screened theatrically in 35 cities and was broadcast on Showtime. Sam also edited and produced the PBS documentary *LaDonna Harris: Indian 101*, which was executive produced by Johnny Depp and broadcast on PBS in 2014. *Indian 101* was selected for the U.S. State Department's American Film Showcase and will be shown in developing countries worldwide through screenings organized by embassies. Sam will be the cultural envoy for the film.

He directed *Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio*, which was broadcast nationwide on PBS in 2010. He co-directed music documentary *The Holy Modal Rounders... Bound to Lose* (2006) and has edited and produced other feature documentaries such as *Along Came Kinky: Texas Jewboy For Governor*, which had its premiere at South By Southwest in 2009. As an editor he has cut countless hours of television for PBS, HBO, A&E, The Discovery Channel, The History Channel and The Food Network.

### Julianna Brannum – Producer

Brannum is a documentary filmmaker based in Austin, Texas. Her first film, *The Creek Runs Red*, was selected to air in Fall 2007 on PBS's national prime-time series, Independent Lens. In early 2008, she co-produced a feature-length documentary with Emmy Award®-winning producer, Stanley Nelson for PBS's *We Shall Remain*- a 5-part series on Native American history. The episode, "Wounded Knee," chronicled the siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890 led by the American Indian Movement.

In 2007, Ms. Brannum was selected as a Sundance Institute/Ford Foundation Fellow and has been awarded grants from the Sundance Institute's Native Initiative, National Geographic, ITVS, the Oklahoma Humanities Council, NAPT, and the Sundance Documentary Fund for her latest documentary *LaDonna Harris: Indian 101*. In April 2008, she was awarded a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Tribeca Film Institute in support of the film.

*LaDonna Harris: Indian 101* broadcast nationally on PBS in 2014 after playing numerous festival screenings. She is a member of the Quahada band of the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma.



Big Beard Films shooting at Nancy Holt's The Sun Tunnels.  
Credit: Big Beard Films

## Lesson 1: Borderlands

(Video Clip – 00:02:55-00:04:45, 00:14:59-00:16:37)  
Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

Where we come from and how we relate to the land impacts our lives.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the significance of how we relate to the lands that we and others have inhabited.
2. To examine and learn about borderlands as shared and contested spaces.
3. To identify policy impacting the formations of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

### Discussion Questions:

1. The Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa identified the borderlands as “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory” (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 2). How does *Through the Repellent Fence* portray the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and intercultural edging?
2. In the film, Kade Twist contends, “The news media never talks about people who are crossing [the U.S.-Mexico border] as being indigenous people.” Considering the film’s emphasis on Native Peoples, how does the film challenge popular understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border?

### Class Activity:

#### Geography and Politics

In the film, Carlos says his “grandmother was a Yaqui Indian,” yet “they call us illegals when we go the United States. But these lands are ours. Immigrants are the ones who have migrated to the U.S. from all over the world. We come from these lands. These lands belong to us.”

Research the history of the U.S.-Mexico border. How did the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 impact Indigenous Peoples, such as Yaquis, T’ohono Odhams, Lipan Apaches, and Kickapoos, whose homelands are located both in the United States and Mexico?

Write a one to two-page paper, and present your findings to the class.

**Vocabulary:** border, borderlands, Gloria Anzaldúa, Yaqui, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

## Lesson 2: Land Art

(Video Clip – 00:16:45-00:21:50, 00:25:55-00:30:33)  
Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

Creating political and social change is possible through art.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the significance of land art.
2. To examine and learn about artistic expression in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.
3. To identify possibilities of what land art can do.

### Discussion Questions:

1. In the film, New Mexico-based writer and curator Lucy Lippard resists “defining art” because it sets up “boundaries.” She continues, “I think that if somebody does something kind of marvelous and it’s in the land call it land art,” but “I don’t think it has to be boiled down to something that chops away at the earth or something made out of trees or natural materials.” Does the land art of Postcommodity support Lippard’s observations? How does Postcommodity challenge “boundaries” and borders through their land art and engagement with communities?
2. Chris Taylor, Director of Land Arts of the American West at Texas Tech University, says, “Land Art is anything people do in the landscape” to represent their “cultural expression” of “what we make as people and Land Art is how we do that with the landscape, with land.” How may land art engage today’s “problems” that Taylor says “require a more nuanced perspective of being able to negotiate a complex world and more people out there dealing with that, being aware ... to open the possibility for ... a paradigm shift in the cultural conversation about our relationship to place, or relationship to each other and how we respect and deal with the landscape”?

### Class Activity:

#### Land Art

In the film, Raven Chacon says, “Land Art has existed since humans have existed.” Select and research a land artist’s work. What messages does your select artist’s work express? Write a one to two-page paper or make a short video, and present your findings to the class. For examples of land art, see the PBS Digital Studios short video “The Case for Land Art” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STW0eZDsKVg>.

**Vocabulary:** land art, cultural expression, Postcommodity, borders, Lucy Lippard, Land Arts of the American West

## Lesson 3: Indigeneity

(Video Clip 00:04:49-00:06:50, 00:33:08-00:35:34)  
Estimated Time: One-two class periods

### Key Concept:

Indigeneity includes that which makes one indigenous, such as ancestry, place, language, ceremony, and history.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the significance of indigeneity.
2. To examine and learn about expressive aspects of indigeneity.
3. To identify and compare multiple indigeneities.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you explain indigeneity, or being indigenous? What do you think Kade Twist means when he says Postcommodity is “able to ask people to think about their indigeneity”?
2. How does the land art *Repellent Fence* express indigeneity?

### Class Activity:

#### Comparative indigeneities

Research artwork by Yaqui, Kumeyaay, T’ohono Odham, Lipan Apache, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Kickapoo, or other indigenous borderland artists. Compare how artists from multiple indigenous nations engage the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through their art.

**Vocabulary:** indigeneity, indigenous, Yaqui, Kumeyaay, T’ohono Odham, Lipan Apache, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Kickapoo

## Lesson 4: Activism

(Video Clip – 00:03:30-00:07:13)  
Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

Activism represents the merging work of art and activism as practiced by artists like Postcommodity.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the significance of art and activism together.
2. To examine and learn about political and cultural expressions of art.
3. To identify and compare projects representing activism.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is activism? How does it compare to art that is not generally associated with activism?
2. How does Postcommodity practice activism?

### Class Activity:

#### The Art and Activism of Postcommodity

In small groups, research indigenous art works by Postcommodity, such as *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* (2012), *Repellent Fence* (2015), *A Very Long Line* (2016), *Coyotaje* (2017), or *The Ears Between Worlds are Always Speaking* (2017).

As a class, explain how each project illustrates indigenous-centered activism.

**Vocabulary:** art, activism, activism, Postcommodity



Crew members filling a balloon of the Repellent Fence.  
Credit: Big Beard Films

## Lesson 5: Visuality

(Video Clip – 00:00:44-00:02:53, 00:16:14-00:19:54, 00:35:35-00:36:28, & 00:44:57-00:48:21)

Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

Who and what we see in film and media can frame our view of the world.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the importance of visuals in film.
2. To examine and learn about visuality.
3. To identify and compare approaches to visualizing borders.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the (costarring) role of the land in the film. Why do you think the director Sam Wainwright Douglas presents long takes of the landscape without dialogue?
2. In the film, Kade Twist (Cherokee) says Postcommodity is “taking [the commercialized open eye] back and bringing it back to the land from which it came.” How so? What do the “open eyes” on the balloons mean to Postcommodity?

### Class Activity:

#### Visualizing Borders

Consider potential meanings of the film title *Through the Repellent Fence* and compare the film’s visual portrayals of and commentary on the “fences”: the international U.S.-Mexico border wall and Postcommodity’s inflatable artwork.

**Vocabulary:** visuality, borders, U.S.-Mexico border wall



Shooting *The Repellent Fence* at dusk near Agua Prieta, Sonora.  
Credit: Big Beard Films



Crew members filming *The Repellent Fence*.  
Credit: Big Beard Films

## Lesson 6: Relationships

(Video Clip – 00:04:11-00:04:48, 00:05:45-00:06:53, & 00:50:45-00:52:38)

Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

How we relate to each other impacts our and others’ lives.

### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the significance of building relationships and working together.
2. To examine and learn about symbols of relationships.
3. To identify approaches to acknowledging those around us.

### Discussion Questions:

1. In the film, Cristobal Martinez claims Postcommodity’s *Repellent Fence* “isn’t a fence that is designed to separate people. This is a fence that is a bridge, it is a symbol of interconnectedness.” How does it “bridge” bordering communities like Agua Prieta, Sonora, and Douglas, Arizona?
2. Near the end of the film, Kade Twist talks of their land art labor as “an exhaustion and contentment and excitement for what it means to acknowledge a person, a land, a community and the cultures of people here.” What is the significance of acknowledging and recognizing people and places? How does Postcommodity attempt to acknowledge and honor them?

### Class Activity:

#### Building Relationships

As a class, make a list of characteristics that you expect to find in respectful and reciprocal relationships. How do Postcommodity and other individuals in the film build relationships with each other and the land? How can good relationships be sustained for generations?

**Vocabulary:** relationship, acknowledgment, recognition, respect, reciprocity

## Resources

More information about Postcommodity, land art, and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands can be found in numerous sources, including the following:

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- "The Case for Land Art." The Art Assignment. PBS Digital Studios. June 15, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STW0eZDsKVg>
- Gill, Jenny. "The Repellent Fence Story, as told by Postcommodity," Creative Capital blog (October 1, 2015): <http://blog.creative-capital.org/2015/10/repellent-fence/>.
- Hämäläinen, Pekka, and Samuel Truett. "On Borderlands." *The Journal of American History* 98.2 (2011): 338–361.
- Irwin, Matthew. "Suturing the Borderlands: Postcommodity and Indigenous Presence on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* (May 6, 2017): <https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/suturing-the-borderlands-postcommodity-and-indigenous-presence-on-the-u-s-mexico-border/>.
- Kun, Josh. "Playing the Fence, Listening to the Line: Sound, Sound Art, and Acoustic Politics at the US-Mexico Border." *Performance in the Borderlands*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011. 17-36.
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- Lippard, Lucy. *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*. The New Press, 2014.
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- Sandoval, Chela, and Guisela Latorre. "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color." *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media* (2008): 81-108.
- Taylor, Chris, and Bill Gilbert. *Land Arts of the American West*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Through the Repellent Fence Official Site. <http://throughtherepellentfence.com>.
- Watson, Mark. "Centring the Indigenous: Postcommodity's Trans-Indigenous Relational Art," *Third Text* 29.3 (2015): 141-154.

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*Through the Repellent Fence* is a co-production of Big Beard Films and Vision Maker Media, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

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Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Vision Maker Media. Vision Maker Media supports Native stories for Public Broadcasting. For more information, please visit [www.visionmakermedia.org](http://www.visionmakermedia.org).

Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/throughtherepellentfence>

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