## ordinary devotion Angelique Rosales Salgado

for *¡Cuidado!* by X Arriaga Cuellar + Adán Vallecillo, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, June 7–September 27, 2025

Como artista, Adán Vallecillo se interesa, se compromete a, y persigue la "carga sociológica de los objetos." The sociological charge of objects. A load, pressure, weight—something compounded over time, carried. What comes of its release? *¡Cuidado!* is a deceptively contained environment. Care, ordinarily or exceptionally diluted into our daily lives, is set into relief here, sharp in its revelation of how much control care is subject to in the United States. The object: a projected seven-channel video work comprising documents of private performances recorded throughout New York City. Together with sculptural and audio elements, the installation explores modalities of care work through the experiences of Honduran migrants from Central American neighborhoods like the South Bronx, Washington Heights, and Bushwick, working as home care aides in the city.

Fragmented gestures form a sequence of six care tasks performed and reperformed on screen, an unrehearsed repertoire of actions and associations emerging at different intervals around the gallery. The infrastructure of the white-walled museum gallery bears the weight of this embodied memory, inhabits it, ritualizes it, becoming a room of total anticipation. *How do you bear another without insisting that they've integrated into your model of the world?*<sup>1</sup> One at a time, each distinct action—one woman takes her own blood pressure (rather than her patient's) while she hums, another takes tiny, slow steps backwards with a walker, a pill dispenser is played with like a time dial, hands move a comb through a head of hair—is split into parts, abstracted, rendered diffuse and omnipresent in its repetition and pace. The score transmits a similar energy. Sonic interludes thrust into a rhythm of vulnerability that compel a familiar understanding of what care sounds like in the many places that sustain it: the home, the bath, the bed, the street, and then abruptly retreats into silence. We listen to care sustained by voice within the archive, too, grounded in a compilation that includes samples of audio recorded between New York City, Houston, and excerpted from family archives in Honduras. Our anticipation of care attends to this loop, amplified by the anonymity of the home care aides who form part of the project. Every body represented on film is cropped or out of image, the intensity of an expected moment of meeting someone's gaze or hearing someone's voice is beholden instead to an imagined "who" and what sounds and sights encircle them. We're oriented to what we see primarily through these women's hands—brown, manicured, enduring—where touch, routinely a tool of their labor, exceeds its own material impermanence.

The room comes undone in its dimness, a scattered light on a sculptural duvet cover made of adult diapers by artist Catta Matute which was activated in *Ternura Escatológica*, an opening performance within the installation in New York City by artist Peter Cramer. In the project's closing performance, *Declaración*, Alex Vásquez Dheming narrated the personal archives of a home care worker who documented her daily experiences through written reports and performance evaluations. Newly reimagined in Houston, a city known internationally as one of the best medical communities in the word, the work's components continue to build upon recognizing the impact of care in our lives. What are the conditions exacted for the labor and life that (migrant) care work yields? Our paradox of survival, confined within a state capable only of reifying in incessant and excessive force its gratuitous violence; a perpetual war inflicted by the United States upon Black life, Brown life, Palestinian life, trans life, queer life, disabled life, indigenous life, migrant life. Replace life with land and begin again. In other words, as Zhandarka Kurti and Jarrod Shanahan put it, "capitalism's profound inability to sustain human life."<sup>2</sup> Consider, then, violence's ceaseless capacity to sustain (racial) capitalism.

This kind of labor, which is fundamentally and completely inexclusive to violence, however, begets displacement, induces it—the cyclical instability that entrenches capitalism—and yet, caregiving remains unexhausted by it. A repository of affections willfully abundant, devotion keeps no debt. (What is kept, remitted; to Central America, Mexico, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Caribbean).

Why do we romanticize being homesick?

The land that loved you first, ador(n)ed

I'm sick

Our sick circuit

Interventionist haunting

A multiplication of home,

The fog of my own grief

Cariño, cuídate

(Extracted) devotion—mistaken as temporary or forever in transience (undocumented)—remains in constant immeasurable pursuit, with no expectation of reciprocity, holding out like a sacrament.

anything that has crossed my paths I would mother any semblance of family elocution, all felled logic familiar huddled for warmth in the space between us that's what distance does to us

this gilded foremost endeavour<sup>3</sup>

"La carga (del trabajo)... es mucha," nos cuenta Mabel Vallecillo, a Honduran immigrant who has worked for over two decades as a careworker for the elderly in the United States, and for whom *iCuidado!* is inspired by and dedicated to. In the same breath—in conversation with the artist (her brother) and curator and archivist X Arriaga Cuellar—Mabel shares: "Para este trabajo, si no tienes compasión estas en el lugar equivocado" (For this job, if you don't have compassion, you're in a mistaken place).

Compassion here seems so uncomplicated. Think of how the accumulation of it at this scale is world-making, its sustenance, intimacy, and reproductive capacity. As much as it reveals, compassion both refutes and obscures how little the work itself is valued (in a Western sense), simultaneously short-changed and subject to innumerable use. A preservation study counter to abandon: unflinching against a culture that sanctions shame onto aging, panic onto health, fear onto death, doubt onto afterlife. What then, if migrant care work were to rest, pause, surrender? Fade into the vision of another world that bears survival and protection inextricable from its vitality; instead, in service of it. I'm stuck. I'm held.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas (T.) Jean Lax, "Up In The Air" in *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art / The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2022) 77. 2 Zhandarka Kurti, Jarrod Shanahan, Tobi Haslett, "States of Incarceration," *Brooklyn Rail, Field Notes* (October 2022): https://brooklynrail.org/2022/10/field-notes/States-of-Incarceration-Zhandarka-Kurti-and-Jarrod-Shanahan-with-Tobi-Haslett/

<sup>3</sup> Asiya Wadud, "the order was in the hour of worship" in No Knowledge Is Complete Until It Passes Through My Body (New York: Nightboat Books, 2021) 5.