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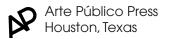
Oscar Mancinas



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Recovering the past, creating the future

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Names: Mancinas, Oscar, author.

Title: To Live and Die in El Valle / Oscar Mancinas.

Description: Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, [2020] | Summary: "Many of the voung people in this haunting collection of thirteen stories grounded in Arizona don't have the luxury of being dreamless. Some are compelled to leave their hometown: "I knew early on that I didn't want to die in El Valle. Nothing could be worse than being stuck somewhere you didn't belong." Those that manage to get out often find themselves in awkward situations. One young man, a student at a New England college, is surprised to receive a call from the admissions office, asking him to give a tour to a Mexican family. He agrees to help, but the interaction only reinforces the unease he feels about his place on campus and his Mexican identity. Not all want to leave. Kino vigorously resists his friend's constant encouragement to apply to schools out of state. "You think you won't be a wetback to people out there? You think I wanna be vour lil' Indian sidekick on the East Coast? You think vou're better than all of us here?" Others live with the daily fear of deportation or the loss of family members. Fernanda adjusts to a new life as an undocumented person in El Valle, where she takes comfort in the familiar ritual of baseball, Roach's mother has steadfastly refused to talk about her father, until through drastic measures she learns he was deported before her birth. And on their long drive to college, Melissa's father finally talks about the death of her would-be older brother. Vividly depicting working-class communities, Oscar Mancinas creates lives shaped by circumstances beyond their control, from migration for a better life to centuries of systemic racism and settler-colonialism. His characters frequently struggle with a sense of belonging, and their stories eloquently illuminate Hispanic and indigenous experiences in the Southwest"—Provided by publisher.

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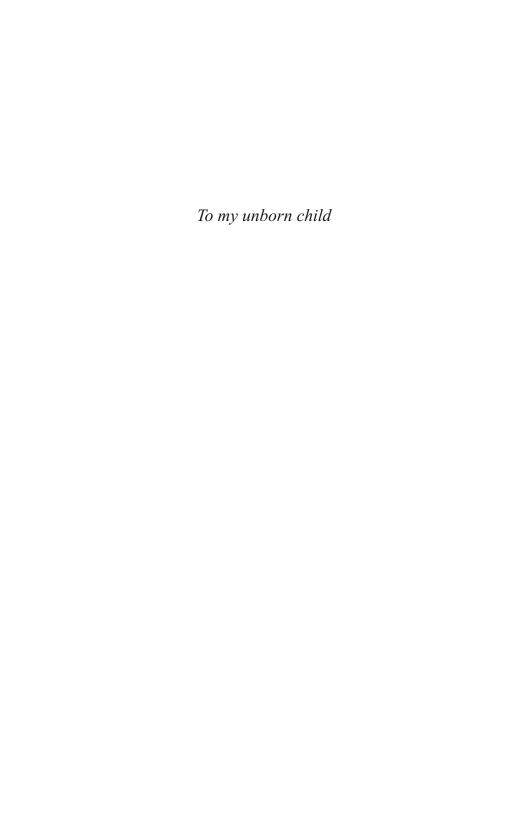
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"These [kids], now, were living as we'd been living then, they were growing up with a rush and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities."

James Baldwin



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I'd like to thank these publications which first gave these stories, or versions of them, life:

"Arizona Boy." Cosmonauts Avenue, May 2018.

"To Live and Die in EV." *Storm Cellar Quarterly* Vol. 6 No. 2, Fall 2017.

"Suicide Survivor's Guide to What's Next." *Cosmonauts Avenue*, November 2016.

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Comenzamos: Falsas Promesas

What difference did it make? Después de haber sufrido tanto, nos fuimos. That's how it started, that's how it kept going. When we lost almost everything, the only option left to live was to leave. So we left. But leaving did not fix everything. We still needed to survive, to provide life. A trabajar pues. We worked. We worked our bodies, we worked our land, we worked our sky, we worked. We worked with the promise that come nightfall, the dark desert would soothe our soreness, ease our pain. We worked until we forgot, or tried to forget, what kind of sun would rise tomorrow. Por lo pronto, ¡nos pusimos a pistear en la pinche pachanga! ¡A romper todo con nuestros gritos, se ha dicho!

Meanwhile, our little ones sat, watched, learned, remembered. ; *Qué más*? What else?

The night begins like it can never stop, but there's a point in the party where the men say to the women, "I love you. No. I *REALLY* love you." They sound angry, but what do love and anger have to do with each other? *Mamá* and *las tías* act like they don't hear them. They've felt this before: the 2 am summer, the *norteña* pouring from the speakers and collecting on the floor in a sea so big, so deep, no one gets out. They close their eyes, and they face the darkness of the ground or the darkness of the sky. It's been the same darkness their whole lives, even now—even

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en el otro lado, where people pay cash to have their houses all look the same—here, too, the darkness overflows from the cups, the cans and the bottles, and we try to drink it. Drink it all before the adults open their eyes. The lights come on and we're still.