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ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Deanna Barahona

Committee in charge:

Professor Ruben Ortiz-Torres, Chair
Professor David FitzGerald
Professor Lorena Mostajo
Professor Paul Sepuya

2024

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University of California San Diego

2024

DEDICATION

To my parents, who gifted me with dreams and the ability to bring them to fruition, I am forever indebted to you.

Merecen todo lo bonito de este mundo.

EPIGRAPH

No matter how hard this country has tried to get rid of us,
we are still here,
flourishing.
My hope is in us.
In me.
In you.

- *Julissa Arce, "You Sound Like a White Girl," excerpt, 2022.*

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I can't help but imagine and hope that, across all universes, my soul and physical presence are lucky enough to be intertwined with those who have guided me to this moment.

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Finally, to Anthony Tillett, my beautiful husband and bestest friend in the whole world, I love you more than words can describe. Thank you for always supporting my dreams since we were 14 years old and cherishing my earliest creations, so that they didn't end up in a landfill.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER

by

Deanna Barahona

Master of Fine Arts Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Ruben Ortiz-Torres, Chair

ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER refers to more than just material possession, but the impression of memories and ephemerality. The exhibition responds to the maximalist visuals of a family gathering, and its “glitter,” or remnants of identity carried through migration while settling in new places. The work reflects subcultures formed in the process of integration in Southern California, with materials referencing architecture, adornments, and symbols within the homes of the Latin American diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

It is nine in the morning and I am sitting in pure silence in my parents' living room. My mother's collection of sewing machines is in my periphery as I see a reflection of light sneaking its way through the crack of the blinds, bouncing off the chrome hardware. Everyone is still asleep, as our family prefers to sleep in. My parents are night owls, and that habit has become a part of me. My last time here was in August; it is now October. I no longer have a room to sleep in because my parents have finally started to deconstruct my childhood bedroom to give it to my younger brother. They are removing the popcorn ceiling and covering up the shitty paint job from when I was 15. My belongings, which once occupied the room, now reside in cardboard boxes in the hallway, awaiting donation at the local Goodwill.

Something constantly changes when I come back to visit, whether it is the furniture arrangement in the living room or maybe my dad lost a few more pounds. It has been over two years since I moved out, and I still cannot shake the feeling that this isn't really my home anymore. As Sunday night approaches, tears well up when I step out the door. My shaky voice surprises me as I tell my dad goodbye, and I wonder why our hugs are so tight. It's worth noting that I did not hug my sister until I moved out, and my brother barely spoke to me before I left. My parents didn't say "I love you" so easily until after I was out. It might sound cliché to say, 'You don't realize what you have until it's gone,' but it holds.

As I reflect on these memories, I realize that it's not just the physical spaces themselves that I miss, but the sense of belonging and connection they provided. Each home, whether lived in or merely glimpsed through photographs, holds a piece of my family's history and cultural heritage. It's in these spaces that our mothers carefully curated a sense of warmth and tradition, passing down heirlooms and decorating with familiar trinkets that evoke a sense of nostalgia. I

recall the times from my childhood when the houses came alive with family gatherings and festive parties. My dad would set up the strobe lights along the wall next to the clock or picture frames. But what I loved the most was the rainbow disco ball, casting its mesmerizing light and dazzling on the star-patterned tile floor. The combination of the home interiors, playing dress-up, and the fusion of booming reggaeton and 80s pop tells you whose house you are in.

Estás en una casa donde hablamos Español. You are in a home where we only speak our native tongue, the broken English is not embarrassed, and our elders can participate in conversations. The carpet that cradles years of fallen glitter from our shoes and dresses serves, each speck a testament to the joy and vibrancy of our shared experiences.

This paper serves not only as a reflection on the homes that have shaped me, but also as a window into the thought process behind practice and the work exhibited. Through its pages, you will come to understand how each element serves as a poignant marker of a moment in my lifetime. Moreover, my personality and attitude of today are apparent, as this documentation will soon be placed in the past, and also in the future, serving as a potential guiding light for future explorations and interpretations of my work.

CHAPTER 1: THE MIDDLE OF THE MIDDLE

LET ANDY WARHOL DIE!

“What’s the difference between you and Andy Warhol?” - Chancellor Khosla

During the Open Studios event this year, I was unsure how Chancellor Khosla landed himself in front of my work. He swiped his disgustingly wealthy hands on my newest screen-printed pieces. Then he asked how I managed to print photographs over ceramic tile. I told him I used the screen-printing technique. His inquiry about my process seemed innocent until he threw me off with a pointed question: "What's the difference between you and Andy Warhol?" I didn't even have the chance to respond as his assistant rushed him out into the next studio as if we were his fangirls who paid for a VIP backstage meet and greet.

I was left with a lingering question: Was his remark meant to challenge or remind me of Warhol's legacy? Since then, his question has echoed in my mind, prompting a deeper reflection on the relationship between my work and the expansive realm of pop art. How does my work relate to Andy Warhol's history of pop art? What unique perspectives and narratives does my work bring to the table? Most importantly, how can I use this reflection to advance my practice and make it stand out?

I'm hesitant to draw parallels between my work and Andy Warhol's. The world knows who he was—the guy who painted soup cans, Marilyn Monroe, and used bright, spunky colors. I can recognize that Andy Warhol stands as a central figure in the Pop Art movement, with his work engaging in discussions about mass production, consumerism, and the popular culture of the 1960s. However, attributing any credit to him for my work feels unjust, as I draw inspiration from a multitude of sources and individuals.

My practice is layered (physically and theoretically), laborious, and multidimensional as it traverses through time, encompassing the past, present, and future, intertwining the histories of my family and the current domestic landscape. The work calls to the vibrant heritage of my family's origins in El Salvador and Guatemala, with a visual veil of Hyperpop and Wacky Postmodernism resonating with the experiences of a person coming of age in 2010.

The work fosters an imaginative reconfiguration of what I have perceived home to be. It blends timelines and locales within The San Fernando Valley, ranging from my parents' migration in the 1990s to present-day settled life and integration. Additionally, it incorporates elements of domestic aesthetics influenced by reimagined popular culture and exchanged ephemera.

THE MIDDLE OF THE MIDDLE

In an interview with Office Magazine, Guadalupe Rosales explores the importance of archiving and showcasing an important time in Los Angeles history through her Instagram account @verteranas_and_rucas. This digital space is rich of Latinx culture that has been neglected due to the marginalization of these vibrant communities in mainstream narratives. Rosales articulates her desire to share this experience beyond her inner circle: "I wanted to have that experience with other people outside of my family, close friends, and stuff because I knew that certain moments in the eighties and nineties were so specific in a way that a lot of us stopped talking about what happened. We were growing up when violence was at its peak, you know,

and we also grew up with shame. I wanted to overcome that, not just move past that, but also acknowledge it, like okay, let us talk about that too."¹

Her insightful reflections underscore the transformative shift within the community, directly impacting the environment in which my parents were immersed. This ripple effect, reaching far and wide, is a backdrop for my practice. Drawing inspiration from the events and lifestyles of the 1980s and 1990s, my work serves as an extension—a testament to the lasting impact and cultural significance of those pivotal eras.

Browsing through the Instagram account, you will find a plethora of shared photographs capturing various corners of Los Angeles during a particular period. The depiction of Latinx youth culture feels reminiscent of flipping through my parents' numerous photo albums from their upbringing. It has butterfly glamour shots, family portraits, and community documentation.

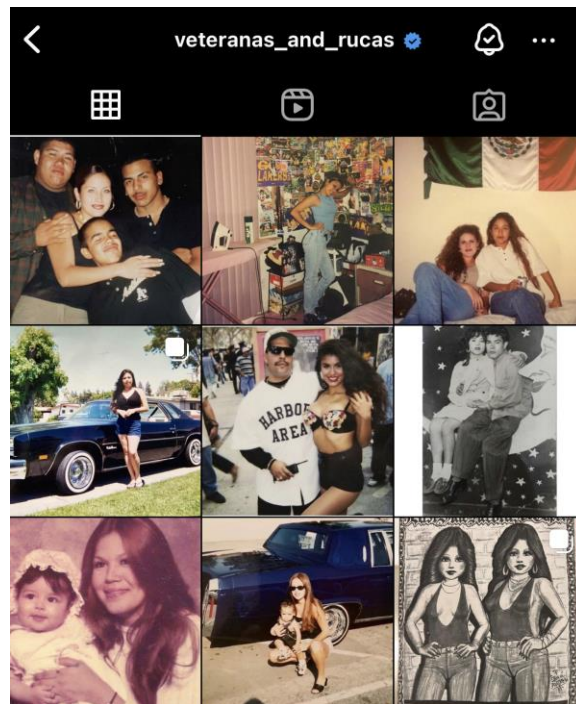


Figure 1. Screenshot of @veteranas_and_rucas on Instagram

This prompts the questions: What remnants remain of this bygone era, and how has its legacy been transmitted to future generations? Where, within the confines of the home, does this documentation find its place, and in what manner is it exhibited or presented?

THE LITTLE SINK

We are given a life full of memories and the choice to decide which one to immortalize. Sometimes, copies are in different homes, each with a special meaning. We choose who to share these memories with and what we'd rather forget. I am so grateful for my family archive. It has taken me into other dimensions, letting our memories fill the missing pieces. It consistently reinforces us to reflect on the individuals and aspects that hold significance during these specific stages of our lives.

I think about my Abuelita's dresser and how it is adorned with cherished photographs of her grandchildren, delicately placed in the crevice of the mirror and the frame. She has small shelves that line up the ends of her mirror where the framed photographs sit. Some frames are wooden, some golden, some are colorful, and others unintentionally form a collage of three photos simultaneously. What shares the space are knick-knacks, plushies, dead flowers, and her medication. When you visit, she always has something new to share; it feels like an endless portal of treasures accompanied by a story.

Most homes have a junk drawer, where the miscellaneous items find a place. At my parents', they have the little sink. The little sink was initially supposed to function as a wine nook, but now serves as a holder of screwdrivers, trophies, documents, and memories. Need your medical records? Check the Lightning McQueen folder next to the CD binder in the little sink. Need a safety pin? Check inside Mom and Dad's champagne glasses next to the Charlie Brown cake topper in the little sink. It is a bit chaotic and has no structure. It is like a shrine or jumbo

collage open for everyone to see. This spot in the house makes no sense but doesn't need to because it makes sense to us.

The photos in the little sink are not curated, so any pictures can join the club. They are held by gift wrapping tape or the leftover heart-shaped stickers from my 4th grade Valentine's Day cards. Here, you'll find the only photograph of my dad as an infant and the only photograph of my deceased grandfather on his wedding day. I'm interested in how these memories, captured countries away, found their place in the little sink. They become a part of the decoration in the home, as they flow with the orange-stained wood and ceramic sculptures of the Virgin Mary. The little sink and the eclectic mix of items, held together by personal stories and memories, reflect a rasquachista sensibility—finding beauty and significance in the ordinary and repurposing objects to give them new life and meaning.



Figure 2. Corners of little sink

MATERIAL CHOICE AND RASQUACHISMO

*Rasquachismo*² is a cultural and aesthetic concept pioneered by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto. The term originates from the word Rasquache, which means ‘do what you can with what you have.’ It has been redefined to celebrate ingenuity, resourcefulness, and a unique aesthetic born out of necessity. Ybarra-Frausto notes that Rasquachismo is from an underdog perspective-- a viewpoint from "los de abajo," or those at the bottom. Despite its negative associations with being considered tacky or unconventional, Rasquachismo challenges traditional standards of refinement and aesthetics.

"Rasquachismo delights in its own excessive hybridity. It is the sombrero embroidered in sequins, it is the lowrider car with air-brushed detailing, it is the purple house, the Chihuahua, and the black velvet painting."³

Looking at Patrick Martinez's work, there is a tie to the ethos of Rasquachismo, as his work embodies resourcefulness and a unique aesthetic born out of necessity, drawing inspiration from the urban landscapes and street culture of Los Angeles. Martinez's recent exhibition, Ghost Land, displays works of various materials, such as stucco, ceramic, spray paint, and found tarps, integrating elements from Cacaxtla paintings. What stands out in Martinez's work is his incorporation of signage that is reminiscent of the mom-and-pop shops scattered throughout Los Angeles, paired with the over-sprayed ceramic tiles and iconography intended to adorn the space. "Maybe they don't know what they are, but they use this language to show that the business is Mexican-owned."⁴ Martinez states when reflecting on the locations he draws inspiration from.

His use of vernacular symbols and motifs adds familiarity to his work, resonating with viewers familiar with the cultural landscape he portrays.



Figure 3. Installation of Patrick Martinez's Ghost Land at ICA San Francisco

While I may not categorize my work as Rasquachismo either, I cannot overlook the aesthetic influences it draws from this concept. It takes on a distinctive relevance when viewed through the lens of feminine labor, a lens that often goes unnoticed. This resonates with the creative endeavors of women as homemakers. Women have demonstrated incredible forms of creativity, repurposing everyday items for practical use, and transforming the ordinary into something unique. They have been the ones to challenge traditional notions of beauty and refinement. But the question remains: where do I stand in this?

Occasionally, I struggle to place where I stand in this timeline. As time progresses, I recognize that the experiences shaping my work vastly differ from those before me. This necessitates a new approach that builds upon the foundation of the past, while forging its own path. My work explores subcultures formed in Southern California's integration process with a lens informed by architecture, adornments, and symbols of evolution within the homes of the Latin American diaspora formed *after* the 1990s. While the tools and techniques may differ, a thread still connects us.

My work often evokes two distinct responses. Those familiar with Latin American culture readily grasp the references and domestic/street aesthetics I draw from. However, viewers outside this background sometimes interpret the vibrant colors and pop culture elements as "childlike," or lacking maturity. Initially, this felt almost insensitive, as if anything colorful or referencing popular culture is inherently childish. However, I see these reactions as an opportunity to bridge the cultural gap.

COSMIC POP?

Cosmic Pop is a term I coined to describe the artistic fusion of the 1990s/2000s Wacky Postmodernism (Wacky Pomo) with the rich aesthetics of Latin America. 'Cosmic' denotes a connection to the cosmos and all universes, embodying greatness and intensity as they intertwine with popular culture. Wacky Pomo is a playful rebellion against traditional styles with bold, almost acidic colors. However, the exaggerated and expensive-looking "funk" in the television programs during my upbringing felt strangely disconnected from the vibrant reality of Southern California street art and the colorful domestic spaces I grew up around. Cosmic Pop is to elevate beyond representation. It infuses the playful energy of Wacky Pomo with the lived experience of Latin American aesthetics, resulting in a visual form that celebrates everyday objects and cultural

traditions. My attempt serves as a form of cultural reclamation and reinterpretation of traditional Latin American aesthetics in a more contemporary context.

I grew up at the peak of Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and Disney Channel Wacky Pomo era. The visuals that raised me likely impacted the work I am developing now. But if I really want to dig deeper into this time of my personal life, the root of the obsession with these characters and aesthetics has always been around me, but in a different form. Looking into how the streets of Southern California are decorated or even advertised, there is a cycle of using the desire of popular media for personal and even consumerist use.

I have a photo album on my phone titled 'PIKACHUS OF THE WORLD,' where I have gathered snapshots of bootleg Pikachus I've encountered over the years. Pikachu is the most iconic and memorable character of the Pokémon franchise, having become a global phenomenon with a significant impact on Latin American communities in the United States and throughout Latin America since the show's introduction in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Aside from being a show made for children, Pokémon has boosted the economy with merchandise sales and video game purchases and assisted local businesses and salespeople with just the appropriation of a Pikachu. The typical structure of a Pikachu is usually a yellow creature with red cheeks, googly eyes, and long pointed ears that have taken the form of hats, keychains, piggybanks, stickers, and more.

I've always found comfort in the presence of familiar characters and symbols in spaces that feel like home. Seeing these visual signifiers in public areas creates a sense of safety and belonging, serving as reminders of the cultural sphere in which I reside. This familiarity plays a crucial role in the collective experience of finding home in the United States. It's remarkable to think about the lifespan of these characters and how they seamlessly insert themselves into our

everyday spaces, becoming more than just images, but integral parts of our lives. They adorn our walls as roommates, add personality to our decor, and, for some, become a necessity for happiness. They transform from decorations to companions while changing the landscape at the same time.

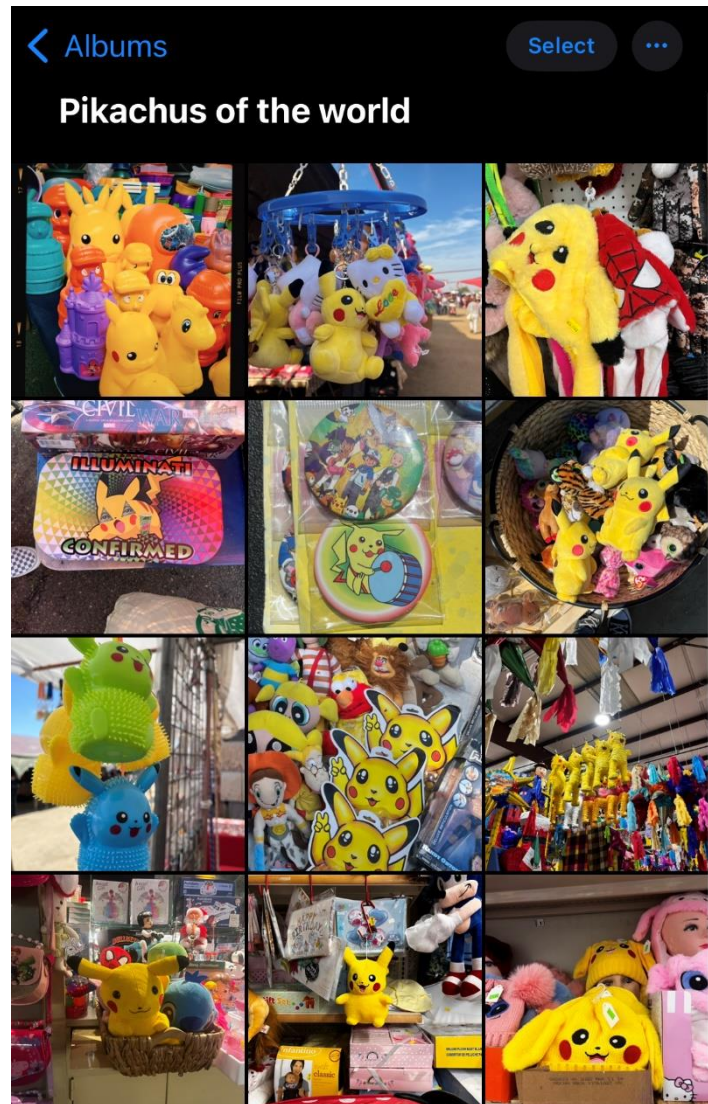


Figure 4. A screenshot of my photo album, 'Pikachus of the world'.

CHAPTER 2: FINDING HOME

ENCANTO AND MIGRATION

I often reflect on Disney's 2021 animation, *Encanto*⁵, a tale set in Colombia that resonates deeply with the Latin American diaspora and their experiences finding new homes in places like Southern California. The story centers around the Madrigal family and their enchanting home, which shares common threads with the stories of diasporic communities. Alma and Pedro, young parents to infant triplets, flee to escape danger in their village, mirroring the migrations that have brought many families to Southern California.

We see how Alma loses Pedro to attackers, but a miraculous event occurs when the candle she carries lights up with magic, offering refuge and a new home for her and the babies. Casa Madrigal, their magical home, symbolizes the diasporic experience while preserving cultural traditions. *Encanto* captures the strength and the cultural experiences of many in the diaspora as they establish their new homes.

Much like the fictional characters in *Encanto*, my family experienced an intense escape from their home countries. In 1990, my father fled El Salvador during the violent, twelve-year civil war that claimed the lives of over 75,000 civilians. He was fifteen at the time of migration and came alongside his cousins, where they found refuge in the San Fernando Valley, California. Similarly, my mother and her family also sought a new beginning in the same neighborhood after leaving Guatemala in 1989. Their decision to leave resulted from my grandfather's killing years earlier. As my family left behind their painful pasts and losses, they sought a new start in the San Fernando Valley, where they hoped to heal and rebuild.

HOMEMAKING

Homemaking embodies the transformation of a house into a welcoming, comforting home. It is beyond the practical tasks of cooking, cleaning, and decorating, but forging a sense of belonging, nurturing relationships, and creating a haven that is not only physically comfortable, but emotionally secure. This process involves more than the arrangement of furniture, but crafting memories, traditions, and a shared sense of identity.

In the past two decades, the concept of immigrant homemaking has undergone a significant transformation, as stricter deportation and detention policies began in the United States in the 1990s. These policies have cast a shadow of uncertainty over immigrant families, making the purpose of stability and belonging more challenging. The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks also introduced a new era of heightened “security” measures. While these measures were passed with national security in mind, they complicated the immigrant experience, further limiting the ability of newcomers to establish themselves comfortably in their new homes. This shift has granted the government increased authority over determining who can remain in the country and who may face detention, making it increasingly difficult for immigrant families to establish their homes and lives in the United States.

Mechanisms to prevent homemaking include hostile and racist conditions that make daily existence and the possibility of spatial mobility difficult and dangerous. This can lead to mass deportation and the criminalization of immigrants. This is commonly seen in rural towns throughout the United States, unlike the city of Los Angeles. This sanctuary city has developed a strong infrastructure that advocates for immigrant rights.

Homemaking, integration, and assimilation are different approaches concerning immigrants' adaptation to a new environment. Homemaking involves creating a sense of home

while maintaining one's original cultural identity, while integration aims for the coexistence of multiple cultures in a host society. In contrast, assimilation is the full adoption of the host culture at the expense of the original culture.

The concept of 'not normal' finds no place within the confines of one's home. *Home* is an environment that does not demand perfection nor subject one to judgment or comparison with others. Instead, it offers security, familiarity, comfort, and a reassuring sense of control. It serves as a sanctuary and provides hope and future-building. Paolo Boccagni and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo state, "Home can be defined as "a special kind of relationship with place", which involves both materiality and the realm of emotions, memories and symbols."⁶

In this context of immigrant homemaking, the preservation of cultural identity takes on particular significance, and this process often leads to the development of specific subcultures within immigrant communities. These subcultures serve as vital spaces for maintaining and celebrating the customs, traditions, and languages of their countries of origin. They become essential for mutual support and connection, allowing newcomers to bridge the gap between their roots and the demands of their new environment. Subcultures within immigrant communities often organize gatherings, festivals, and events that become integral to their sense of belonging and identity. They are a testament to the strength of individuals and families who, despite the challenges posed by evolving immigration policies, continue to find ways to cultivate a sense of home and community in the face of change and uncertainty.

FAMILIAL GATHERING IN CONNECTION WITH HOMEMAKING

Familial gatherings are crucial in lessening the difficulties of settling in a new place. Events where immigrant families can come together reinforce a sense of belonging and the

ability to connect and share life and its experiences. It is essential to maintain unity, especially in a place where our belonging is questionable due to cultural identity.

These get-togethers also become a platform to celebrate and carry on traditions to pass down to the younger generations and prevent losing connections to one's roots. The homemaking process involves nurturing memories and practices, which is possible with parties and celebrations. Positive memories become a way to balance the negative impacts of immigration.

“There is a gendered component to the work of making home and establishing community claims and resources, with women often doing the bulk of this work.”⁷ This observation resonates with my family, where events are typically female-dominated. The women take charge of sending out invitations, preparing the food, managing the children, and deciding on decorations.

I often think back to when my mother would propose a “no reason at all party,” simply wanting an excuse to dress up and spend time with the family. This always felt silly at the time, as I assumed there should be a reason to gather (I now realize I was wrong). Still, I now reflect on her desire and almost craving for togetherness.

Migration and settling in a new place often require sacrifices from both men and women. Women, in particular, are often relegated to the role of homemakers, keeping them confined to the house as they care for children, cook, and clean, but sometimes even work outside the home to contribute financially. This role can make it challenging for women to socialize and build community beyond the house, leading to a strong inclination to prioritize gatherings with loved ones in a closer setting.

DAD'S NOTES

“I think every immigrant in this country knows that you can eat English and digest it so well that you will shit it out, and to some people, you will still not speak English.”

-Karla Cornejo Villavicencio in *The Undocumented Americans*

Language is one of the most significant challenges during the migration and integration process. Based on my own experience and conversations with others, the inability to speak and understand the language around you can be traumatic. It can make you feel isolated, marginalized, and insignificant, as if you don't belong.

My parents both learned the English language and, in my opinion, speak it well—so well that after years of practice, their English is far more advanced than their Spanish. Their accent is beautiful, as it is a reminder of their mother tongue and their journey. My father unknowingly documented his English learning process in his notebook, which dates all the way back to 1999.

I found the notebook in a box containing old bills and mail ads as my parents decluttered the house. The inside of this notebook felt like a treasure, as I was able to get a glimpse of my dad and his responsibilities when he was 26 years old, the same age I am right now. The notebook contained his insurance record for his 1978 Toyota Supra, his incomplete job applications, love letters between him and my mother, my scribbles as a toddler, birthday party grocery and invite lists, and an English-Spanish translation book and guide he followed.

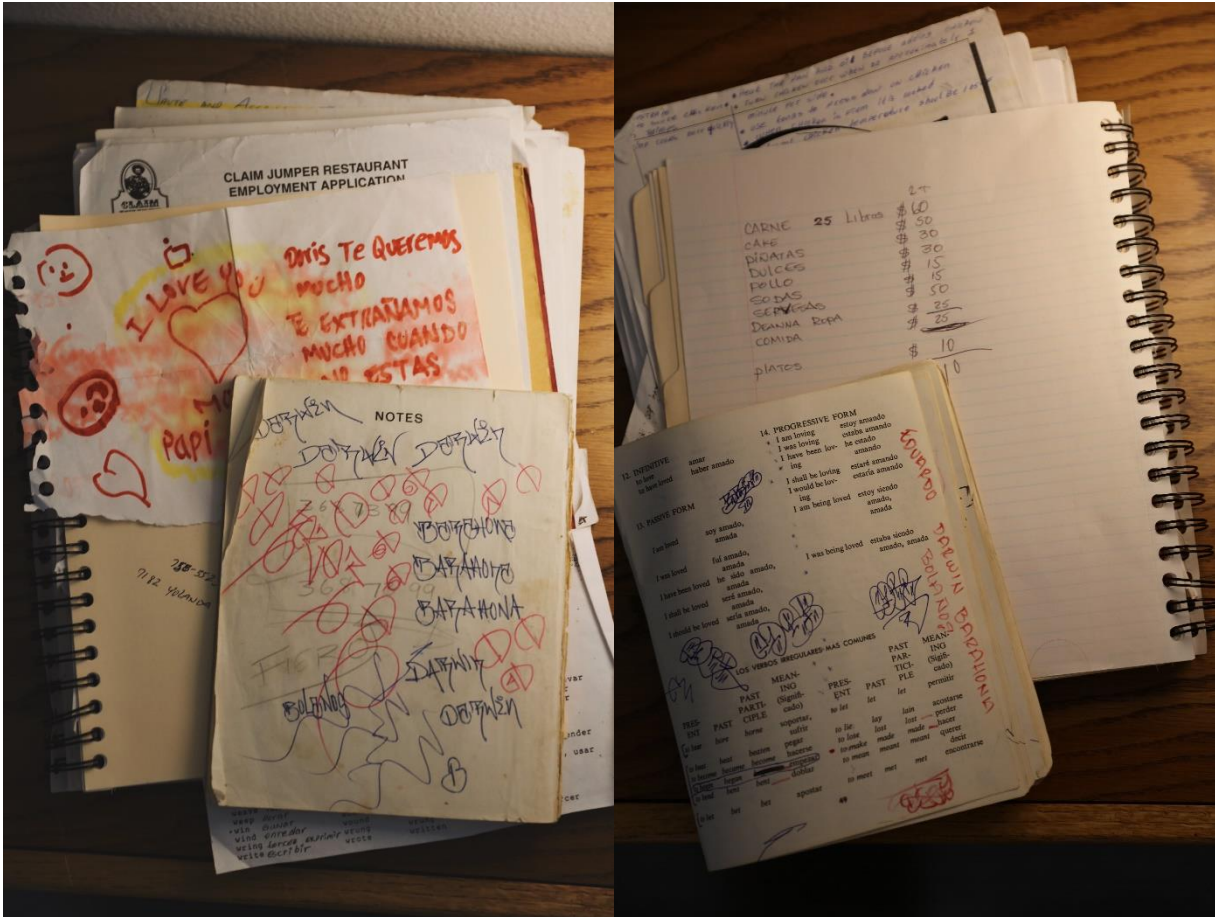


Figure 5. My dad's notebook.

This notebook became crucial to the work I will present in this thesis. It serves as a reminder of my background, family histories, and the desire for home in a new place. The writings and lessons found in the confines of this notebook, in conjunction with the visual and material elements of the work, reveal how language shapes and is shaped by these memories.

CHAPTER 3: ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER

ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER

At the start of my studies at UCSD, my practice consisted of public installations in the streets of my grandmother's neighborhood in Guatemala and around my home in Bakersfield. I constructed paper-cut banners similar to ones seen at birthday parties, which contained endearing phrases said during the departure of the home. They were placed over vibrant architecture -- cyan-colored bricks, hot pink stucco, and green staircases -- where they were left to fade and deteriorate, or perhaps be ripped off the site since it was only being held by packaging tape.

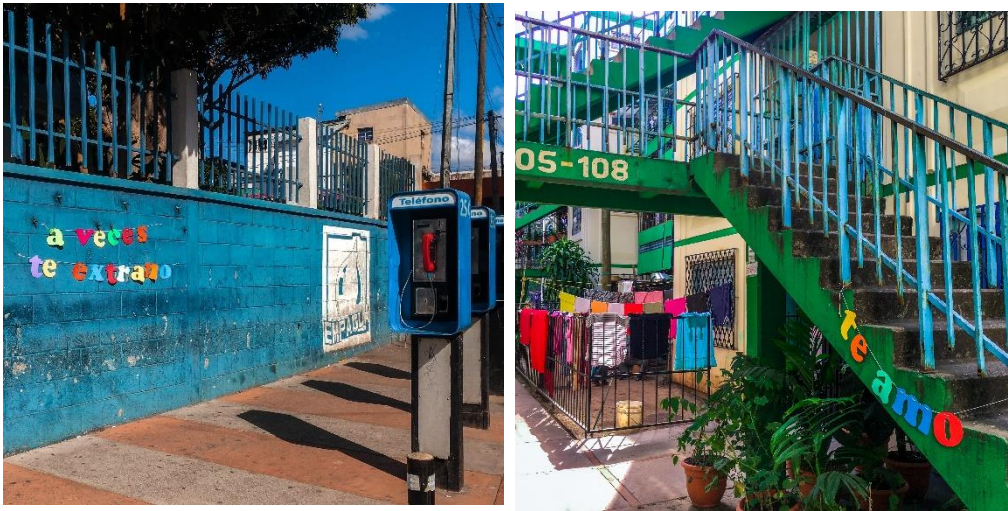


Figure 6. *a veces te extraño* (2020), *te amo* (2020)

Revisiting my earlier statement, my current practice is characterized by its labor intensity and multidimensionality. The work has taken a different form while continuing to highlight and call on the aesthetics of these specific locations and times in history. What was once disposable and had a lifetime of a few days is now a hard structure, matching the palette and durability of the architecture while also incorporating text and images.

ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS GLITTER took shape at the end of my first year when I began to manipulate and illustrate over images of my family archive. Although the title didn't come to me until May 2023, I was fixated on the concept of over-sensualizing and fragmenting images that convey themes of care, gathering, tenderness, and celebration. The over-sensualizing creates a stronger sense of significance and connection that elevates the images beyond representation and turns them into almost reflections of memory and emotion.

I began to take note of the many photos that were within reach and noticed the necessity of documenting events and self. My parents had a plastic storage bin of hundreds of photographs they documented during their youth in the 1990s and on. Some of these photos had writing on the back intended to be shared with others, but never had the opportunity. Others were labeled for individuals other than my parents but ended up in their possession. There were also photos of family members whose names were no longer remembered. Yet, these images found a place in the hands of strangers. Engaging with this archive wasn't just about documenting events and individuals—it became a process of redefining my identity within my family's history. While not captured by me, these images served as a mirror reflecting my rediscovery and reinterpretation.

I question the then and the now, how these photographs exist and are interpreted in the present day, and the evolution of their significance. What aspects of those times still resonate today, and what has perhaps lost significance, no longer requiring documentation? I am stuck in the candidness of imperfect photographs, the blurred, the desire to pause a time in space. These times of digital and phone cameras have taken spontaneity away and made discarding the “bad photos” too easy.

A party is energetic and almost unpredictable. It's challenging to control what appears in the frame and what doesn't. The lighting is often beyond the photographer's control, adding to

the spontaneity of it all. In a group photo, there are never enough eyes to ensure everyone looks their best, and there's no time to waste, even if a child is running in the background. The chaos of the party stands in contrast to the desire for control over personal spaces, where each framed photograph represents a carefully curated story that embodies cherished memories and personal narratives.

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING FRAMED

My father never let us hang frames on the walls in our home. I believed he thought driving a nail in the wrong spot could bring the house down. As a teenager, all I longed for was for my room to be the place that represented who I felt I was at the time. It would change as quickly as my phases came and went. I remember wanting to hang my paintings and picture frames on the wall, as I thought they deserved more than to lean against the wall over the dresser. I would find loose nails or thumbtacks in the little sink and save them on my desk, and when my father left for work at 4:30p.m., I would push the nails into my bedroom walls with my mom's high heels as makeshift tools.

The ability to adorn walls with framed photographs seemed like a symbol of wealth to me, as my dad was always so meticulous about what got to be on the wall and what was not. I would go into my friends' homes and adore their collaged, professional family portraits down the hallways and, in my mind, compare them to the taped 4x6 photographs in the little sink, or the only three frames in our hallway: one that held a poster of the Super Mario Bros., a baby portrait of me, and a built-in collage picture frame that I am sure still has the default family in one of the slots.

This leads to the question of who and what earns the privilege of being framed? It is a bit ironic, as the phrase “to be framed” is typically associated with the wrongful accusation of a crime, but could it be reclaimed as a symbol of personal significance and belonging?

GLAMOUR, GIFTING GIVING, AND GLITTER CANDY GRAMS

During my second year, I began to pay more attention to posed photographs my mother and her siblings took during their teen years in the Valley. Glamour shots were quintessential to the lifestyle of the Latinx youth in Los Angeles, embodying a unique blend of personal expression and cultural identity, while also capturing their beauty and confidence. My mother would tell stories of the days her and her siblings would randomly decide to get portraits done. They would arrive as they were, in their casual tank tops and white tees, making no attempts to alter their genuine style. After purchasing numerous wallet-sized photos of themselves, they would trade them like Pokémon cards or mail them out to family members. I am intrigued by the lifecycle of these portraits, from their creation and circulation in the past to their current perception and existence.

On my last trip to Guatemala, I fell in love with the camiones, or chicken buses, that ran the streets. They were gorgeous, so glam with a vibrant paint job, insane pinstriping, and details like no other. The bus' life is interesting because they are immigrants from the United States. After they live their 10 to 15 year lifespan serving public schools, they retire and are auctioned in countries throughout Latin America, where the engines are gutted and replaced to start over. There was a sweetness to the buses as they were often dedicated to the women and children of the owners. Their names, usually plastered on the face of the bus in a beautiful cursive reminiscent of the nameplate and gold jewelry, were a finishing touch. The interiors are also decorated with religious symbolism, popular culture, and small photographs of their loved ones

on the dash. These dedications inspired the following small series that boosted me to where I stand in my practice right now.

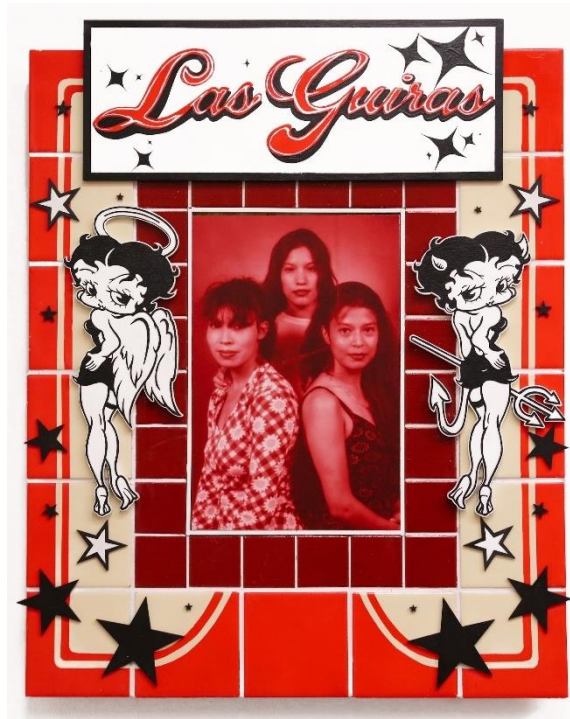


Figure 7. Las Guiras

Las Guiras is one of my favorite pieces to date, as it was a pivotal moment in my practice. Through this piece, I came to a profound realization about the significance of materials in my practice and how I wish to approach the integration of photos, text, and iconography. Constructed from ceramic tile, grout, and paint, *Las Guiras* introduced me to the nature of this medium, which requires patience and an understanding to manipulate.

Tile has a history in Central America, particularly among the Indigenous peoples. The Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas were known for producing decorative tiles. Over time, tile production in Latin America began to incorporate a mix of traditional and contemporary styles. Beyond its historical context, ceramic tile embodies qualities of permanence and durability, making it ideal for architecture.

Ceramic tiles are versatile, water resistant, easy to maintain, and, most importantly, cost-effective. In Guatemala, for instance, sinks and laundry areas are typically utilitarian and plain, often made of concrete. However, in my grandmother's apartment, she chose to embellish her sink with peachy-pink tiles, adding a touch of glamour and beauty to the otherwise mundane object.

Similarly, my parents did the same after purchasing their first home in the United States. They removed all the carpeting and installed a shine to the floor, with tiles I thought were so cute as a kid as they carried the shape of what reminded me of stars and suns. They would tell me that this made their house high-class and more beautiful.

In Las Guiras, I contemplate tile as more than just a durable material; I view its use as a way to elevate space and objects. I see a parallel between the remodeling of plain yellow school buses and the use of tiles to redo the interiors of homes. This ceramic window is a portrait of my mother and aunts, who immigrated to the United States from Guatemala in the 1990s as children. This frame brings together a particular moment in time that transcends between households in both Southern California and Guatemala.

It is adorned with stars and the iconic Betty Boop, like the buses I pulled and reimagined the design from. Still, it is reminiscent of the personalization of the home's interior. To personalize means ownership. When something feels personalized, it is like it was made just for you, enhancing attachment. However, the ability to gift an icon symbolizes care and connection, emphasizing the phrase, “to be known is to be loved.”

On my birthday, I sometimes receive candygrams and messages from distant relatives on Facebook. They are twinkly GIFs of characters like Mickey Mouse, Tinker Bell, or Winnie the Pooh with a sweet phrase attached. I love how one can find the time to search Google for the

perfect GIF to send you as a reminder that they love you and that God is watching over you. These are the only gifts that can be given due to separation. But what if it moves outside of a note or candygram and takes shape as a birthday party table cover, bed sheets, or a Valentine's Day balloon? Do they still harbor the same level of admiration?



Figure 8. Candy Gram found on Google

It is apparent that holding onto imagery and the vibrant aesthetics of popular culture is not childish. When a whole demographic is forced to take on adulthood before their teen years begin, these become objects meant to heal and fill voids created by separation, distance, and time.

TEAM ROCKET'S TWINKLE

We can start this paragraph with a basic question: what is a star? In essence, the concept of a star goes beyond its physical form to represent a profound truth: the interconnectedness of all existence. It reminds us that everything in the universe is inherently connected despite differences in appearance or form. The absence of a defined star shape is still radiant and bright enough to follow. It can create a path or purpose while emphasizing the idea of infinite possibility and unknown futures.

Stars are born from clouds of gas and dust that dance in the night sky eternally. They surpass many lifetimes but are not immortal. In the grand dance of the universe, a supernova bursts, releasing stardust like glitter across space. The star is reborn on Earth with newfound possibilities to embrace, give, and find its rightful place among us.

I often contemplate the significance of a geometric star, considering where it is seen and its power. It remains ephemeral, subject to being easily gifted or revoked. Given permission, it can assign value to anything. However, beneath its appearance lies a simple truth: the star, often linked with American symbolism, serves as a cover-up, tricking people into believing in the unity and worthiness of the land it represents.

Stars find place in the work as they dance with each other and reflect back to you. The star has always been the ultimate shape. They are the border of the photographs and function like a golden star sticker that adorns images of memory. They are scattered like confetti or glitter on the floor after the party. They are the cosmos and traces of memories that linger after the festivities have ended.

LIGHTING CANDLES



Figure 9. Lighting Candles

This triptych is one of the only few in the gallery where the photos presented are ones I took myself. Serving as both the orchestrator of the event and the photographer, I immersed myself in the roles of host and documentarian—a spontaneous and intimate three-person event set against the unknown backdrop of my parent's dining room.

I purchased a ten-dollar cake from the Food4Less around the corner and decor from the 99 Cent Only store, just announced the closure of every single one of its locations due to inflation post-COVID. The 99 manages to feel stuck in time, as its interiors are frozen in an era and occasionally offer deadstock and forgotten merchandise from the late 2000s. The places where I purchase my supplies are important, as it felt necessary to do it the way my mother used to.

The scene unfolds, with the focal point being the adorned table. The funky table cover and cheap party blowers take the stage with the sprinkled cake as it is lit and sliced. The three duo-toned images were screen printed on ceramic tile, as these moments are now stained and a part of the architectural material. The home is a silent witness to the emotions and experiences that happen within it.

Cutting the cake at a birthday party is essential to the timeline. It is the only part during the celebration where all guests unite, as the attention is directly on an honored person. The birthday cake is the centerpiece of festivities, as it symbolizes the passage of time, shared connections, and the celebration of existence itself.

The triptych demands attention with its grand scale, each measuring four by five feet as they stand closely to each other. Each tile in the work was separately printed on and later pieced together like a puzzle. Grout holds the tiles in place, creating a grid like a dancefloor. The tiles were laser etched, cutting out stars like metallic confetti, warping and reflecting shimmering fragments of light.

BALLOONS ON THE CEILING AFTER THE APARTMENT WEDDING IN RESEDA



Figure 10. *Balloons on the Ceiling After the Apartment Wedding in Reseda*

While creating *Balloons on the Ceiling After the Apartment Wedding in Reseda*, I was drawn to the reflections in my dining room, particularly the long mirror behind the table. The work is a fragment of a photograph from my parents' apartment wedding in 2003. Rather than focusing on the event itself, the picture shifts attention to the aftermath—the lingering remnants of the party. The balloons hang from the ceiling and, over time, gradually descend, coming closer to eye level. As they lower, they signal the need to discard them, marking the end of celebration.

This work is long, spanning 8 feet, and it stays in your periphery when you walk along it, inviting subtle play as you can catch glimpses of your reflection through the dancing stars scattered across the surface. Another leading layer is a scanned portion of my father's Spanish-English book: the words "become" and "leave" in their current and past tense, accompanied by my father's penmanship as he practiced the language. "Become" is a signifier of growth and

integration. The continuous growth of experiences – as "leave" speaks to the ephemeral nature of moments. Together, they are a cycle and a part of releasing the past.

EL FUTURE



Figure 11. El Future

El Future is also a close-up of my parents' apartment wedding. The photo depicts the groom holding his bride shortly after they tied the knot. They are in the dining room, with the baby's breath and daisy bouquet in front of them and the kitchen in the backdrop. You can peep at the box of Pizza Hut on the counter, as that is what was served to the guests of the night, along with my grandmother's tamales. Overlaid on this scene is an excerpt from the Spanish-English translation book, introducing "the future" in simple tense through an example sentence, "I will wear that dress tomorrow," explaining how to express determination and promise.

The title 'El Future' initially appears as a playful blend of Spanglish. Yet, it carries a deeper significance, hinting at reflections on language and culture. The work goes beyond the

photograph and the translation book, integrating my father's sketches, lovingly created within the pages of the notebook, where my mother's name is frequently found. This interplay suggests the connection between language, memory, and identity.

THEY STILL HAVE THE ANIMATRONICS AT THE NORTHRIDGE LOCATION

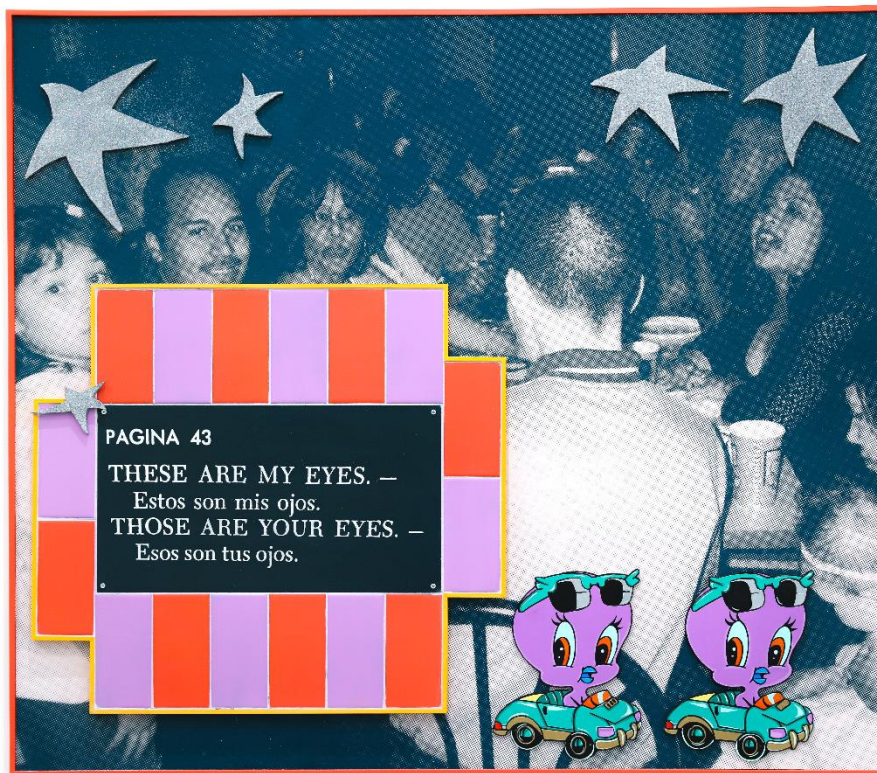


Figure 12. **THEY STILL HAVE THE ANIMATRONICS AT THE NORTHRIDGE LOCATION**

While all the works in the exhibition focus on gatherings within the home, this particular piece stands out as it prompts reflection on where we gather when home is not the setting. The background photo captures a moment from my father's side of the family, gathered together at a Chuck E. Cheese party. This shift from the intimacy of the home to a public space like Chuck E. Cheese reflects more significant societal shifts, including white flight. During the era of white

flight, as white families moved to the suburbs, commercial spaces like Chuck E. Cheese became not just places for entertainment, but also symbols of changing community dynamics. Despite efforts to integrate into higher social spheres, spaces like Chuck E. Cheese are often stigmatized as 'low class' or 'tacky,' perpetuating stereotypes and biases that persist regardless of location or context.

This photo is accompanied by the translations for "These are my eyes" and "Those are your eyes." The words function in many ways, as they are bold and pierce like the eyes in the image looking back at you. This stand-off between personal narrative and external perception is further emphasized by the vibrant hot pink and purple tile pattern and the recurring image of Tweety bird. These elements are aesthetic choices and deliberate reflections of the Hispanic-populated neighborhoods, where Chuck E. Cheese locations are often found.

SAVE ME CANDY!



Figure 13. Save Me Candy!

Save Me Candy! depicts the cake-cutting ritual overlaid with imagery of Candy Candy, an iconic manga character that captured the hearts of Latin American audiences in the 1980s. As one of the first Spanish-dubbed anime series to achieve widespread success, Candy Candy paved the way for subsequent beloved titles like Astroboy, Heidi, Sailor Moon, and Dragon Ball Z, solidifying its place as a pioneer in the region's anime fandom.

For my mother, Candy Candy was the quintessential television program of her youth, serving as a bonding experience for her and her sisters. Fast-forward to the present day, there has been a revival of interest in this anime character. The children of women who grew up in Latin America during the 1980s have taken to organizing Candy Candy-themed birthday parties for

their mothers. However, with the decline in its popularity and merchandise availability, these celebrations often rely on DIY printed banners and decorations sourced from online images. The text 'take care of themselves, among ourselves,' combined with the imagery of Candy and a birthday party, highlights the importance of support and self-sufficiency within communities.

DAD'S GROCERY LIST

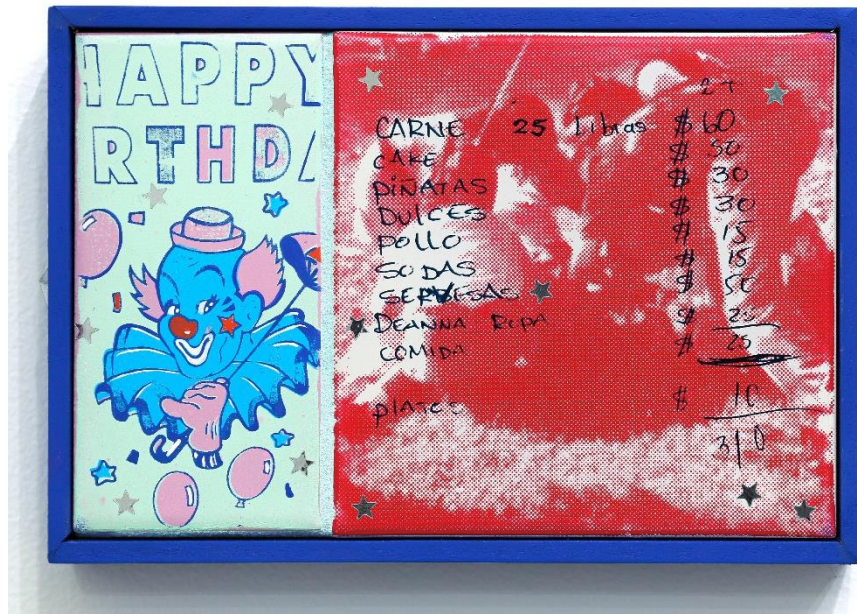


Figure 14. Dad's Grocery List

Dad's Grocery List is the smallest piece to date. It is the most true to scale as it is drawn directly from my father's journal entries from 1999, when he was 26, the same age I am now, nearly a decade after his migration to the United States. The list is simple, as he made an estimate of what my second birthday party would cost him and my mother. What I found of interest in this list is the unintentional representation of integration, seamlessly merging both English and Spanish languages. The text lays over the image of the party moments after the pinata broke and the children gathered to collect the candies.

NEXT TIME I SING WITH YOU

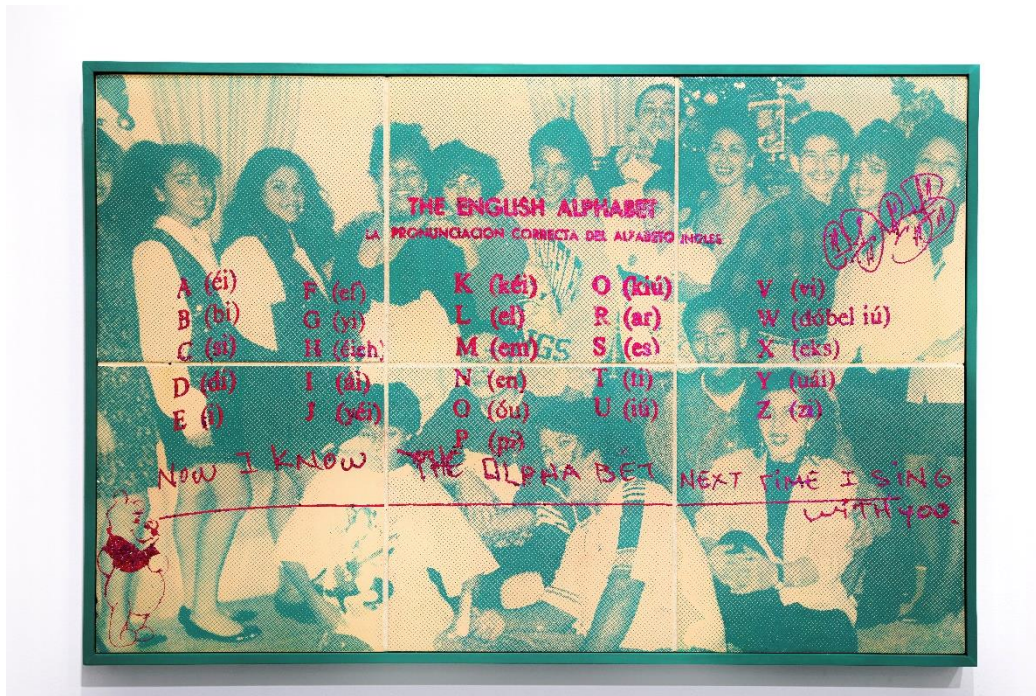


Figure 15. Next Time I Sing With You

This piece was the last one completed for this exhibition. However, the writing included erased my doubts when contemplating whether to include text with images. Something in my dad's writing, "NOW I KNOW THE ALPHABET NEXT TIME I SING WITH YOU," had me revisit that page in the book over and over again. I cried with the phrase and only imagined my young father happy he had learned his English alphabet and could recite with me as I was also starting to learn to speak. I think of the ability to learn a new language as another door opened, granting access to more people and opportunities for growth. However, it could also be a wall as it is quite literally one of the first phases of assimilation.

My father has always had a strong desire for "American-ness." He told me about the times he watched the planes fly over his home as a child and wished he could be on the next flight to the United States. His fascination with 80s house music and his strange admiration for

Ronald Reagan were his initial connections to American culture. He claims he was always “American” when he was not American. He has always been ready to reject his Salvadoran background in the name of being American, even if that meant leaving behind a family who had not entirely started the assimilation process.

The photo printed is of my father and the family he migrated to the United States with. They are gathered for a group photo, lined up, some holding onto each other and others still in mid-conversation. My favorite part of the photo is my dad’s cousin in the back, as his hands shape the letter S, noting that he is part of el Sureños, a gang in Southern California. This detail reveals the complex reality of immigrant life—the allure of belonging to something greater, even if it meant joining a gang. It starkly contrasts my father’s dream of American life, highlighting the challenges and choices many immigrants face.

ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS GLITTER

Reflecting on this body of work post-de-installation has left me with many questions and realizations, specifically regarding my place in the web of “Latinx Art” and “American Art.” I think about the trajectory of Latinx-American Art, contemplating its evolution beyond the stereotypes that arose from the aesthetics of the 1980s and 1990s. How will it navigate away from these perceptions, and what will emerge? How does the digital age and social media impact shape these new experiences? What is the relationship between counterfeit and bootleg in the transition of assimilation and integration?

I began this project feeling my experiences were not enough to be considered one or the other. There has always been a weird necessity to have a label or try to fit into the stereotype of a label. *ALL I CAN LEAVE YOU IS THIS GLITTER*, posed the question: How valid are these

categories, and how do they apply to me and my practice? However, with that, I realized that my experiences, though not fitting neatly into predefined categories, are just as valid and significant.



Figure 16. Installation shot from the entrance.

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