



PASOS
NETWORK

NEPANTLA

Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts



Volume 1 • Issue 1 • Summer 2024

Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts

Volume 1, Issue 1 (Summer 2024)

ISSN: 2297-8858 (Online)

Copyright 2024

All rights reserved

No portion of this journal may be reproduced without the formal consent of *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture and the Arts*. The material published reflects the opinions of the artists and is not necessarily those of the editors.

SUBMISSION POLICIES:

Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture and the Arts seeks to promote the artistic expressions of faith, culture, and justice of undergraduate students. We are looking to highlight and publish those writers and artists who create from a space of liminality, embracing their status as “*ni de aqui, ni de alla*” (from neither here nor there). The PASOS Network invites students to submit any form of art that reflects the ways in which we engage in culturally responsive and sustaining practices that center the lived realities of students from minoritized communities. We invite undergraduate writers and artists to contribute to our journal, exploring the rich, complex, and other transformative experiences of navigating this liminal space.

Submissions are open to undergraduate students from all disciplines. Written works such as essays, poetry, short stories, personal narratives and reflections should be submitted in word format. Visual arts such as photography, digital art, paintings, and other visual creations should be submitted in the highest resolution possible and JPEG or PNG format. Writers and artists should submit one online form for each of their pieces, along with its respective artist statement and an artist biography. All submissions must be original and previously unpublished.

Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts is published once a year by the PASOS Network, an entity of Dominican University (River Forest, IL).

Armando Guerrero Estrada, Director

PASOS Network

Dominican University

7900 Division St.

River Forest, IL 60305

USA

Cover image from *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture and the Arts*, Volume 1, illustrated by Shalom Borrallo. Used with permission of Oh Deer and Shalom Borrallo. All *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts* material © Dominican University/PASOS Network. Cover design by Shalom Borrallo Dominican University Alumna Class of 2024.

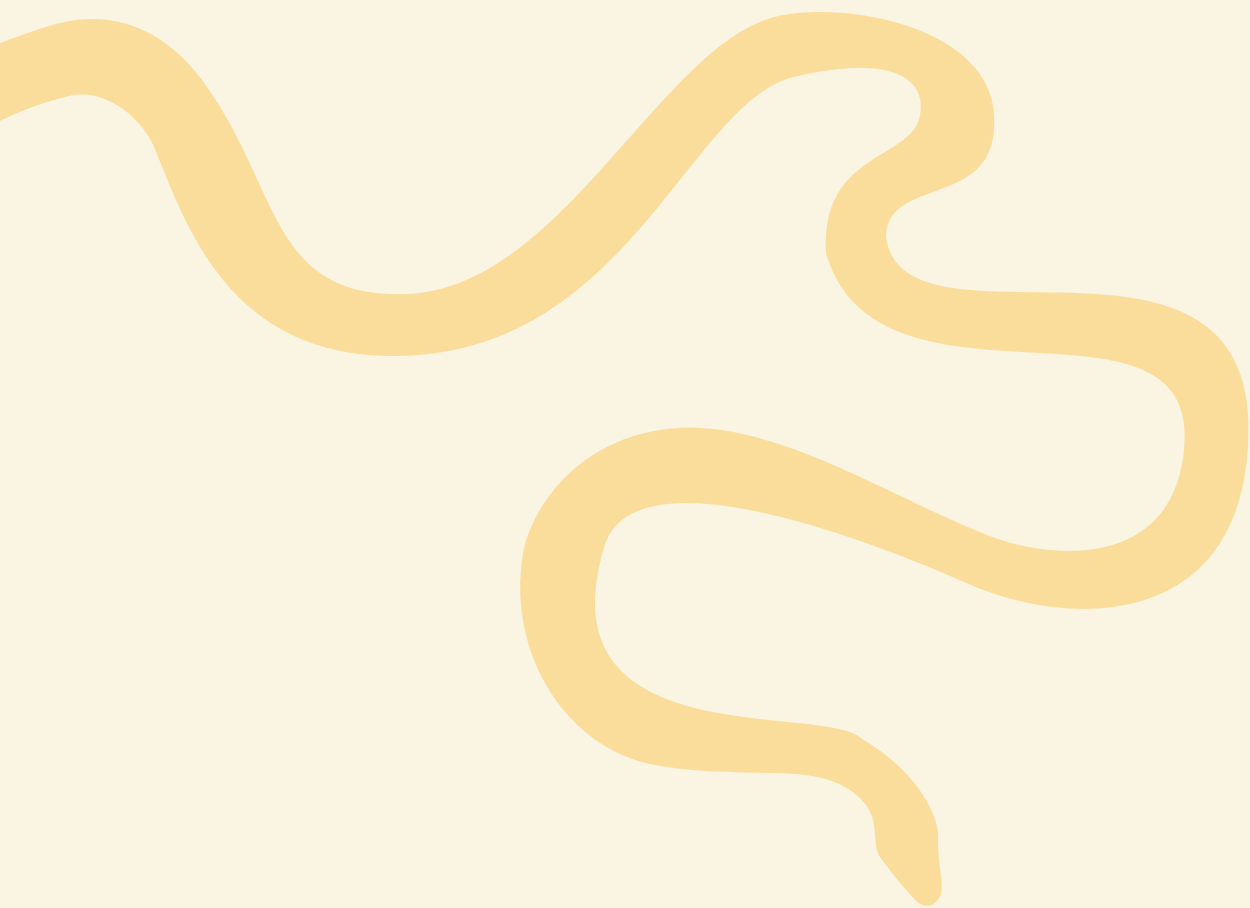


TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Message from the Director | 1 |
| Meet the Staff and Editors | 2 |
| What is <i>Nepantla</i> ? | 5 |
| <i>Carnaval del Barrio, Escuchando el Lío!</i> | 9 |
| Dr. Claudia Herrera-Montero | |
| <i>Esperanza for Tomorrow</i> | 12 |
| Monica Petek | |
| <i>Iluminando Mis Sueños & Mi Morenita</i> | 24 |
| Viviana Tellez | |
| <i>Pensamientos de una Niña Perdida</i> | 28 |
| Ximena Silva-Aguirre | |
| <i>Low Low</i> | 30 |
| Bryan Rivera | |
| <i>Sheets</i> | 34 |
| Madilyn Haughey | |
| <i>The Desire to Know and be Known</i> | 36 |
| Emily Reynoso Muñoz | |
| <i>Fight to Stay</i> | 38 |
| Alianna Alcala | |

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Self-Portrait & Chuparosa</i> | 42 |
| José González | |
| <i>Mi Rosario</i> | 46 |
| Elena Martínez | |
| <i>The Rivers Herstory</i> | 48 |
| Andrea Belmares | |
| <i>Community</i> | 52 |
| Faith Adedokun | |
| <i>The Violent Vanishing Act</i> | 56 |
| Monica Petek | |
| <i>Mis Lagrimas No Pertenezen</i> | 58 |
| Gabriela Corral | |
| <i>Struggles & Boys and Girls</i> | 62 |
| Ruby Cruz | |
| <i>Self Shape</i> | 68 |
| A'Shunti Tillman | |
| <i>Numbers</i> | 70 |
| Mariana Hernandez | |
| <i>La Bendición</i> | 74 |
| Maria Morales | |
| <i>Katya & Mi Virgencita</i> | 76 |
| Andrea Calderón | |
| <i>Tejiendo Conexiones</i> | 80 |
| Laura Espinosa | |

Message From the Director

A Celebration of Faith, Culture, and the Arts

The Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts began as an idea well before I joined Dominican University. I am indebted to the visionaries who laid the foundation for a national journal that celebrates the creativity and diversity of students across the country.

This inaugural issue could not have come to fruition without the incredible work of the following people: Emily Reynoso Munoz, Rosa I. Padilla Rincon, Tatiana Uram, Shalom Borrallo, Gloria Goray, and Maria Villanueva. Thank you to this fantastic team!

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Claudia Herrera-Montero, the first Latina, tenure-track professor of theology at Dominican University. It is fitting that we include Dr. Herrera-Montero's article, which served as the keynote presentation for the 2023 El Futuro is Here Conference, for in this presentation she celebrates *nepantla*, encouraging young adults to see the potential that lies within this liminal space. She states, "At the core of what it means to be human is to navigate 'in-between' spaces through the stories we live, the moments, seasons, or general states of our everyday lives." The art contained within this first issue most certainly reflects what's at the core of human existence. Additionally, Dr. Herrera-Montero's contribution underscores the role that mentors play in the lives of college-age students.

Accompanying, Dr. Herrera-Montero's presentation is Monica Petek's artwork titled, "Esperanza for Tomorrow." Petek, who was enrolled in Dr. Herrera-Montero's Abuelita Theology course, created this image that served as the backdrop during Dr. Herrera-Montero's keynote presentation. The three prominent mortarboards highlight the three central tenets of *mujerista* theology: la comunidad, la lucha, and permítanme hablar.

Within these pages, the reader will encounter the prose, poetry, photography, and graphic designs that center the *nepantla* experience: the experience of *in-betweenness*. While these artists understand and undergo experiences of *nepantla* in unique ways, they all express the profound theological concept of hope through the interlacing or weaving together of culture, faith, and justice. Grappling with themes such as Latinidad, belonging, migration, sexuality, gentrification, and community, the artists who responded to our call for submissions articulate many topics of relevance to undergraduate students throughout the country. **The PASOS Network is incredibly thankful to these students for uplifting these topics and for trusting us with their artwork.**

Armando Guerrero Estrada,
Director, PASOS Network
Division of Mission and Ministry
Dominican University

BEHIND THE SCENES



Director, PASOS Network

Armando Guerrero Estrada is PhD candidate in Theology and Education at Boston College. He currently serves as the inaugural director of the PASOS Network at Dominican University, where he also teaches in the theology department. As a DACAdmented theologian and administrator, his scholarship examines the interlacing

of Catholic higher education, theologies of migration, and immigrant literature. He holds a Master of Theological Studies from Vanderbilt University's Divinity School, where he also earned graduate certificates in Latin American Studies and in Religion & the Arts in Contemporary Culture, with an emphasis in U.S. Latinx literature.



Program Coordinator

Maria Villanueva holds a Master of Arts in Trauma-Informed Leadership from Dominican University and a Bachelor of Science in Business and Economics with a specialization in Business Management from North Park University. Maria is the Program Coordinator for the PASOS Network at Dominican University. She has served in the Illinois Student Assistance Commission as a Community

Outreach Specialist for high schools in the City of Chicago that have a high population of first-generation students. She also served as the College and Career Coach for Little Village Lawndale High School Campus and College Counselor for the Chicago Scholars Foundation.

Santa Rosa De Lima Fellow

Gloria Goray recently graduated with a Master of Social Work and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and minors in Criminology and French from Dominican University. They served as the Graduate Santa Rosa de Lima Fellow for the PASOS Network. Gloria also served in University Ministry as a Ministry en lo Cotidiano Fellow.



Through their work with organizations like Taller de Jose, Sarah's Inn, Rush, and Youth Services of Glenview, Gloria has immersed themselves in Chicago communities to learn more about their members, their needs, and the ever-present need for social justice.

Senior Graphic Designer

Shalom Borrallo is the Senior Graphic Designer and Illustrator for *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts*. She recently graduated from Dominican University with a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design and minor in Philosophy. Her brand Oh Deer is dedicated to courageously exploring art and design through multifaceted media. Shalom serves on the Board of Directors for Emory's House, a non-profit dedicated to cultivating community and providing resources for artists.





EDITOR

Tatiana Uram is a recent graduate of Dominican University, focusing in neurobiology, chemistry and sculpture. Her passion for the arts extends to graphic design and language arts. Naturally this led her to pursue a role in editing and lending her artistic eye for *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts*. As a first-generation immigrant she contributes a unique perspective on the multicultural struggle of balancing

fitting in and standing out. She believes that the expression of inner truths is an empowering process in the journey of embracing ones' origins. Art and faith uplift communities, which makes it easier to tackle the hardships present in societies all over the world.



EDITOR

Rosa I. Padilla Rincon is a senior at Dominican University, currently majoring in Sociology and Criminology. She is passionate about an array of social issues, particularly those surrounding the undocumented and LGBTQIA+ community. She has participated in movements like No Pride in Detention, organized a storytelling workshop featuring undocumented authors, and has spent her years at Dominican creating a safer

space for the undocumented community. She hopes to continue her various forms of activism as she works to become a social worker to advocate for those without a voice.



EDITOR

Emily Reynoso Muñoz is a junior at Dominican University majoring in painting with a minor in biology. Emily hopes to go into medical illustration in the future. You can find Emily's work online under the username paintbristle. Much of her work focuses on being comfortable within one's body at any angle and at any state. As the eldest daughter in a Hispanic household, Emily's work highlights the importance of positive representation

and healthy self-esteem. In addition to serving as a student editor for the *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts*, Emily is a student athlete and holds various leadership positions on campus.



What Is *Nepantla* ?

The *Nepantla: Undergraduate Journal of Faith, Culture, and the Arts* seeks to promote the artistic expressions of faith, culture, and justice of undergraduate students.

Nepantla, comes from a Nahuatl word that means “in-betweeness.” We seek to highlight and publish writers and artists who create from a space of liminality, embracing their status as “*ni de aqui, ni de alla*” (from neither here nor there). That can mean different things for different people. For some, it might mean the being from both the United States and another country. For others, it can be embodied in the navigating of obstacles unique to the experience of first-generation students for whom the university setting does not see their struggles.

The *nepantla* identity of our students also informs the ways in which they theologize; this journal will explore the many ways students engage with the divine through art and social justice. We consider this journal a radical act of decolonization in that it will highlight the voices of those for whom publishing has many barriers, including, but not limited to, perceptions on the capabilities of young students of color, who make up a large constituency of colleges and universities across the nation.







"El Lío is within you!"
Dr. Claudia Herrera-Montero



Dr. Claudia Herrera-Montero

Dominican University

Dr. Herrera-Montero is a Catholic practical theologian and assistant professor of theology at Dominican University. She is a native of Bogotá, Colombia where she pursued her undergraduate studies in International Relations and Political Sciences from Universidad del Rosario (Our Lady of the Rosary University). She holds an M.A. in Pastoral Ministries and a Ph.D. in Practical Theology from St. Thomas University in Miami, FL. Her scholarly work sits at the intersection of U.S. Latina/x theologies and practical theology. Her latest peer-review publications and presentations include Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the exploration of the faith identity, spirituality, and social contexts among first-generation college-age Latinas. Her research has also enabled her to better engage underrepresented communities in both the classroom and ministerial settings.

Dr. Herrera-Montero comes to Dominican University with an experience in Catholic Higher education since 2010. Before her faculty appointment, she served as a lay minister, director of campus ministry, and theology faculty in the Archdiocese of Miami. In addition, she has contributed to the formation of Hispanic Ministry leaders from the Dioceses of the Southeast. Dr. Herrera-Montero serves as the Secretary of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). As a Latina practical theologian, she draws from the spiritual and cultural wells of both the U.S. Latinx Catholic experience and the Latin American experience.

Carnaval del Barrio, ¡Escuchando el Lío!

Attending the Spaces of La Comunidad/Community,
La Lucha/The Struggle, and Permitanme Hablar/Allow Me to Speak

By Claudia Herrera-Montero, PhD¹

The following is a summary of the keynote presentation given at the 2023 El Futuro is Here Conference organized by PASOS Network on August 2, 2023, at Dominican University, Parmer Atrium. Academic sources have been cited as footnotes. For more information, visit: <https://www.dom.edu/about-dominican/mission-and-ministry/el-futuro-2023>

¡Buenos días!...I will invite you to put ourselves in the presence of God.

St. Mary's University Campus Ministry music team started singing the chorus of the song "Carnaval del Barrio!"² (from "In The Heights" Original Motion Picture Soundtrack).

Introductory Music: Students singing "*Carnaval del Barrio!*"

*I will talk a bit about the song "Carnaval del Barrio"...I used this part of the song "Carnaval del Barrio" not only because I wanted to think of a popular imagination of "haciendo lío" (making noise³), but also as a way of remembering that *el lío ya existe*. The noise already exists! It is already here! Just look around and among us! Esooo!!! Escuchemos el lío around us! We have to listen to it! We tend to say: Let's make some noise! Let's go out and *hagamos lío*...but what if the *lío* is already here, embodied and living within and among us and from el corazón of our communities?*

This presentation does not intend to speak for all the multilayered complexities within the Latinx communities and college-age students within the context of the United States and across the American continent. Also, this presentation is not a key formula to follow and apply to a larger audience. Rather, I would like to depart from my own lived experience as an immigrant Latina, living and sitting in-between multiple borderlands and my own social locations as a current university

¹Claudia Herrera-Montero, PhD. Assistant Professor of Theology. Rosary College of Arts and Sciences. Dominican University.

²Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Carnaval Del Barrio," *In The Heights* (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack), Atlantic Records, 2021, digital audio.

³*Haciendo Lío* (Making noise) is a popular phrase used by Pope Francis inviting young people to live out the joy of the Gospel.

professor and scholar within the context of the United States. Rather, this is to provide some insight and motivate the en conjunto reflection in the larger community, the church, and theological enterprise. Some of the stories and narratives that I will share are a result of my ministry of teaching and scholarship with college-aged Latina/x students in both South Florida and now the Midwest. As a Mujerista theologian [Hispanic-Latina women doing liberation theology], Dr. Ada María Isasi-Díaz would add: “*Permítanme Hablar! Allow me to Speak!*”

"Esperanza for Tomorrow" by Monica Petek

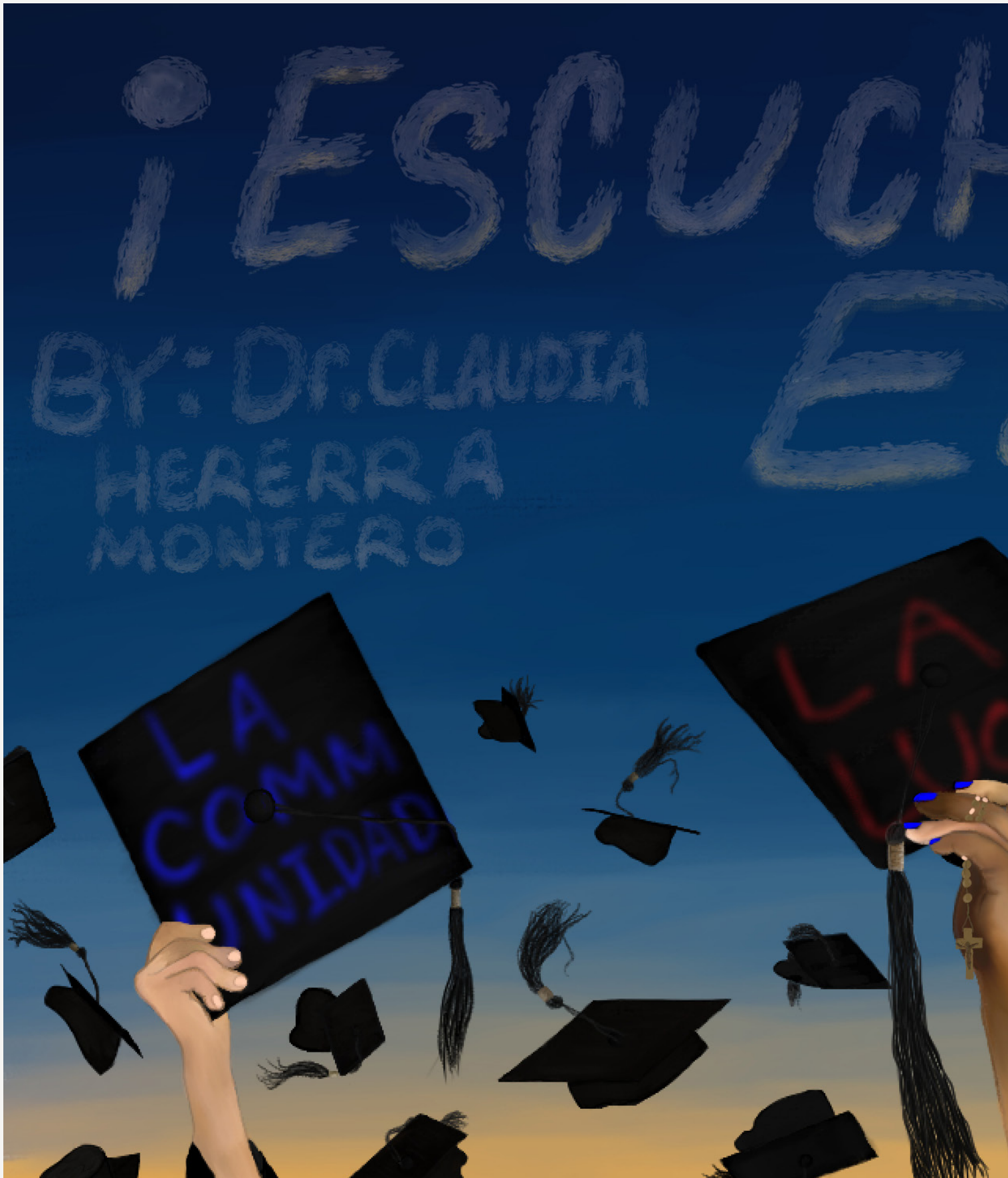
I am sharing with you this morning a design by one of my students in my course, “Prayer and Spirituality en lo Cotidiano (in the everyday).” Ms. Monica Petek is a Graphic Design Major [and now a theology minor] at Dominican University. As you look into Monica’s art design, I would like to ask you: What are some of your initial observations? How does this picture speak to you? What do you think is going on? I will invite you all to look at the particularities of her art.

Monica titled her art design, “Esperanza for Tomorrow.” This piece is a result of Monica’s creative interpretation and hermeneutic of the title of this keynote presentation. These are some of her words:

I always grew up feeling in between. I grew up as a first-generation Mexican-indigenous/Slovenian American. I hadn’t met anyone else who identified as a mixed Hispanic until high school. It wasn’t until recently that I learned about a new aspect of my identity that I had never known: I was more Russian than Slovenian. I never felt “Hispanic enough,” yet I still know nothing about my Russian heritage. I created “Esperanza for Tomorrow” to honor all Hispanic and Latinx students and acknowledge that our appearances and experiences are not a monolith. Citizens or not, first-generation American or fourth, we all share common threads in our unique journeys that unite us and push us forward into tomorrow.

Thank you, Monica!

Sometimes, we have been taught to leave who we are and our ordinary lives at the door of our professional and academic lives, when in reality, it is our lived experiences (*lo cotidiano*) and the social contexts where we come from that shape us, as ministers, theologians, professors, teachers, students—people in relationship with ourselves, one another, and ultimately in our relationship with the divine. Most of the time, our most intimate expressions of faith are embedded in the particularities and concreteness of our daily lived realities (*our cotidiano*).





SOURCE: Monica Petek, *Esperanza for Tomorrow*, 2024

This is why I am sharing a little bit of my story...It is incredible to think that precisely today, a year ago, *la familia* Herrera-Montero (I almost said *la familia* Madrigal! No, no, no...This is not the Encanto movie! but perhaps we will talk about Bruno!): My spouse Andres, our daughter Mariana, and I, were arriving in the City of Chicago, all the way from Pembroke Pines in South Florida. Pembroke Pines is located around a forty-minute drive north of Miami: The “place” of resounding sounds and smells of the Latine and Afro-Caribbean waters and culture. The place where Español, or even better, *Spanglish*, was reimagined with new *dichos*, or sayings, like “dale!,” “papo,” “chevere,” “ya tu sabes.” The place where *pastelitos*, *croquetas*, *arepitas*, *tequeños venezolanos*, and a *cortadito (cafecito)* from *una bakery* is never missed in a meeting or gathering. It is a place where the salsa music of Celia Cruz and the deep and rooted devotion to “la Cachita” or La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre has never been forgotten, but it is mystic and poetic. A place that, if you type it on the internet, will not show instant pictures of little Haiti, Hialeah, or Calle Ocho...but, most importantly to me, the place where my young daughter was raised, grew up, and still calls home. So, we arrived in Chicago while responding to a new calling as a family. Our hearts were filled with hope, new dreams, nostalgia, and tremble. Our second immigration story [after coming from Bogotá, Colombia, almost twenty years ago...] from that sacred space we called home, South Florida, to Chicago had just started, as we were facing new open doors and possibilities.

"Nepantla"

I want to pause momentarily and invite everyone to consider the in-between spaces. At the core of being human is to navigate “in-between” spaces through the stories we live, the moments, seasons, or general states of our everyday lives. In these spaces, it seems sometimes that we are not here nor there, *ni de aquí ni de allá, talvez de aquí pero no de allá, de aquí y de allá*, perhaps never here or there, nor this or the other. The in-between is a sacred space in the story of an immigrant *familia* and their *coraje* (courage) to leave their tierra de origen (a place of origin). The strength and the tremble to set out in haste, and then, the hopes for a better *mañana* (tomorrow). In the words of Monica’s art design: An “Esperanza for Tomorrow,” while holding on to the sacred memories, stories, narratives, and identities—carried in the heart of the *caminantes*.

Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa calls this space Nepantla. Have you heard of the word *nepantla*? This is a Nahuatl word from Mexico and Central America. In her essay, “Gestures of the Body: *Escribiendo para Idear*,” which is part of her book, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, she notes, “*Nepantla* is the point of contact *y el lugar between worlds*...

the place between words...between ordinary and non-ordinary spirit realities...”⁴ The pilgrimage of leaving behind yet moving forward, remembering and keeping in our hearts, struggling for identity yet becoming, dying to oneself beginning a new life, are some of the significant moments that newcomers, in our case an immigrant *familia*, have faced once we leave our place. My family and I encountered a place in which the social categories of language, immigration status, and ethnicity were foreign, new, and challenging to avoid. I did not anticipate that we would be reminded of these categories in our everyday lives. Even after almost half of my life of living, being, and becoming in a *tierra extranjera*, I constantly navigate the tension of being a Latina in the United States and now a *Colombiana* in the Midwest who immigrated from South Florida.

I have learned to honor my lived story, and I encourage my students to do so because my *nepantla* journey and space have shaped my lenses as a theologian and professor. My lived particularities and those of my communities have adjusted and humanized my lenses as I teach with my students and do *teología en conjunto*. And this is an embodied and incarnational act that speaks to and with an embodied Gospel and God’s embodied people. *What is your nepantla space? Or spaces? What in-between spaces do you navigate in the ordinary life, en lo cotidiano?*

Pause for music: Students singing “Carnaval del Barrio!”

College-age Latinx students in the “here” and “now”

I have had the opportunity to lead participatory-action research with college-age Latinx students, regardless of church participation and affiliation in the local church or any ministry. I have found, not only in my research with college-age Latinas but also within the classroom setting, that my students constantly navigate the tension of different worlds, social contexts, identities, and spaces that move parallel with one another and sometimes remain invisible. As I attend to the lived experience of my students, one of the contexts is the world of their families and *comunidades*, which is a re-imagination of the particular worlds and identities that their *familias/comunidades* brought with them from Latin America, but that is lived out here and now, and, therefore, in a new way. The other context is the world of the university, the U.S. educational systems, or the social imaginaries where they have learned to study. Moreover, this second world is the one that, in some cases, expects them to assimilate and succeed within specific parameters set by the established

⁴Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “PREFACE: Gestures of the Body—Escribiendo Para Idear.” In *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, edited by Ana Louise Keating (Duke University Press, 2015), 1-8.

culture. Every new semester, I meet new faces, extraordinary human beings, and active agents of the learning experience. Yet, I always wonder about the invisible spaces and identities my students have to navigate in their ordinary lives beyond the classroom but remain unseen in the public arena.

U.S. Latino/a/e/x theologies have departed from *lo cotidiano* (our everyday life), or the daily lived experience, and the concrete particularities of *la vida diaria* as a source of theology (the way we reflect about God and God's revelation in the ordinary). In recent volumes from the series *Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente*, fellow U.S. Latinx theologians claim on *lo cotidiano* or the daily lived human experience, and the concreteness of reality to rethink Christian theology *Latinamente*, a Christian theology where God reveals to God's people in the complexities of the ordinary, in relationship, and through culture.⁵ In my work and research, I dialogue with the work of *Mujerista* (or Hispanic women's liberation theology) and Latina theology, particularly the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz. This work intends "to bring a theology from the perspective of Latinas as an intrinsic element of Hispanic/Latino theology in the USA."⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz highlights the critical task of lived experience as a primary source of *Mujerista* theology, draws from the communal dimension of the human, and affirms the person in a relationship. María Teresa Dávila refers to Isasi-Díaz in her essay: "A 'Preferential Option': A Challenge to Faith in a Culture of Privilege" (which is part of the *Disruptive Cartographers Series*). Dávila writes, "In relationship, we come to understand more clearly how oppression works in people's lives, specifically in its gendered and racial dynamics."⁷ This is why this work raises critical questions of ultimate meaning and survival. This work inquires about our communities' humane living, thriving, and liberation. It takes to go to the grassroots in order to listen and unpack the particularities and concrete realities of the people. In the listening or attending process, Isasi-Díaz utilizes three *dichos* (sayings) from *lo cotidiano*. These phrases are *La Comunidad/La Familia* (Community/Family), *La Lucha* (the struggle), and *Permítanme Hablar* (Allow Me to Speak). Question: Do you have some *dichos* (sayings) that you use in the *everyday life*? *Hagamos lío!* Let's make some noise! *Dichos!*

⁵See: Miguel H. Díaz, ed., *The Word Became Culture, Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020).

⁶Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 1.

⁷María Teresa Dávila, "A 'Preferential Option': A Challenge to Faith in a Culture of Privilege." In *The Word Became Culture*, 64.

La Comunidad/La Familia (Community/Family), La Lucha (The Struggle), and Permítanme Hablar (Allow Me to Speak)

La Comunidad/La Familia: In my teaching and research as an Assistant Professor of Theology at Dominican University (which is a Catholic Hispanic Serving Institution of Higher Education), I have observed that the majority of my students are most likely the first generation obtaining a four-year college degree in the United States. Moreover, for the majority, their familias and *comunidades* represent a fundamental piece of their trajectory before and during college. As current groundbreaking research presents it, for example, the work of Dr. Hosffman Ospino, *la familia hispana* still faces numerous challenges as we observe its socio-economic and educational reality and trajectory in the United States. Therefore, when the first in the family is graduating, success is not an individual but a communal experience (that took not only *acompañamiento* but financial, communal, emotional, and spiritual efforts).

Since this past Spring semester, I have been teaching Abuelita Theology as part of the contemporary U.S. Latinx theological discourse and as a theological framework to reflect theologically on grassroots participatory action and communal wisdom. The figure of *la abuela* or *madres luchadoras* has become a common theme (for example, in teaching the faith and as role models of hope, resilience, service, community organizing, and solidarity). However, this is not the case for all my students in the classroom. In my abuelita theology course, *abuela* represents communal *acompañamiento* and grassroots wisdom. All of my students highlight through their reflections the critical role of their *comunidades* (parents, siblings, aunties/*tías*, friends/*amigxs*, *abuelitxs*, maestras/teachers, and so on) not only in their educational trajectory but also in the process and tension of discovering and shaping self-identity in light of the “*Nosotros*” (“we”). Latina theologian Dr. Michelle González notes that “who we are cannot be reduced to an isolated “I” but instead must be understood as an “I” that is organically linked to a collective “we.”⁸ Teaching this organically constructed course has been one of the most profound and life-giving experiences I have had as a theologian and professor. Even though most of the shared stories in the classroom are lived out in private spaces, these stories become communal wisdom and storied tradition. I teach with a greater community, walking together in faith and hope. My students’ lived stories of their

⁸Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Embracing Latina Spirituality: A Woman’s Perspective* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009), xiv.

families become communal sacred wisdom and storied traditions informed by people's ordinary lives. What are some of the particularities of your/our *comunidades*/communities? What are the concrete social locations we come from and serve with?

La Lucha/The Struggle: Recognizes more than just our communities' *luchas*/struggle and inquires to actively question and respond to the social categories that oppress our communities. Mujerista theology highlights the capacity of our communities when facing struggle. The "esperanza for tomorrow," as we see in Monica's art design, invites us to reflect that from the lens of a college-age Latina, La lucha is graduation. La *Comunidad* is graduation, *Permítanme* hablar (allow me to speak) is graduation. The hope for tomorrow!

La Lucha also correlates with our everyday spirituality. For example, when thinking about our community organizing in the struggle for a more humane living in our communities. *Comparsa y carnaval* can be the most intimate expressions of the soul, mind, and body. *Arte popular* (popular art) expresses cultural memory and identity. Storytelling is an expression of liberation. Orlando Espin reflects on traditioning and subversive hope⁹ through the popular religious expressions of *lo cotidiano*. In my research with college-age Latinas and in the classroom setting,¹⁰ I have found that *las expresiones populares de fe* (the popular expressions of faith) are examples of La Lucha. Some of these expressions are, home *altarcitos* (home altars), *devociones de la Virgencita, la comunidad de las y los santas y santos* (devotions to Mary and the Saints), the symbols as *medallitas, estampitas, rosarios* (religious medals, stamps, and rosaries), as well as the language they use in the everyday to communicate with their *familias* and the divine, are examples of both *Nepantla* and *La Lucha*. I want to speak of language as the incarnational dynamic of *la lucha*. The language of the heart embodies a deep spirituality, carrier of *recuerdos* (memory), and the lived experiences of a larger community. In the practice of participatory action research, particularly during the one-on-one dialogue with my students, the narratives are enriched by a transition between English and Spanish, particularly when naming the religious practices, devotions, and *dichos* (sayings) they learned in their

⁹See: Orlando O. Espín, *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

¹⁰See: Investigación-Acción Participativa en Lo Cotidiano: Una exploración teológico-práctica sobre la identidad religiosa de jóvenes universitarias latinas en el contexto estadounidense [Participatory Action Research in lo cotidiano (the everyday): A practical theological exploration on the religious identity, spirituality, and social context of college-age Latinas in the United States], *Revista de Educación Religiosa* [Journal of Religious Education], Universidad Finis Terrae, Instituto Escuela de la Fé, Vol. 2, No. 5 (October, 2022). <https://revistas.uft.cl/index.php/rer/index>.

communities. More than a colloquial term, Spanglish becomes, in this case, a symbol of spirituality. While English has become the primary language in the public and educational spheres that most feel comfortable speaking, the stories and narratives taught in Spanish have become the language of the heart, which, in most cases, is the language of prayer.

In my abuelita theology class we also share *recetas* and *dichos* (home recipes and sayings) as a symbol of communal traditions of the everyday. Some *dichos* (sayings) mentioned and that are a combination of cultural memory of our *tierras* (places of origin) are: *¡Libertad!; si Dios quiere; la vida es un carnaval; más sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo; cada persona con su cruz; se dice el milagro, pero no el santo; Dios sabe porque hace las cosas; anda con Dios; al mal tiempo, buena cara; quien a Dios tiene, nada le falta; solo Dios basta; Dios te bendiga. ¡Hay nuestros dichos!* (the sayings) that are recorded in the ordinary books of our families.

Permítanme Hablar/Allow Me to Speak: I love this phrase! This is communal wisdom and the opportunity to brainstorm creatively en *conjunto*. *Allow me to speak* is used in this case as a metaphor for actively participating in defining and shaping the church, academy, and society we live in. Michelle Gonzales reminds us: “Latino/a theologians are not merely attempting to bring forth the particular religious reality and practices of Hispanics, they are also seeking to transform the very discourse of theology.”¹¹ We tend to say Latina theology is for Latinas. What if Latina theology is a framework of theology? What if the lived realities of college-age Latinx students are the concern of the broader higher education and the academy? The challenges and hopes of college-age Latinx students are not just a concern of *El Futuro is Here* or those doing Hispanic-Latinx theology, outreach, and ministry. The challenges and hopes of God’s people are the concerns of the church, the academy, and society. There is a resounding call for the larger community to listen, affirm, and consider people’s insights, concerns, and challenges; thus, there is concrete change.

I recently had the opportunity to record one of the USCCB V Encuentro panels in the area of Higher education. My favorite part was co-presenting with one of our students here at Dominican University, Ms. Daniela Mendoza [Graphic Design Major and Latinx/Latin American Studies/Theology Minors]. Her wisdom and voice spoke of the spaces that actively listen, attend, and respond to her realities as a first-generation Latina at Dominican University. In the words of Dani:

¹¹Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 15.

I was born in El Salvador and lived there until I was 15 years old. Then, I moved to the United States with my mom to start a family. I learned English in my first year of High School, and although it was not easy, I have not stopped dreaming. Dominican University was the only university I visited, and [some spaces and people] helped me not feel so strange. **It was seeing something familiar to who I am: signs in Spanish that told me, “You are not alone here.”**

Isasi-Díaz discusses questions of ultimate meaning and survival: “Survival has to do with more than barely living. Survival has to do with the struggle to be fully.”¹² What are some spaces where our communities, in this case, our students, are *fully* visible, engaged, thriving, and actively participating in communal change and transformation?

Pause for music: Students singing “Carnaval del Barrio!”

“Wepa! Carnaval del barrio, Carnaval del barrio

Carnaval (Carnaval!)

Del barrio (Barrio!)

Carnaval (Carnaval!)

Del barrio (Barrio!)

We don't need electricidad

Get off your butt, avanza

Saca la maraca

Bring your tambourine,

Come and join the parranda, hey!...”¹³

Everyone was singing and dancing by the end of the verse...

Yesterday, our music team led us in an opening song that says: “O Love of God gather us, amor de Dios haznos uno. That we may share the gifts we are given; **para construir la comunidad.**”¹⁴ *Que el amor de Dios, present and working among us, gather us as one. Thus, we may share the gifts we are given; para construir la comunidad! ¡Hagamos lío!*

¡Muchas gracias!

¹²Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988), 4.

¹³Miranda, “Carnaval Del Barrio.”

¹⁴Bob Hurd, Pia Moriarty, Ana Victoria Demezas, and Jaime Cortez, “Amor de Dios/Oh Love of God,” OCP, 2015, digital audio.

Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. "PREFACE: Gestures of the Body—Escribiendo Para Idear." In *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, edited by Ana Louise Keating, 1-8. Duke University Press, 2015.

Dávila, María Teresa. "A "Preferential Option": A Challenge to Faith in a Culture of Privilege." In *Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente, The Word Became Culture*, edited by Miguel H. Díaz, 49-69. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020.

Díaz, Miguel H., ed. *Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente, The Word Became Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020.

Espín, Orlando O. *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014.

Gonzalez, Michelle A. *Embracing Latina Spirituality: A Woman's Perspective*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009.

—Sor Juana: *Beauty and Justice in the Americas*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

Herrera-Montero, Claudia H., "Investigación-Acción Participativa en Lo Cotidiano: Una exploración teológico-práctica sobre la identidad religiosa de jóvenes universitarias Latinas en el contexto Estadounidense" ["Participatory Action Research in lo cotidiano (the everyday): A practical theological exploration on the religious identity, spirituality, and social context of college-age Latinas in the United States"], *Revista de Educación Religiosa* 2, no. 5 (2022): 119-47. <https://revistas.uft.cl/index.php/rer/article/view%20/270/298>.

Hurd, Bob, Pia Moriarty, Ana Victoria Demezas, and Jaime Cortez. "Amor de Dios/Oh Love of God." OCP, 2015, digital audio.

Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Isasi-Díaz, Ada María, and Yolanda Tarango. *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988.

Miranda, Lin-Manuel. "Carnaval Del Barrio." In *The Heights* (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack). Atlantic Records, 2021, digital audio.



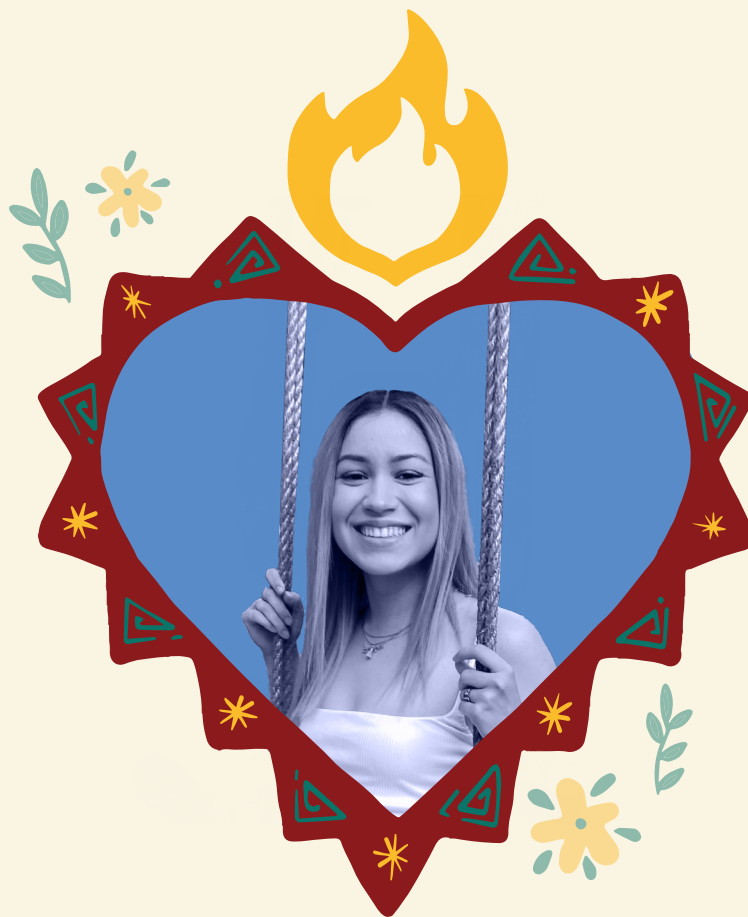






SOURCE: Viviana Tellez, *Iluminando Mis Sueños*, 2024





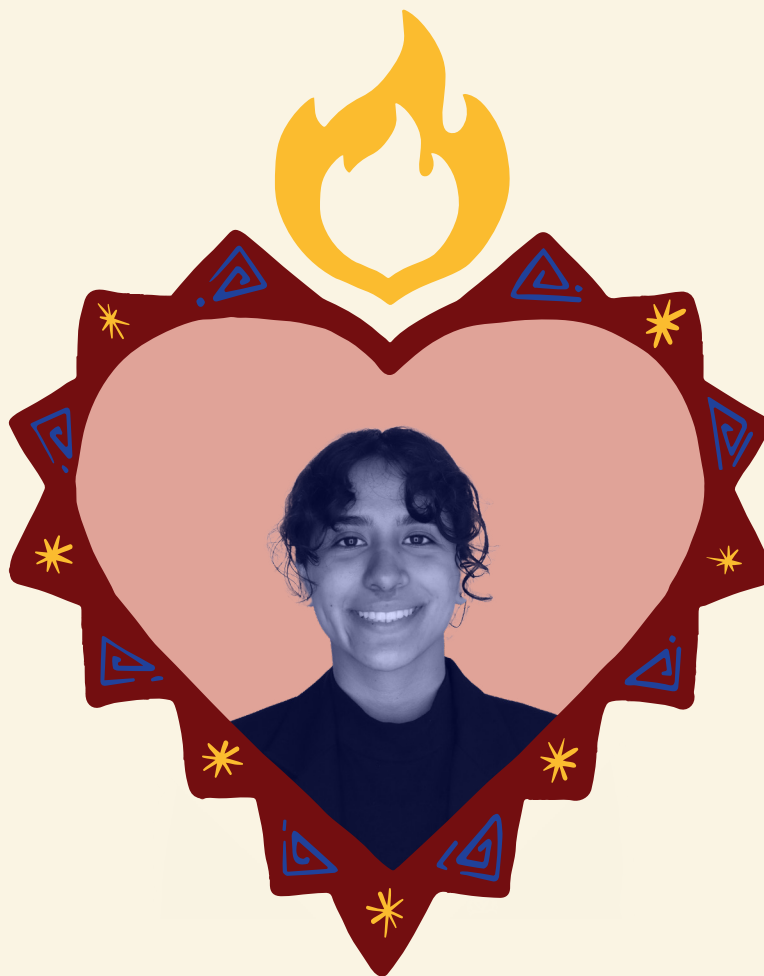
Viviana Tellez

Dominican University

My name is Viviana Tellez. I am a Senior at Dominican University, double majoring in Sociology and Women Gender Studies, with a minor in Latin and Latinx American Studies. I always had a love for photography as I enjoy capturing moments in life to be able to look back at or to simply capture what my eyes see to share with others.

The picture, *Iluminando Mis Sueños* was taken in the office of the Director of University Ministry at Dominican, Andrew Mercado. Andrew is Puerto Rican and Colombian which he shows through the art pieces that he has in his office. He also attended The College of Our Lady of the Elms and Boston College and is a first-generation graduate. Throughout his office there is a representation of his faith and religion in the picture with the statue of Jesus and the Sacred Heart. This picture captures the Latinidad through one's culture, faith, and dreams. I named this photo *Iluminado Mis Sueños* because many, like myself, look to our roots for inspiration and use our faith to help guide us, a faith that "shines a light" unto our path for our futures.

When I took the picture, *Mi Morenita*, I was at La Cathedral, a Mexican restaurant in Little Village. Little Village is a neighborhood in Chicago that expresses Mexican culture. In La Cathedral, there are many statues and art pieces that reflect Catholicism, which is the main denomination in Mexico. In this picture, we see a focus on La Virgen de Guadalupe, which many also refer to her as La Morenita. Growing up in a Mexican household also came with growing up Catholic, and La Virgencita became a symbolic figure in my life as she is a representation of a mother figure. Capturing this picture reminds me of the women in my life who have served as a guide and inspiration in my life.



Ximena Silva-Aguirre

University of Dayton

Hello, my name is Ximena Silva-Aguirre, and I am from a town northeast from Chicago called Cicero. I am a senior at the University of Dayton and am currently pursuing a major in Human Rights with minors in Latin American studies and Spanish. I am passionate about diversity and inclusion in higher education and have plans to pursue a masters in higher education policy and administration after I graduate in Fall of 2024.

I wrote this poem Summer of 2023 when I was studying aboard in Guatemala. I was staying in the second largest city in Guatemala called Xela which is short for Quetzaltenango. I was there to obtain Spanish credits for my minor and to teach English to young girls in a state home. I was surrounded by forests, mountains, volcanoes, and a whole community of people who I could speak to. For the first time in a long time, I felt blessed to be bilingual. However, that realization also came with a wave of shame. I felt like I had rejected my culture for so long and was not worthy of being Latina. I had never appreciated Latin identity or language until that summer when I found a piece of myself I didn't know was missing. I stood on the roof of my host family's home and wrote "**Pensamientos de una Niña Perdida**". It marked the start of my journey towards embracing and exploring my Mexican American identity.



Pensamientos de una Niña Perdida

cuando en Xela—

si miras mas aya

atraves de las nubes que tocan las caras de los volcanes—

encontraras mi primer patria, la madre de mi sangre ardiente—

una creadora divina que guia mi alma y tambien calma mi furia

Mexico, mi tierra, como deseo conocerte y ser reunida con el pedazo de mi corazón que mi mamá dejó plantado bajo tu suelo.

Y me preguntó-

¿cómo es posible extrañar un lugar que solo ha existido en mis sueños y en Los cuentos de mis padres?

fue real?

Estoy tracionando mis raices consumiendo esta identidad gringa?

Ximena Silva-Aguirre, Mexican-American, Queer Latina, resident of Illinois, lives in Cicero, student at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

am I meant to excel in this space of duality? am I ugrateful? am I spoiled?

Am I wrong for having feet that can walk amongst two lands and not having done so?

Casi 21 y no tengo las respuestas....

nomas te pido que me abrazes mamá

que el aroma de tu piel maternal nunca me va dejar olvidar tus esfurozos y el sufrimeinto que cargas en tu espalda—

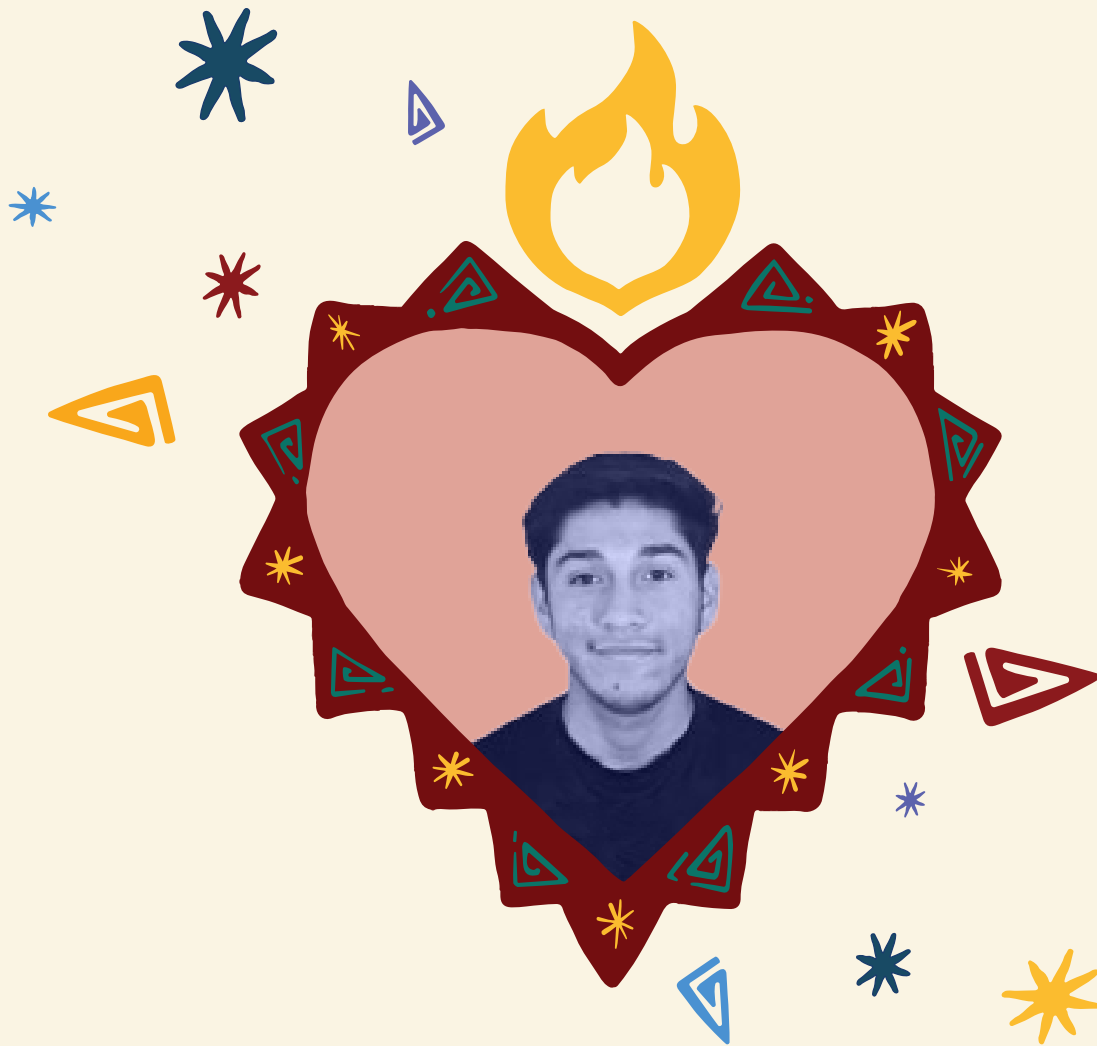
dudas que me pertencen solo a mí

abrazame mamá, abrazame y nunca me sueltes

no se donde voy a cayer

pero le reugo al cielo color *lapis lazuli* que me deje caer del otro lado de estos volcanes.





Bryan Rivera

Dominican University

Hello, my name is Bryan Rivera. I'm a proud Mexican/Chicano–American and a freshman at Dominican University, majoring in Math and Computer Science.

My poem, “**Low Low**”, reflects my experiences and cultural values. I believe that embracing discomfort and building from failure is what makes people grow and allows our communities to continue thriving. Life should be lived with no regrets because failure is often a great teacher.



Low Low

In the heart of bustling streets, where cultures collide and meld into a vibrant diversity,

Lowriders cruise by,

Their sleek bodies a canvas for tales untold.

Born from humble beginnings,

Their essence is woven into the fabric of heritage,

Each lowrider,

A testament to the passion and perseverance of its creator,

Bears the marks of a journey through trials and tribulations.

Every **curve**,

Every **color**,

Every **bolt**,

Every **wire**,

Every **tire**,

Every **blood**, **sweat**, and **tear drop**,

Tells a story of evolution, a silent narrative crafted into its own unique form.

It's a living, breathing symbol of pride and artistry, a language that speaks of rebellion

With a graceful defiance.

Within the frame of these automobiles lies more than just metal and machinery;

They carry the weight of historical struggle,

A silent plea for freedom.

Despite the burden of stereotypes and misconceptions that cast their shadows,

A resilient community thrives within these chrome-laden streets,

Resilient in the very air they breathe.

Yet, challenges persist – legal confines and regulatory shackles attempt to stifle their Spirit.

**But amongst this,
A symphony of colors erupts
A palette of dissent pushing against these barriers,
A movement that refuses to be silent.**

In clubs and groups coming together,
People find unity.
They create different subcultures and identities.
People connect beyond just being in their cars.
They share different cultures and make a colorful mix in this special community.

The impact of lowrider culture extends far beyond the streets;
It intertwines with local economies, nurturing businesses, attracting tourism, and blooming
job opportunities.

Figures like Ruben Ortiz-Torres step in as artists,
Creating bridges between worlds, connecting time and space through their visionary art
That captures the soul of lowrider culture, birthing a masterpiece that resonates with its Essence.

Through every struggle and triumph,
A narrative unfolds—a tale of resilience, courage, and boldness.
These streets, adorned with lowriders, become a canvas where stories find their home,
A testament to a culture that stands tall and proud, an art form that embodies a rich
History and an unwavering source of communal pride.







Madilyn Haughey

Dominican University

Hello! I'm Madilyn Haughey. I am a junior at Dominican University. I am a double major in Theology and English and am very excited to be submitting my work for the first time.

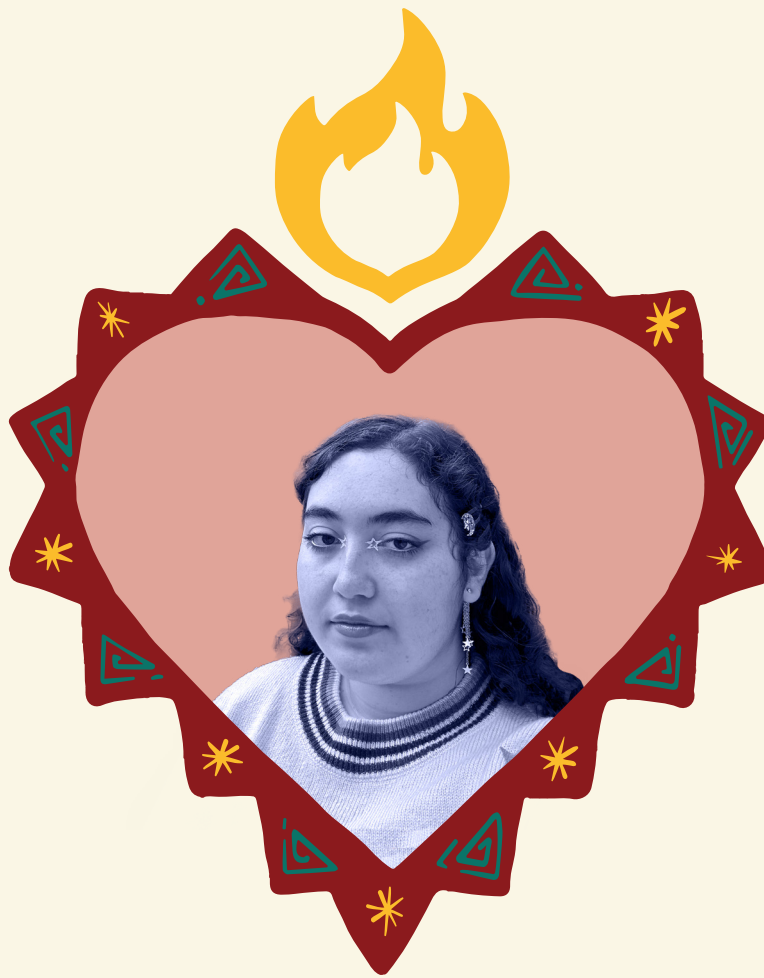
My poem represents the love between two young women who are trying to explore and understand their own relationship. It details a small moment from what I like to think is the beginning of something beautiful.

Sheets

I don't remember the color of your sheets
The rest of my memory falls away until
It is us, lying beside each other
Floating in the dark
You sleep unaware of the abyss around us
That threatens to swallow us
Your hair, like a lioness
Your hands beneath your head,
Which I have held only to crack the knuckle of your thumb
Your mouth, which moves around sleepy mumbles
Did you know you talk in your sleep?

My head full of cotton, I grow uncomfortable
I cannot sleep, your presence tugs at my eyes
And I can do nothing but watch the rise and fall
Of your chest
Until the darkness swallows us both





Emily Reynoso Muñoz

Dominican University

Emily Reynoso Muñoz is an undergraduate student at Dominican University majoring in Painting and minoring in Biology and Theology. She aims to go into Medical Illustration after she graduates and posts her art under the name "Paintbristle." She's the eldest sister to four younger sisters in a Mexican household.

This piece is based on the desire to know and be known. Using the imagery of a **pomegranate** both in the head and arm It's meant to depict the grotesque nature of an all-encompassing yearning for meaning within yourself and who/what you perceive as an extension of yourself. Representing the want to consume your own thoughts through an outside perspective yet wanting to be known by someone outside of yourself. It's also supposed to be a call back to both Greek and Catholic imagery and the concept of suffering for others.



SOURCE: Emily Reynoso Muñoz, *The Desire to Know and be Known*, 2024



Alianna Alcalá Dominican University

I come from a Mexican-American background and grew up in Chicago. I am a freshman. My major is pre-nursing as I plan to pursue a career in nursing. Down the line, I hope to become a bilingual travel nurse to help support the under-served Spanish-speaking community. I come from humble beginnings and truly find joy in helping others in times of need.

This poem was written about the gentrification taking place in Pilsen. As someone who grew up in Pilsen for some time, the issue is very apparent and strong. However, it's also heartwarming to see how close the community has gotten in spite of it.

Fight To Stay

You know what they say..
“If it ain’t broke, dont fix it”

Don’t fix or

Don’t change

Change isn’t always great

Change isn’t always needed

Change isn’t always wanted

In Pilsen

Full of Chicano culture

Art

History

Food

Dessert

Museums

People

Actually, not so much of that last one anymore...

Change is a tornado

Disrupting lives, displacing objects

Rebuilding anew, destroying family’s homes

Swoosh

I see white people now

Regularly now that I think about it

And they’re all so young

Swoosh

When did these new apartments get here? They’re so beautiful

They’re tall with windows for walls

They’re “modern”

But who will ever pay that much?

Oh wait...

Those apartments are raising my rent

Mortgage

Property taxes

Bill

...

Swoosh

It's 10 am now on a Sunday and we just left mass

You know what that means

I'll get a dozen for the familia

Hold up... \$24... You're joking right

Yeah nevermind

Swoosh

A contractor reached out today

I didn't realize the family house was worth that much...

It's good money

Tempting

I wonder what they will do with the property...

Swoosh

"Desirable"

A new word added before Pilsen

Near el centro - is that all this was?

They say tornadoes don't occur in the city

You're safe

Disregard the phone warning

Yet somehow I see a tornado right before our eyes

In the Heart of Chicago

Strong like a lion

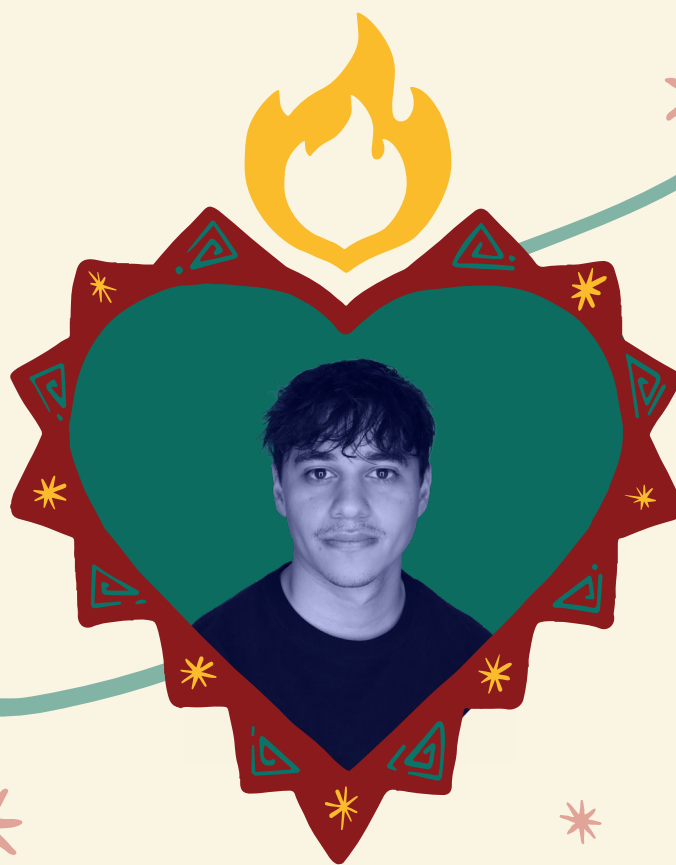
Unwanted change is never 100% awful though

Sometimes it brings out

Unity and inclusivity

Organizations and coalition
Stories and cultures
Friendships and family
This special unison comes fast and strong
Like a tornado
Full of beautiful, colorful, blooming flowers
We're all beautiful
Colorful from our different backgrounds, cultures, skin tones
Blooming relationships with one another
Newfound friendships
All united within one common cause
It's beautiful, isn't it?
The bond against unwanted change
It feels like
We're all holding hands in a circle playing ring around a rosie
In simpler times when everyone was a friend
The circle powerful like the "I have a dream" speech
A united front is
Strong and fierce
Difficult to break
Together, the first tornado doesn't stand a chance
Together, we create solutions
Fight to Stay
Because nobody will for us
Fight to Stay
Because we can
Fight to Stay.





José González

University of Notre Dame

My name is José Alfonso González Belmonte. The piece I have submitted is titled "**Self-Portrait. Along the Border of Reynosa and McAllen,**" and was first written in a creative writing class taken during my final semester at the University of Notre Dame. The title and what the piece explores is completely in reference and praise of Frida Kahlo's, *Self-Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States*. It is part of my senior thesis, a collection of writing in that prose/poetry binary that stems from an early short story concept of being in the passenger seat of a car that drives through my hometown of McAllen, TX.

The second piece I have submitted is titled "**Chuparosa**" and originated from exploring my bilingualism through the writing of my senior thesis. Growing up in a Mexican household in Mexico and later in the U.S., heavily influenced how I incorporate my language into my writing. I believe that immigrant languages hold powerful potential that has already been displayed in the current spectrum of American poetry, and I have chosen to explore mine within my bilingualism instead of just picking one language and ignoring the pull of the other.

Self-Portrait Along the Border of Reynosa and McAllen

After Frida Kahlo's Self-Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States



feet-rest in 2
places at once,
hands stretch from
one side * to * the other *
are you giving
(taking)

elote on your right
and passport on the left
how were you
supposed to reach
your wallet?



that crossing is
familiar, but the
wheelchair uncomfortable
it stands in the middle
of the street; both lanes
of traffic tossing coins
into the seat, its owner
in-line at the bank,
I sit and wait.



you can't be in 2
places at once





Chuparosa

El primer beso es submarino
in her pool I say, thank you
Pero tengo que abrir mis ojos.

Lick the mites and seeds off her **strawberry** lips,
escupiéndolos en una bolsa alrededor de mi cuello

Mother at the kitchen window,
arrancandole las alas a un colibri

Who with each snatch says,
“Que Dios este con vosotros”

Dipping the head into a vat of **red** petals
Chupandole la rosa

Father in the living room,
sus dedos huesudos tocando las cuerdas

A cacophony of sounds that accuse him of having no heart

Las cuerdas eventualmente cortan los nudillos.

Each bone to be wrapped in a **red** paper tube

Atado con una cinta de raso que deja al descubierto la uña marchita.

Rosesucker

The first kiss is underwater
en su alberca le digo, gracias
But I have to open my eyes.

Le chupo los bichos y semillas de sus labios **fresas**,
spitting them into a little bag around my neck

La Madre en la ventana de la cocina,
plucking off the wings from a hummingbird

Quien con cada rasgón dice,
“May God be with y’all”

Sumergiendo la cabeza en una tina de pétalos **rojos**
Sucking the rose

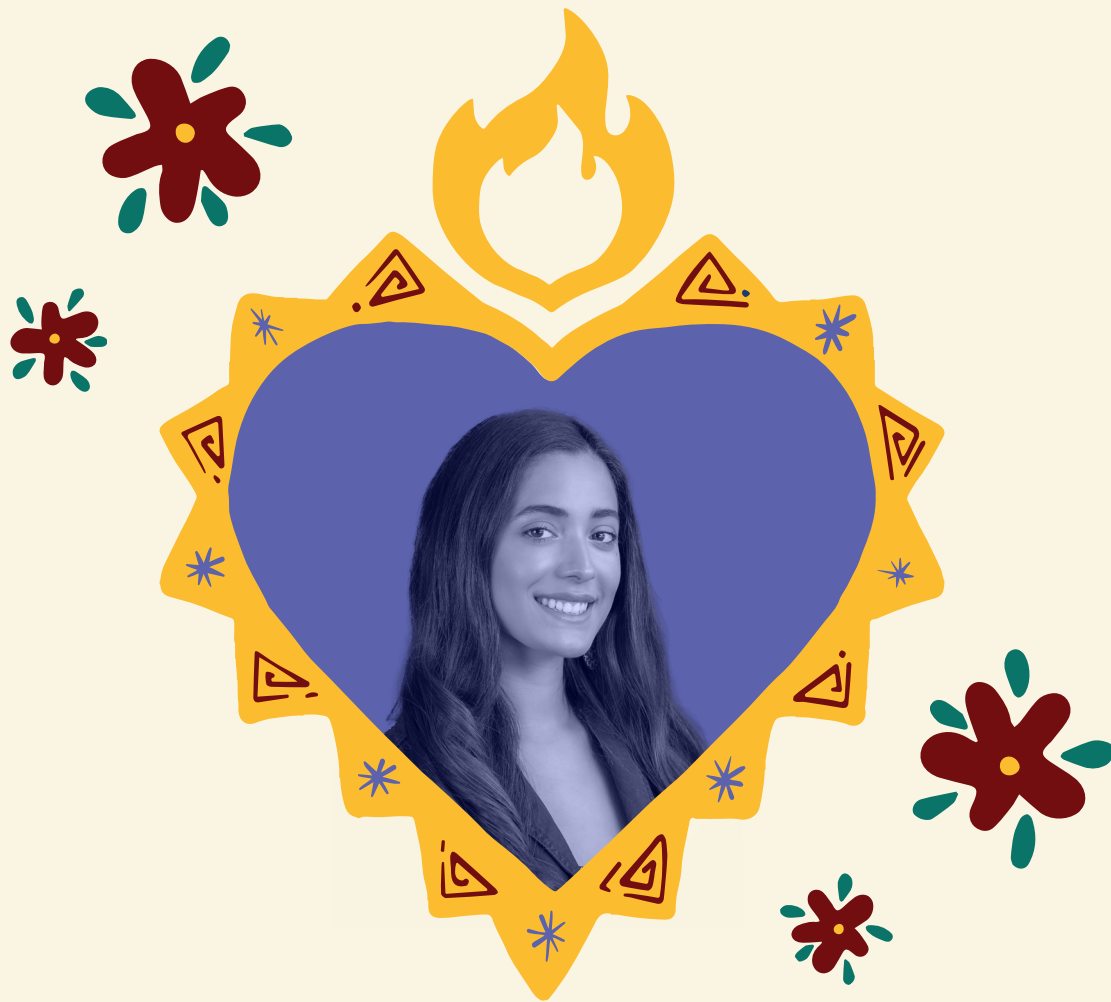
El Padre en la sala,
his bony digits plucking the strings

Una cacofonía de sonidos que le acusan de tener no corazón.

The strings eventually slice across the knuckles.

Cada hueso se envolverá en un tubo de papel **rojo**

Tied with a satin ribbon that exposes the withered nail.



Elena Martinez

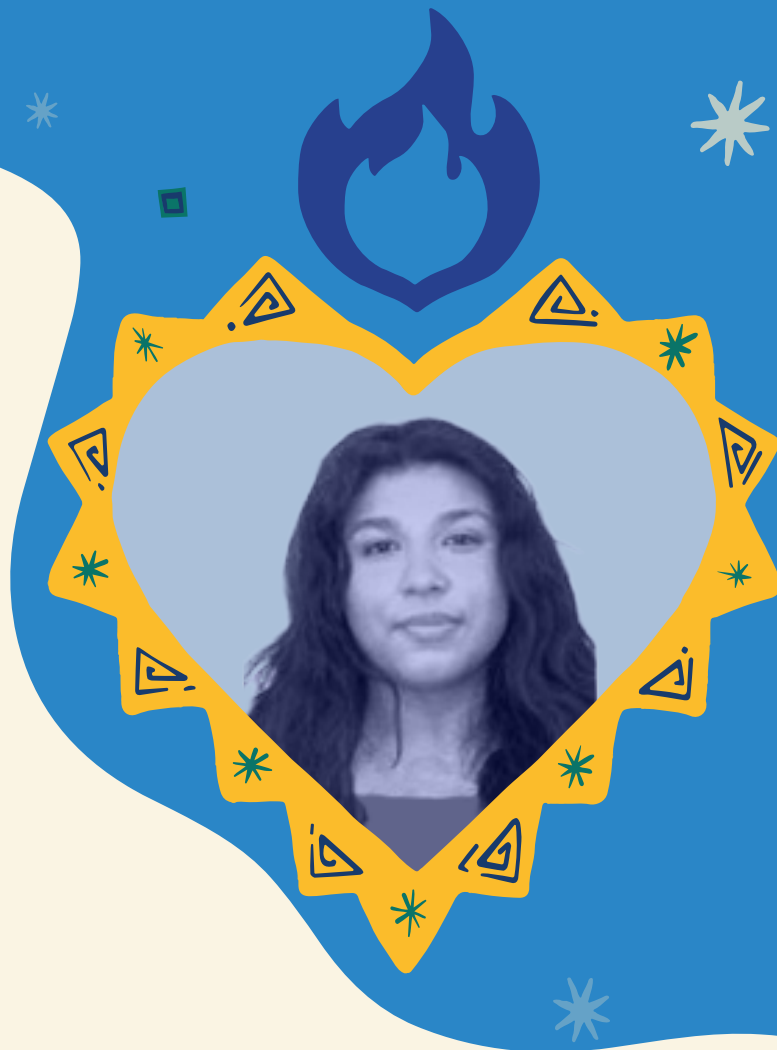
Loyola University Chicago

My name is Elena Martinez. I am a second-generation Mexican American, a current senior, studying Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience, and Psychology at Loyola University Chicago. My faith has always been important to me, but it was not until college that it really took off. Owning my Catholic side and Mexican side has been a beautiful way of truly honoring my truest authentic self. I know myself very well, and I know that what I have is something very special. I love art because it is a form of expression. It is a way in which I can put all of my identities on the canvas, and people can see it for what it is. Art shows us to never hide but to be firm in who we are as beautiful individuals.

This piece represents my Catholic faith that has been passed down to me from many generations ago. As a Mexican American I own this identify of mine because of what it represents to me and what it represents for my ancestors. In times of suffering and pain we can only get by with the light that has been brought to us. Faith is not always given, and therefore we must seek it and cherish it.



SOURCE: Elena Martinez, *Mi Rosario*, 2024



Andrea Belmares

Dominican University

Hi, my name is Andrea Belmares (she/her). I'm a first-generation student at Dominican University.

This poem is inspired by an art piece titled **The River Remix** by Zeke Peña as well as the stories told by friends and family about their journey to cross Rio Grande. This poem celebrates the beautiful, ancient the **Rio Grande River** and all her history. This river is impacted by both Mexican and American communities, each utilizing her resources in different ways. My poetry seeks to honor the **Rio Grande** and its impact on both nations. The flow of her water holds on to the countless stories of those who dreamt of a better life and were brave enough to embark on the journey to pursue it



The Rivers Herstory

My water is as ancient as the world
Older than the flow of blood in veins.
My family strong like an Aztec's blade,

I cradle the dreams of those who dare,
To cast them upon my currents, to drift and to share.

I am the river, a timeless guide,
In me, reflections come alive
Carving the landscape, with Indigenous pride.

A storyteller of echoes, ancient and new,
In every ripple, whispers of the past accrue.

I am, life's eternal vein,
A giver of substance, a community's gain.

Through the heart of the town, I gracefully glide,
Binding the threads of life, a source of pride.

In the morning light, fishermen set sail,
Casting nets their faces veiled.

Along my banks, farmers toil and sweat,
Tending to fields where crops are met.

Their hands in soil, the partnership we share,

Fruit blooms, an act to show your collective care.

Children laugh by my shores, their playful glee,
Splashing in my shallows, wild and free.

Grinding grains for the daily meal,
Nourishing bodies, a pact we seal.

Trade and commerce burgeon at my edge,
A bustling market, a vibrant pledge.

Boats laden with goods, a floating bazaar,
Connecting lives, no matter how far.

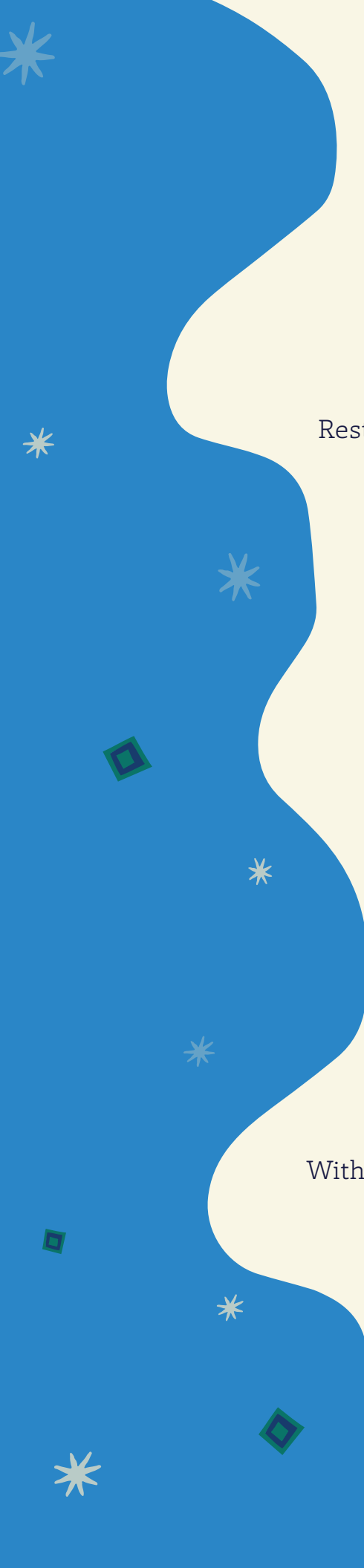
Through seasons' dance, I provide and protect,
A lifeline for all, none shall forget.

Yet, in my depths, a resilience remains,
A plea for change, a call to break chains.

Oil factories fill smoke to the sky,
Poisoning my waters as the years pass by.

My crystal blue turned to brown now worn

I bear the scars of a world that's torn.



Chemicals contaminate my flow,
A toxic tale of progress, a relentless woe.

Concrete walls confine my once winding course,
Restrained by human hands, me and my people feel the force.

Erosion claims the soil, a silent cry,
As habitats vanish and families say goodbye.

A liquid canvas tainted by battles that stun,
They mark me with echoes of battles won.
They dress me in buoys and fill me with their guns
In currents of conflict, where innocence shuns.

I swell and surge, an anguished plea,
A reflection of humanity's apathy.

Bridges of memories, spanning years,
Witnessing joy, triumph, and tears.

My children in a boat overloaded without control
With troubled souls sailing to safety or to death, nobody knows.

**For those who embarked on a quest,
I mourn their dreams, forever at rest.**





Faith Adedokun

Saint Joseph's University

Faith Adedokun is a psychology major on the pre-law track at Saint Joseph's University. She is a Nigerian-American and a second-generation immigrant who strives to enact positive changes through law and advocacy. Using her lived experiences and expertise gained from her education, she hopes to provide a safe and welcoming community for all.

I wrote this spoken word based on my experience as a college student at a predominately white university (PWI). Growing up, college had always been described as a place where diversity meets education. However, during my short time here, that is not the case. There is still so few people that look like me. This piece details my experience when realizing that for the first time and my feelings of uncertainty, betrayal, and finally acceptance.


Community

An open community is what was promised us
The young and hopeful from near and far
To come together in classrooms and clubs and life
One for all, all for one

Yet as I sit in my classroom I scan the room
And not one, not one face I see
That looks like mine
And so my senses are heightened as the familiar realization sets in
I'm the only one

The only one who has my chocolate brown skin and my jet black hair
The only one with my face, nose, and lips
And while it's only the outer layer I see
I recognize that they are not me

They do not know what it is like to be surrounded and yet alone
They do not know what it is like to feel so glaringly, obviously "other"
To be so aware of one's skin that every word and every gesture is compared
Against a standard that neither they nor I built



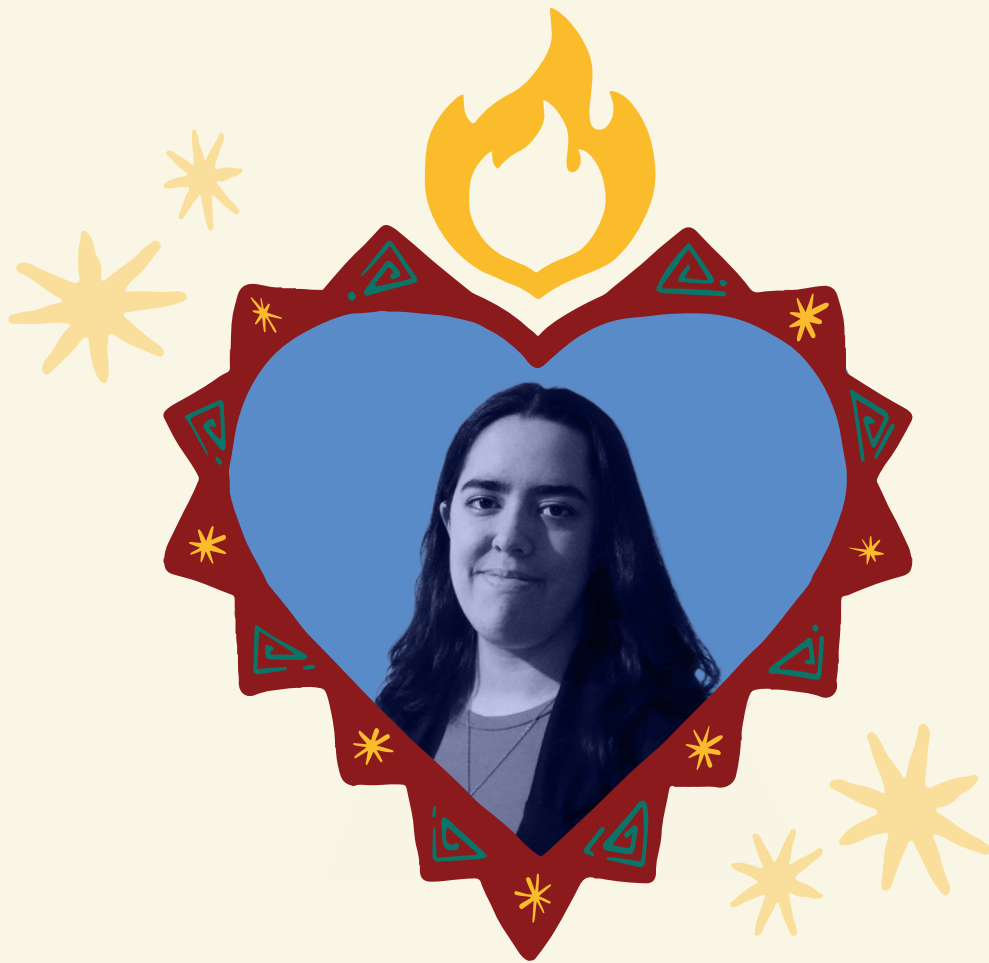
* And yet my actions are measured
The transformation becomes easy, terrifyingly so
I speak “properly”, I speak slow
For the fear of being silently judged
And given a label I may not hear but deep inside, I will know

I know
I know who I am
I am a student, I am a woman, I am Black
But most of all, I am proud

Proud of the community inside the community

The number of us who have used our identities
To create change, to make a mark but also
To welcome, to love, and to heal

Yes, I have found the community that was promised us
The young and hopeful from near and far
To come together in triumphs, struggles, and in between
One for all, all for one



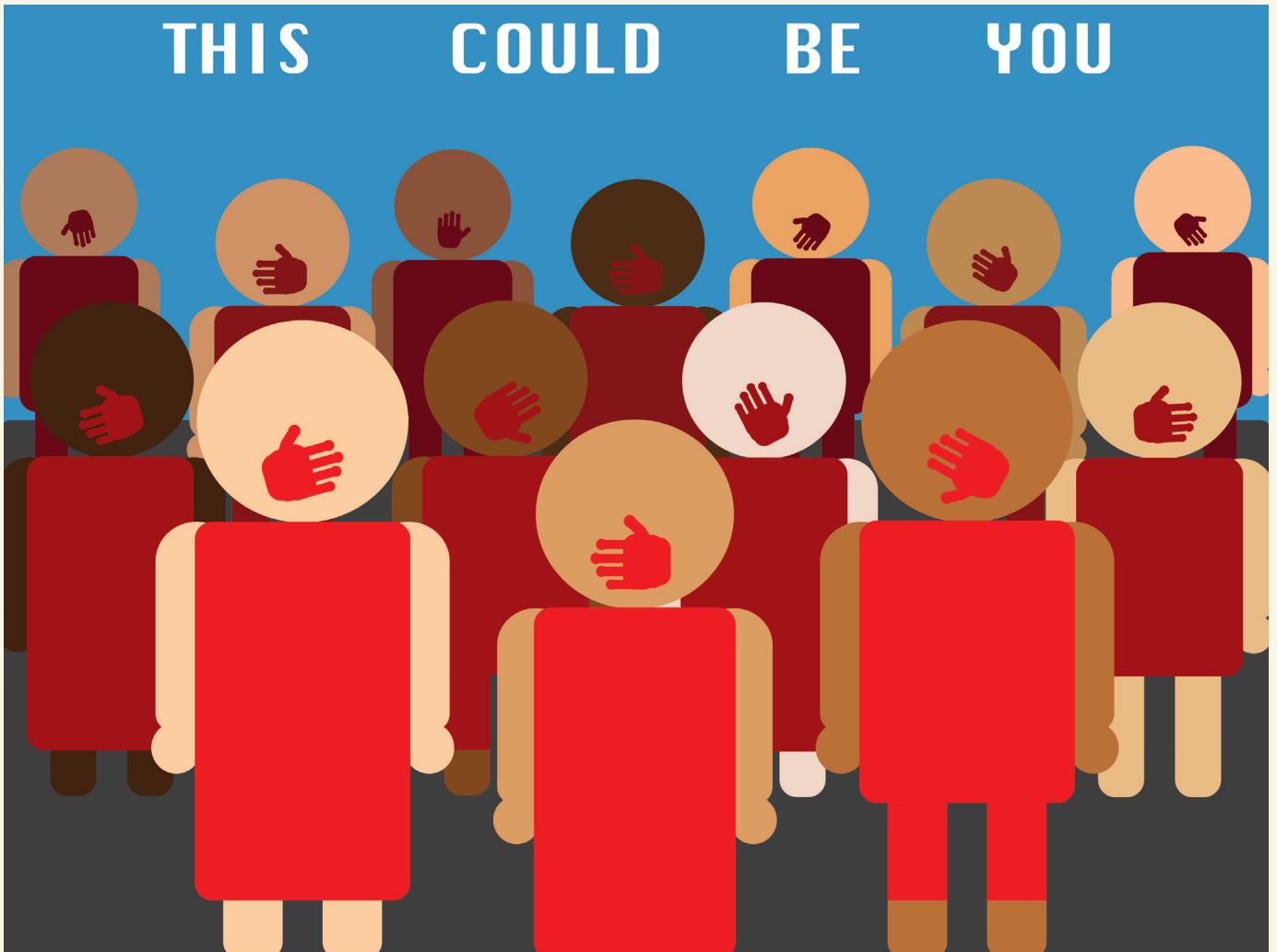
Monica Petek

Dominican University

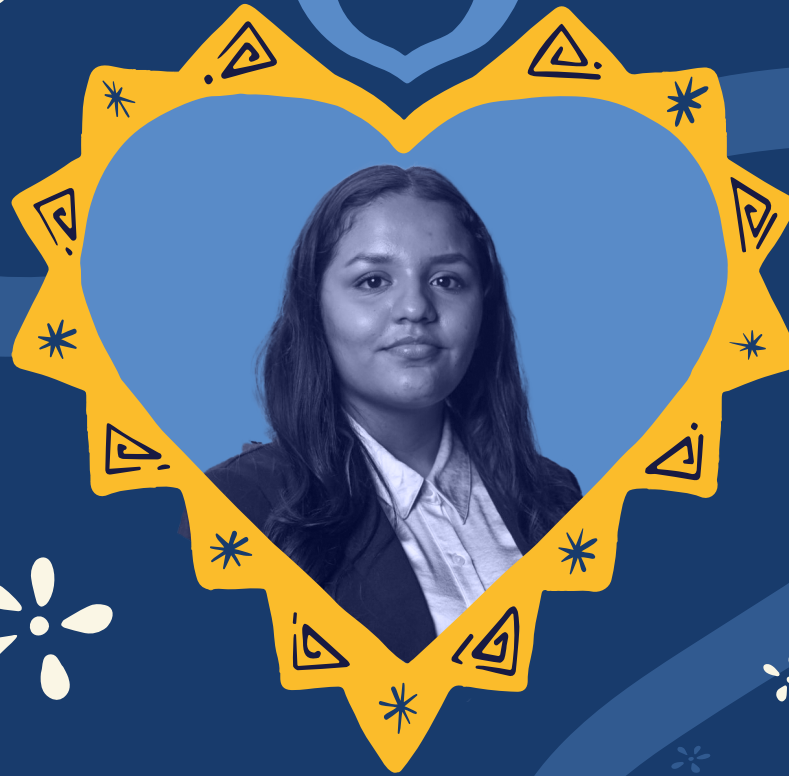
Monica Petek is a first generation indigenous-Mexican Slovenian-Russian American raised in Homer Glen, Illinois. Currently based out of Lockport, she is a junior at Dominican University pursuing a bachelor's degree in fashion and graphic design.

Initially self-taught in graphite drawing from early childhood, she currently is building her skills in photography, sewing, and digital illustration and editing, with a current focus on Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and Clip Studio Paint. Growing up feeling in between her two identities, many of her pieces are inspired by those experiences. Inspiration for her recent pieces is highlighting social inequity. One of her biggest motivators to continue creating is her family consisting of her mom and older brother. Previously, a self-portrait photo edit titled "Cloud 9" was showcased at Governor's State University for the Southwest Suburban High School Conference in 2020 and "Déjà Vu" was showcased at Dominican University's Annual Student Art Exhibition in 2023.

THIS COULD BE YOU



SOURCE: Monica Petek, *The Violent Vanishing Act*, 2024



Gabriela Corral

Dominican University

I'm a current senior at Dominican University. Even though my major is Behavioral Neuroscience with a minor in Biology, I have always been drawn to writing as a way to express myself. Growing up in a heavily Latinx community has shown me the many struggles and obstacles that Latinx immigrants have to face on a daily basis. With writing, I can capture these moments ranging from high achievements and success to sorrowful lows. Even though I want to have a career in healthcare after graduation, I will continue to give back to my community through activism, writing, and outreach.

This written work was composed from moments of helplessness exhibited from me, my family members and friends. **Grief is such a difficult process for immigrants that are unable to go back to their home country.** Without a tangible event, like a funeral, grief is such a heart-wrenching and confusing emotion to process. This short story was a way to show some insight of how immigrants feel in these moments where their heart and years for another place where they cannot go to. Their grief belongs somewhere where they cannot be, no matter how bad they want to.

Mis Lagrimas No Perteneecen

My bare feet touch the grassy land, shoes forgotten somewhere along the path. I stumble over some sharp rocks and sticks as I desperately make my way to the river. My heart is thudding in my ears as I try to think of how fast everything went wrong earlier in the morning.

Everything seemed fine. The sunlight shone into my room as I woke up to the smell of freshly cooked huevo con jamón making its way into my room. I know, now, that was just a façade to the sorrowful news that was waiting for me.

“Mi mamá falleció,” my mom said, with a blank face staring off into the distance as if she wasn’t in the room with me. All I could do was stare as her tears made their way down her sun spotted cheeks, staining her deep blue blouse. I couldn’t speak even though I wanted to. At one point, she just sat down at the kitchen table, and the tears would not stop as she curled in on herself with her face in her hands. I should follow her and do something. Yet, I could not move. What is wrong with me? I should be comforting my own mother after she lost her own. Even then, I open my mouth and there’s no sound. There’s something so helpless stuck in my throat that can’t make its way down nor up. That’s when I heard it, a quiet whisper from my mom.

“I should’ve been there.”

A pain shot through my chest, feeling tight over the area where my heart lives. Maybe she thought I wasn’t in the room anymore. Or maybe she wanted me to hear it. As if she wanted to confess her deepest regret to someone, anyone. Like a sinner confessing their deepest darkest sin to their priest as a way to feel better about themselves. She didn’t say anything else, but the weight of her words was heavy in the air from what they implied.

My trembling hand found its way to the door as I shakily opened it to the outside world. The traitorous sun's glare beamed down as I found my way to my rundown car that had seen better days. One thing led to another, and suddenly I was some miles away from my house. Muscle memory brought me to the nearest forest where I usually go for walks. I made it a point to come often as a way to have some fresh air and breathe when I felt like I was suffocating back at home.

Once again, I found myself pulling over in the small parking lot and speed walking to the hiking trail that I'd become familiar with. After some mindless stumbling, I finally made it to the river. It wasn't a large one but good enough to skip rocks across it.

Except, now, I'm not sure what to do. Was it selfish of me to leave? To get out?

The image of my mom curled up like an infant at the kitchen table came back.

Before I knew it, the tears started to sting my eyes and came rushing out. The useless lump in my throat finally passed as I sobbed in front of the trees, long grass, and river. Seconds, minutes, hours could've passed, and I wouldn't have noticed. After a while, no more tears could come out as if I ran out dry. Now, I can only bend over to look into my reflection in the water. My red rimmed eyes stare back at me as I embarrassingly hiccup and snuffle.

Why did it have to be this way, I thought. My own Abuelita has passed away in Mexico and all I can do is cry and cry. Even though I should be back at home comforting my mom and trying to support my family once again. Yet, the first thing I could think of was

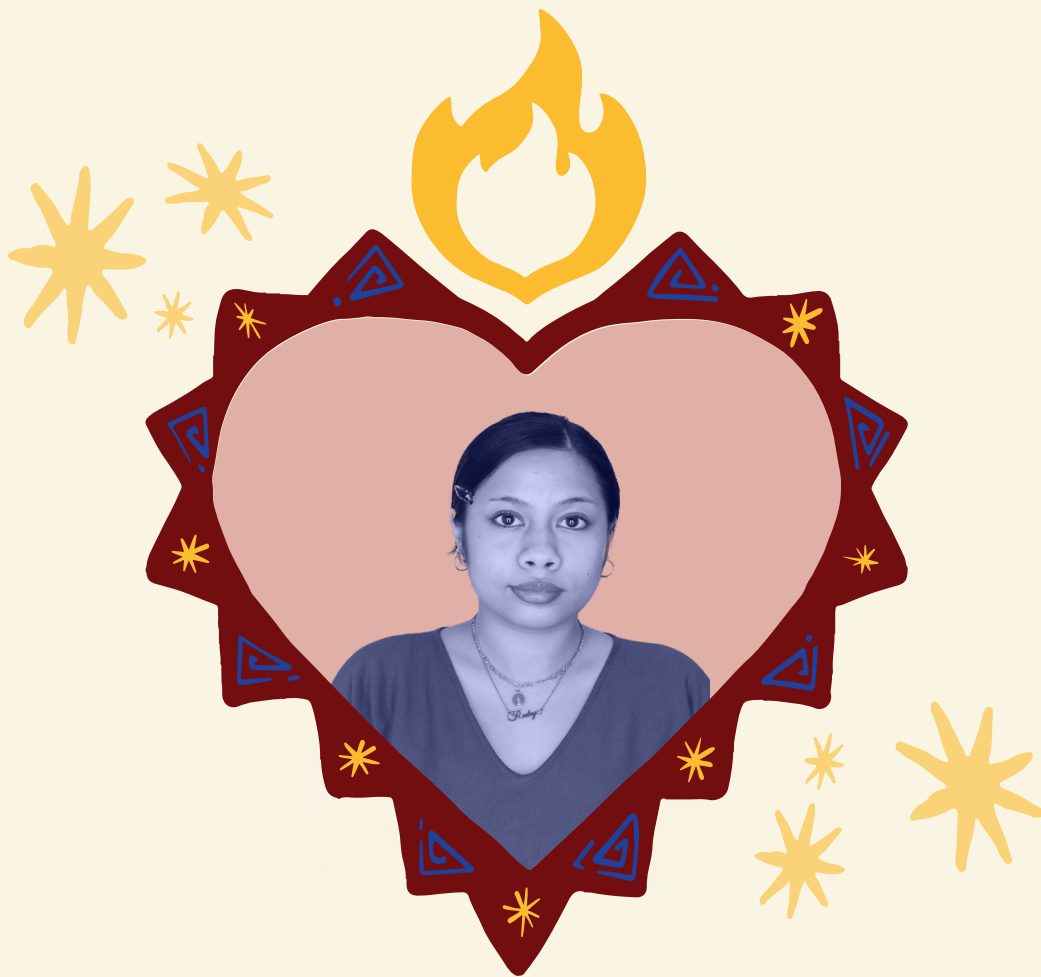
just running away. Meanwhile, my family in Mexico will have time to grieve and then, they will organize themselves so the funeral process may begin.

While the neighbors from the pueblo will bring dishes of mole and arroz to my tíos and tías, I will stay here and cry. While my tíos and tías pick out a beautifully adorned casket for my Abuelita, I will stay here and cry. While my Abuelita gets transported by hearse to the cemetery, I will stay here and cry. My tíos, tías, and the neighbors will follow the whole way, with heavy steps and hearts as white pristine flowers are thrown along the path. Yet, all I can do is stay here and cry.

My hand grips my shirt over where my heart resides hoping to push down the settling pain in my chest. I don't think anything can help with that unless there's a way to get my family and I first class plane tickets to actually see my Abuelita. Of course, that is too much to ask for.

All I can do is let the tears well up again at the corner of my eyes, hot and heavy. They trickle down my smooth cheeks and I watch them drop into the river, being swept away by the current.

Maybe my tears will continue their path down this river which will eventually merge into a larger one. Maybe the water currents will contain my salty tears as they make their way down the states where they will reach Mexico's border. Eventually, there would be a stop to this river which would mark the end of my pathetic tears. Or maybe, the water would evaporate and become rainclouds, all while taking my tears with them. Maybe that cloud would find its way to the cemetery where my Abuelita was buried. Maybe, just maybe, my tears will go to where they belong one day.



Ruby Cruz

Dominican University

I am a freshman at Dominican University, currently undecided but leaning toward elementary education or business management. I am Mexican American and grew up on the West side of Chicago only 15 minutes away from school. My pieces are about my struggles as a Hispanic and the struggles I see others endure like my family. My pieces are influenced by my *Chicanos In Chicago* class taught by Profesora T. "Nacho" Montiel who pushed us all to write about our struggles. My work is meant to allow others to connect to my struggles and to bring awareness to the struggles of all Hispanics.

The poem "**Struggles**" is based off of an art piece calls "**Repetitive Strain Injuries**" by Marcos Raya a famous Mexican painter based in Chicago. The piece is about the struggles immigrants and their families face in America.

While the essay "**Boys and Girls**" is about my personal struggles as a woman in a Hispanic household. I drew inspiration from Sandra Cisneros book *House on Mango Street*.

Struggles

The year was 2016

There was so much riding on this election

My family, my friends, my parents

What would happen to them?

The words “**Make America great again**” echoed through my mind

A sentence of 4 years was our charge

And every second all I thought

Was America ever great?

As a child, I sensed our lives took a different guise.

My people come to this country with hopes and aspirations

This is the land of **opportunity** and **freedom**

For most, The American dream consists of money and material possessions

But for my people the American Dream is anything surpassing the hardships they left behind

Undocumented,

forced to navigate this country with so many obstacles

clawing at their dreams

This strange language holding them apart

Mocking their native tongue

They fumble and tumble through the words

Laughing off the mistakes

This impossible language only holds them back

But for their children,

this language was priority number one

Now they can

Translate documents and make phone calls, even as young child

Be your parents spokesperson

That's why you are here

Force yourself to grow up

They've endured more than you

They've sacrificed everything for you

There is no one to guide you

So you must Guide yourself

It's different for all of us

All different paths

Is success in our cards?

Who knows

All I see, feel, and hear

Is dealing with discrimination because this land is not ours

A truth acknowledged

But once upon a time it was

Now the same states that we called our own

Try to banish us away from our own home

Their **red states** much like the color of the blood being spilled as people try to cross the border through death traps placed by the very same people who claim their country as their own

When your people go to Cancun on vacation for fun

They're welcomed

When my people come to America to survive

They're attacked

They're rapists

They're stealing jobs

They're drug dealers

They're killed along the way

So, what's left for us?

But scarred hands

And Injuries

And broken dreams

And broken hearts

My parents left their country and said goodbye to everyone they held kind

They struggled and clawed their way to the top

To provide for their family

They came here for a better life and left everyone else behind

Working the jobs no one with papers dares to touch

My dad wakes up with

A sore body

And a sore heart

Like he is a sore thumb in this country that is not ours

And he continues to work hard

Even through the repetitive stress injuries

Because one day there is hope we will make it out

A day when my people will be treated for who they are not for where they're from

My people work just as hard

if not harder to be where they are

This is the land of the free

And we are free too

Boys and Girls

When I was like eight years old my brother's friend would come over and bring his little brother and I would beg him to play with my Ariel toys and so he did. But then everyone started making fun of him. I never played with him again. I guess that's when I really started to see the difference between **boys and girls**. **Boys** did different things, right? I really didn't know, I had three older brothers, and all I wanted to do was be with them. I would sit next to them while they watched inappropriate shows. I learned every curse word in the book from them and mimicked them to a 'T', even though I got in trouble for it.

Of course, at the time I thought I was grown but looking back I'm embarrassed about it. I thought I was the coolest person hanging out with my brothers doing whatever they did. They're fond memories, but I soon realized we were in two different worlds. As I got older, I started wearing their clothes, baggy shirts, baggy jeans, all stuff I had stolen from their room. My mom started saying I wanted to be a **boy**. There is nothing wrong with that if I did, but I didn't. **I just wanted to be like them.**

One day I woke up and decided to cut my hair. I had long hair ever since I was little and then in around 7th grade, I was so over it. **But this too was not womanly.** I didn't really grasp the concept of womanhood at the time. I didn't really care about hair or clothes as long as it was easy to put on. I would go to school, and they would ask me if I had brushed my hair since it wasn't straight like everyone else's and it wasn't curly either. Sort of like how I wasn't feminine or masculine I was somewhere in the middle. (I did in fact spend a long time brushing my hair but never understood why it would **puff up** or get **tangled**). All the comments about me wanting to be a **boy** from my mom mixed with the comments about my hair and every other small comment about my appearance changed how I dressed and how I looked. I started wearing tight clothes,

and I would straighten my hair for the whole week just to look like everyone else. I got my eyebrows done and I was a new person. I wore crop tops in 8th grade and this side of me sort of stuck. Makeup, earrings, the whole spiel. I threw myself into being **feminine**. So, I started hanging out with my sister. I played with her makeup. I used her clothes. Now I had a new cool person to look up to (and of course my brothers didn't want their annoying little sister being with them all the time).

Just then everything changed again; I was feminine now but “¿Qué le vas a dar de comer a tu marido?” My mom would ask, constantly. Clean this. Clean that. Help me in the Kitchen. “Women take care of their home, and the Men work.” My dad would say. But what about my brothers? They played video games all day and didn't have to clean or do laundry or cook. I didn't understand it. I still don't but I learned it's better to not argue because believe me I have many many times. So now was I feminine enough? I can clean, I still can't cook but I think I'll forever be doomed in that department (I burn everything) I can do laundry, I can watch kids, my favorite color is **pink**, I love clothes. **However, that dreadful hair of mine was still short, still puffy, and still impossible.** The cycle continued except I finally learned to put hair products in for curly hair, a simple solution and it only took like 15 years to figure it out. Although I did end up bleaching and cutting it recently which I do regret. I was at my peak femininity, I think... I still wasn't happy. I still liked baggy clothes or “guandajas” as my mother would say.

As I got older, I decided **I would do things that made me happy**, so I wear baggy clothes, but I also wear tight clothes, I only clean my laundry, only wash my plates, not my brothers. **I do my hair how I want, and I still think I'm somewhere in the middle deep down.** I'm happy however as long as I choose what I look like and what I like. Before I used to want to be like someone else, but now I want to be **unapologetically** me, and the small comments don't bother me anymore. Some days I could dress like a '**boy**' (though I am a firm believer that clothes have no gender) and sometimes I could dress like a '**girl**'. **As for my hair, I'm still figuring it out.**

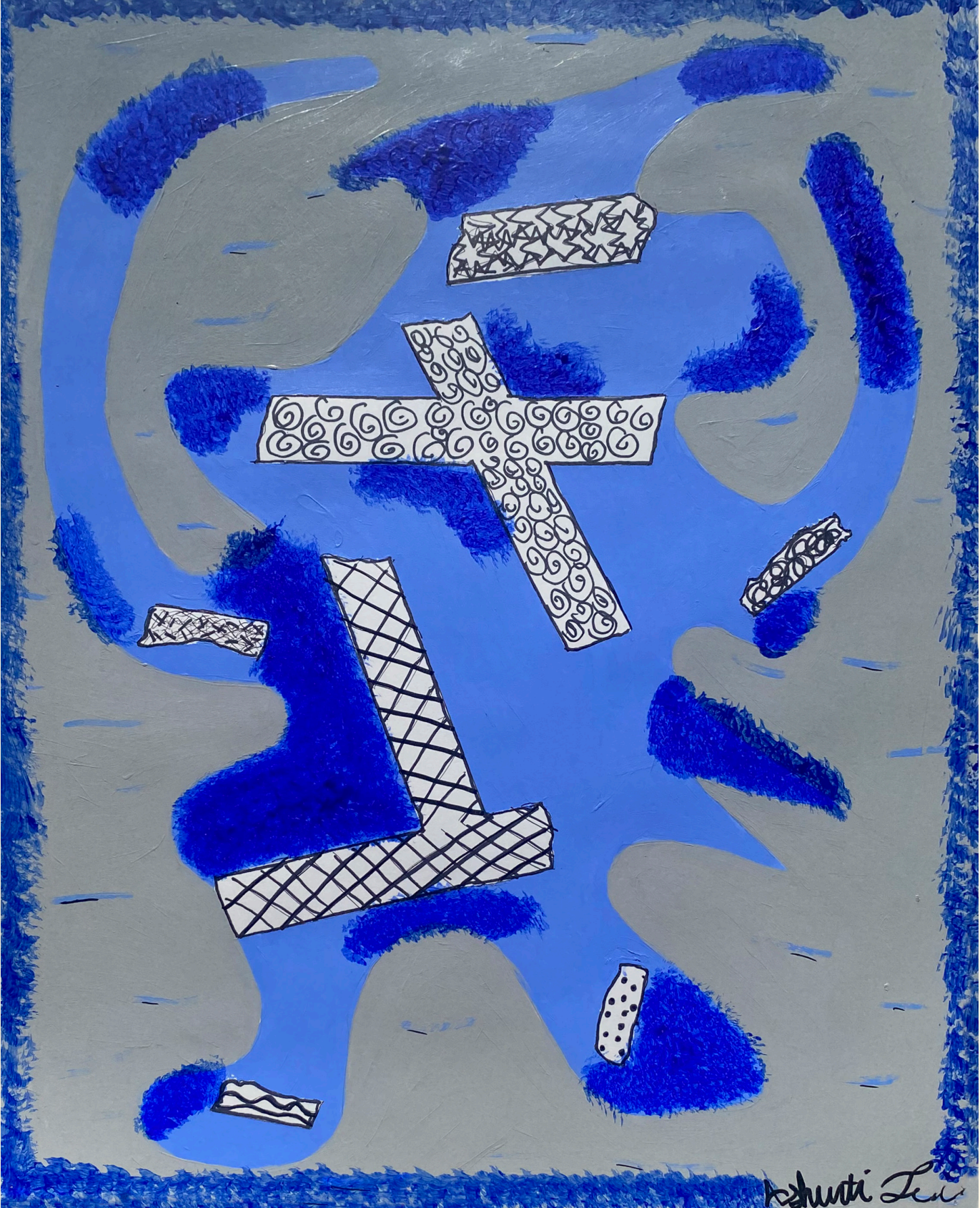


A'Shunti Tillman

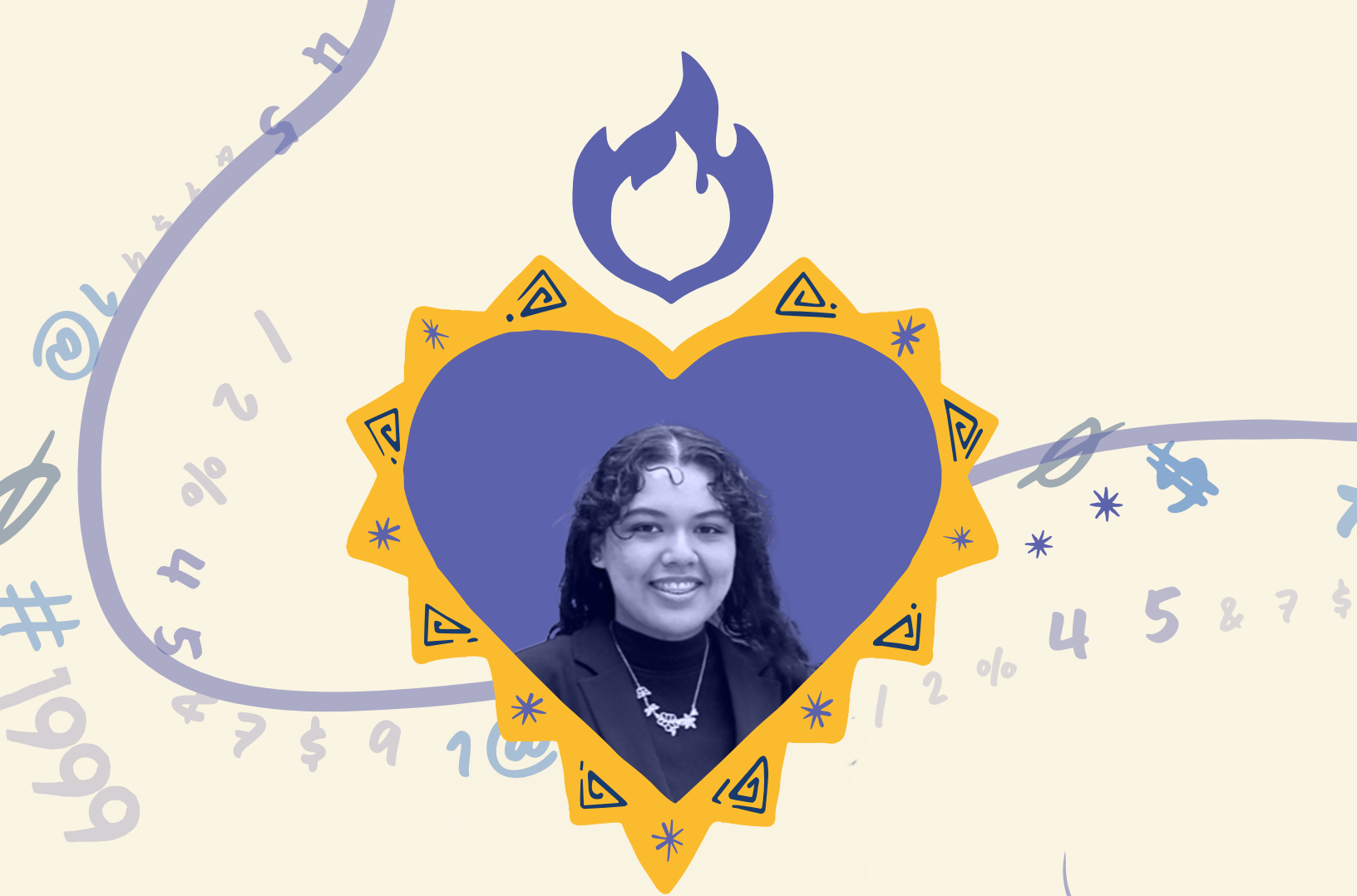
Mount Mary University

I am a Graphic and User Experience Designer who enjoys a little bit of every medium that art can bring because I love to create things no matter the outcome. Especially if I can be sure to understand how and why it was created to use in my everyday life in the future. I believe everything is considered art because the effort and decisions you had to make to even create it is important. I enjoy learning the new methods and processes I have learned to be even gifted enough to create art. I love to make digital work just as much as I do like creating things from scratch and by physical hands because I find it relaxing to just make art. I am always looking forward to learning and advancing my skills with in the art industry because it changes all the time plus we get new trends everyday so I have to stay up to date.

"Self-Shape" is an abstract representation of what I was thinking of myself at the moment in time when I created it. The color and movement of the shape was very intentional. The spaces in between the shape represent the bandages (or challenges) I've gone through. The movement of the raised arms is because I like to conquer new things, and I would dance my life away if I could. The texture on the shape showcases how fuzzy I can be because I am very loving and caring.



SOURCE: A' Shunti Tillman, *Self Shape*, 2024



Mariana Hernandez-Galeana

Dominican University

I am a first year student from Dominican University. I come from Waukegan, Illinois. My major is Criminology with a minor in Psychology. My long-term career goal is to become someone that can figure out and investigate crimes, I have no idea what I want exactly, but I am excited to explore my options.

This piece reflects the grief I experienced due to not being able to see family members who passed away and the impact that this had on my parents who weren't able to say their final goodbyes. I hope to raise awareness of the difficulty of receiving a valid social security number and the impact this causes for immigrant parents with first-generation children.

Numbers

When I was growing up, I would always dream of going to Mexico. I would pitch in the idea of me going with my parents to visit, but they said no. They'd say, "*No hija, todavía no. Alomejor cuando estés más grande.*"

I know that they want to take me, but they sadly cannot. They would have wanted me to explore and get to know their country, but they are immigrants, and if they visit, they would have to stay there because of some numbers.

Numbers that people born in America are automatically given at birth but those who immigrate here are also given those numbers, but to me at least they are fake **numbers**.

The numbers help with barely anything, they don't help at all when it comes to getting decent jobs. Immigrants pay taxes and contribute a ton to the economy, yet the country still will not give them valid **numbers**.

They can't visit their family anymore unless they want to go back to Mexico for good, but the situation over there is looking very much rough. The cartel is running the country, your own family members can back stab you even if you are outside of the country.

I would know.

My own sister did it to our dad and uncle by trying to threaten my aunt's life by involving the mafia, just for some money.

These **numbers** stopped many things.

They stopped my parents and I from seeing our siblings, our aunts, our uncles, our grandparents and our other family.

I know that the immigrants who came here are told that “it is not their land” although it is, but I digress; some citizens who are born here just don’t bother to

understand that they came here for a better life.

They told their loved ones back in their home country things like,

“I will see you again soon” or

“I promise I will come back to see you.”

But they never came back.

Either because the person that they promised to go back to has died, or the immigrant person died in the United States.

I only know one side of that coin.

My parents promised their families that they would come back to them, but my parents aren’t able to.

Their parents passed away, their siblings have passed away as well, aunts and uncles too.

Some years ago, my uncle was murdered. I was never able to meet the majority of my family,

I was only able to meet my two grandmas.

One of my grandmas passed away in **2018** and my other grandma passed away in **2023**.

Both of my grandpas died in **2023** along with an aunt of mine from my father’s side.

One of my grandpas was buried on my birthday.

We did not celebrate my birthday,
but my mom who was mainly the affected one
didn't want the tragedy to affect me neither
did my older sister from my mother's side.

My friends still visited me to tell me "Happy Birthday!"
even if it was for a few minutes or hours.

What makes it even more depressing is that I never got the chance to
meet him, and my mom never got the chance to bury him or finish mourning her
mother, my grandma.

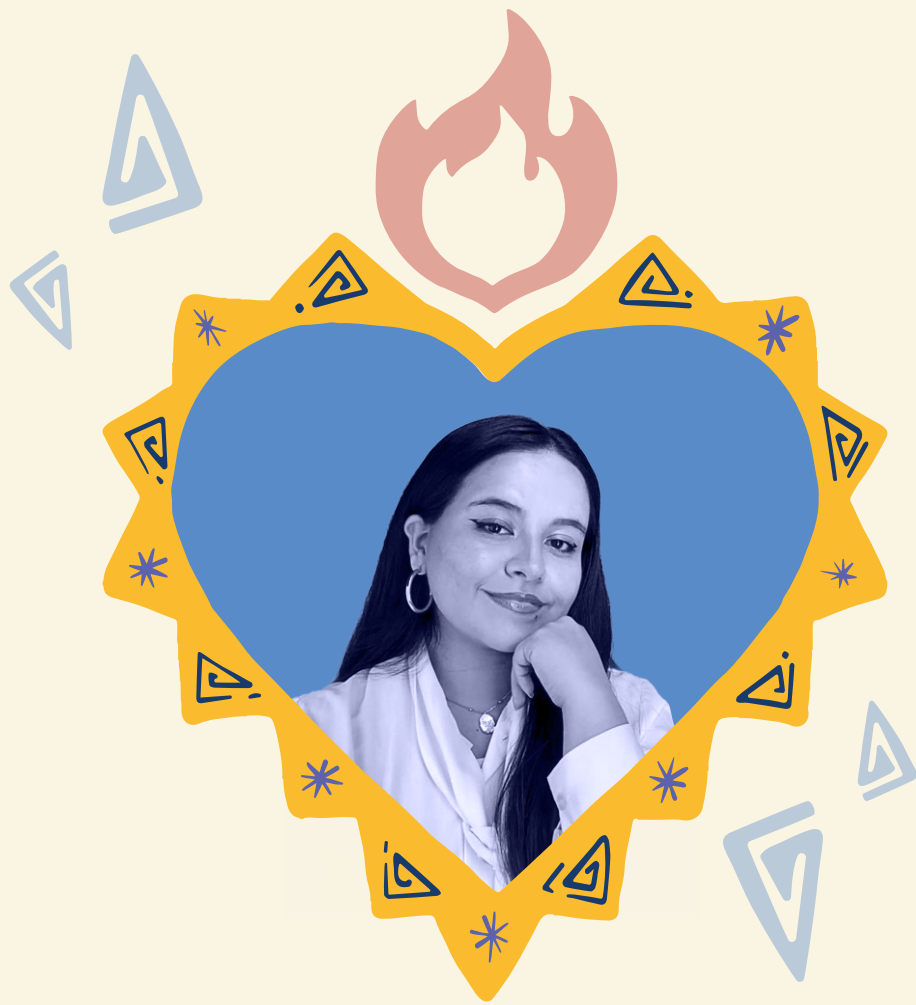
Numbers stopped my family from going to Mexico
to bury their loved ones as much as it sounds morbid.
My parents knew full well that they'd be the ones burying their parents, they tell
me that they want me to bury them and not the other way around.

Between them I am their only child;
I have two half-siblings on both sides.
I am not close to them by any means,
only as of recently I am getting a bit closer with my
oldest sister from my mother's side.

Corruption is what stopped me from seeing my family in Mexico,
numbers too,
some silly little **numbers** that I was automatically born with
but my parents, although being here for over 20 years,
are still not granted those **numbers**.

We can't do anything about it now seeing as our loved ones passed away,
some became corrupted, or other reasons that I do not know of.
We couldn't say hello or goodbye in person to them, there is nothing left but a
void because of those pesky
numbers.





Maria Morales

St. Mary's University

Maria Fernanda Morales was born in Bogota, Colombia, in 2001. Currently a sophomore at St. Mary's University, she is pursuing a degree in Art Education. Before starting her higher education journey, Maria honed her editing, photography, and illustration skills through self-teaching.

In 2022, she began her role managing the social media presence of St. Mary's Inclusive Excellence Office, where she created various advertising images. The following year, Maria showcased her talent at the San Antonio Art League, marking a significant milestone in her artistic career. During the same period, she engaged in diverse illustration projects, contributing to initiatives such as *Why Would I Mispronounce My Own Name?* and *The Blue Beetle: The Lecture*.

In crafting this illustration, my vision was to share the deep love and passion I hold for my Latin roots. With each stroke and detail, I found my chest swelling with emotion, for me, *abuelita* means home, unity, and family. *La Bendicion* represents carrying our loved ones close to our hearts wherever we go, symbolizing connection and protection because once grandma gives you the blessing, you have the strength of all your ancestors.



SOURCE: Maria Morales, *La Bendición*, 2024



Andrea Calderón

Dominican University

My name is Andrea Calderon, and I am a Junior at Dominican University. This is my fourth year at Dominican, and I will be graduating in Spring 2024. My major is Graphic Design, and my minor is Social Media. I specialize in digital illustration design, and I love it. I love showing my creativity, and it also helps me to de-stress as well. I am Mexican American, and I am proud of my Mexican background. Hobbies that I love to do in my free time are arts & crafts, bullet journaling, drawing on my iPad, drawing and creating stickers, and using my Cricut machine. Art is my thing because I love creating things to show my creativity.

This **Katya Echazarreta** portrait is redesigned in Adobe Illustrator and it's one of my favorites as well. This portrait was for an assignment for my History of Graphic Design class. The assignment was to do a propaganda poster to raise awareness for an event or cause. I decided to focus on this poster to raise awareness for Women's History Month. I decided to add a woman who has made a huge impact. I decided to focus on Katya Echazarreta, she was **the first Mexican-American woman to go to space**. She is also a Mexican electrical engineer. To this day, she is focusing on encouraging young kids who are interested working in the science field. I designed her with her space uniform and added a quote as well which translates into English, "Never say you can't do it because you don't know how to do it, always say yes you can do it because I learn to do everything."

The portrait of the **Virgen de Guadalupe** is very special to me. I like to incorporate my faith and mexican culture into my art. The portrait was created using the Procreate app. While drawing it, I wanted to match the colors to look realistic to the Virgen de Guadalupe. I also added the title in a handwritten style.

KATYA ECHAZARRETA

Women's History Month

"Nunca digas que no puedes porque no sabes como hacerlo siempre di que si puedes porque vas a aprender todo."

First Mexican American to fly to space



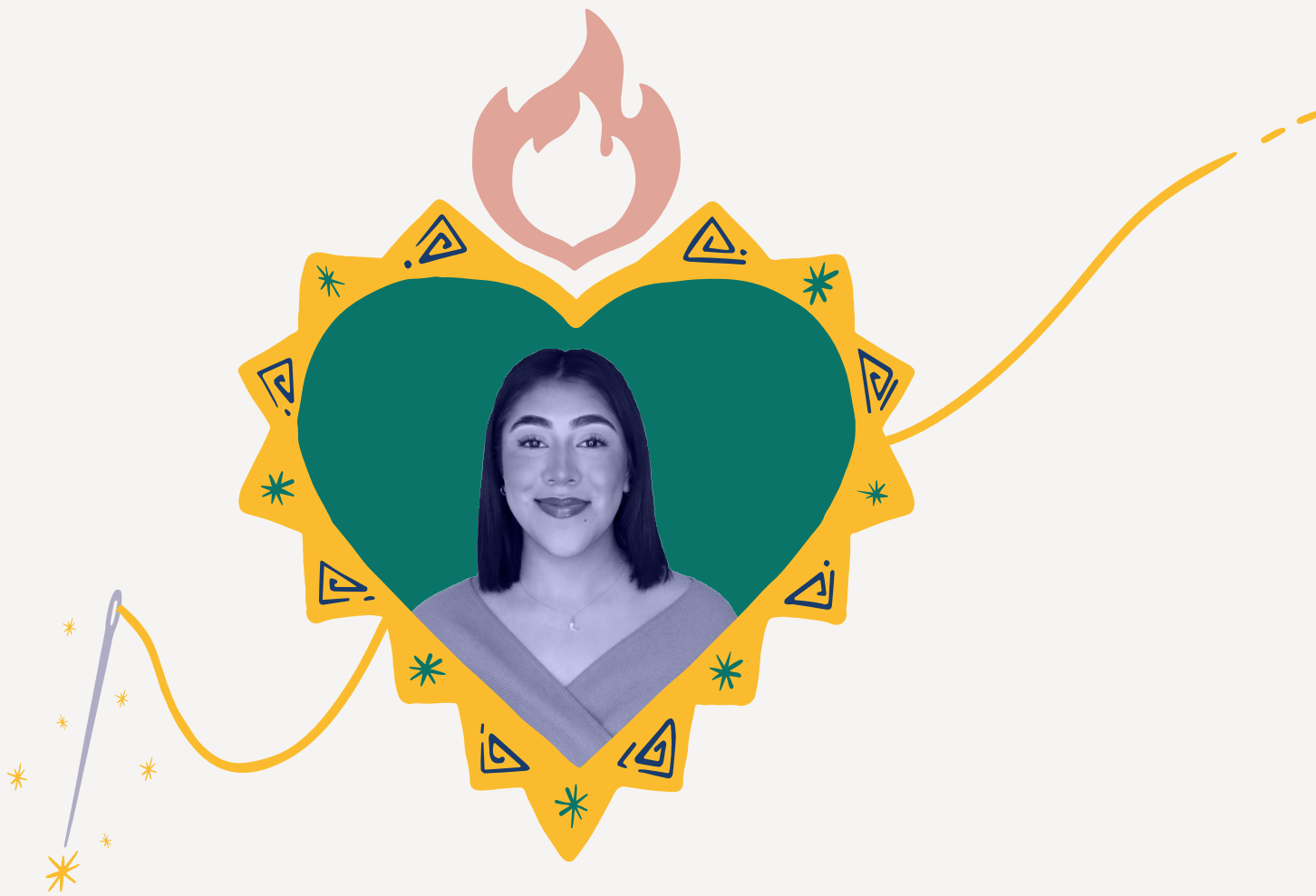
Andrea Calderón

SOURCE: Andrea Calderón, Katya Echazarreta, 2024



VIRGENCITA DE GUADALUPE





Laura Espinosa

Dominican University

My name is Laura Espinosa, I am a current college student majoring in Fashion Merchandising with two minors in Theology and Marketing at Dominican University. I was born and raised in a suburb called Elgin in Illinois, and I take great pride in my roots as a daughter of Mexican immigrants. Through my academic journey, I've come to appreciate fashion as a potent form of resistance — a form of defiance that I deeply resonate with. Moreover, my experiences have nurtured a love for embracing diversity and culture within the fashion industry.

In this journal, I delve into my personal journey with La Virgen de Guadalupe from an early age, all while wearing the lenses of a fashion student. As I weave together my spirituality with the layers of the meaning found within fashion, I am drawn to the interconnectedness of it all. Through the threads of my personal journey and the rich tapestry of Guadalupe's wisdom, I explore the intersections where faith meets creativity, tradition intertwines with innovation, and spirituality is sewn into the fabric of daily life. In this journal, I delve into my personal journey with La Virgen de Guadalupe from an early age, all while wearing the lenses of a fashion student. As I weave together my spirituality with the layers of the meaning found within fashion, I am drawn to the interconnectedness of it all. Through the threads of my personal journey and the rich tapestry of Guadalupe's wisdom, I explore the intersections where faith meets creativity, tradition intertwines with innovation, and spirituality is sewn into the fabric of daily life.



Tejiendo Conexiones

De chiquita, I have always been exposed to the mother of all mothers, the mother of the divine. Although I grew up Catholic, I have learned that my faith and spirituality is what I feel the most comfortable in. A very eminent figure in my childhood, en lo cotidiano, and in my faith is La Virgen de Guadalupe. Our Lady of Guadalupe is someone who speaks for indigenous people and who continues to show motherly love and care for all people. In this essay, I will talk about how my upbringing, my passions, and the theme of my life thus far, relates wholeheartedly to Guadalupe, her image, and how she presents herself to the people through everyday struggles.

When I was about six years old, I would draw images of La Virgen María. I would color these images and gift them to my mom and my abuelita. Looking at the drawings now, I never realized how much of myself I would draw into La Virgen María. From her eyes to her hair, she would be identical to me. Back then, drawing these images just felt right to me. I did not even fully grasp the concept of La Virgen. I knew she represented a mother, and because mine is so loving and thoughtful, I felt a connection with La Virgencita from a very early age. In correlation to my creative and crafty nature, as well as my implicit intuition, Kat Armas explains, “The art of making and creating has always been more than just physical craft; it has served spiritual purposes as well” (82). The simplicity of being a kid and drawing such important and symbolic figures of faith and historic moments allowed me to start my spiritual journey, without me realizing it. As a Mexican living in the United States, the infamous La Rosa de Guadalupe was always playing on the television. I was constantly inspired by Guadalupe on the show, not only because of the heartfelt stories, but I also knew that much like the mothers on the tv, my mom also had an image of la Virgen de Guadalupe in our house and would pray for her and with her. Because of this inspiration, and when I would draw these pictures, I would always focus so much on her garment—the symbols in them and the colors that clothed her.

Looking back at this now, fashion is something that has always interested me. Not only does dress represent someone very well but it allows for interpretation and understanding from generation to generation. Clothing and garments act like a time machine; they allow you to feel nostalgia or allow you to have an idea of someone from a different place or a different time. I have a blurry memory of myself drawing a portrait of la Virgen de Guadalupe in her traditional green and gold cloak, with stars and the moon. As a six-year-old, I was too young to fully grasp and understand the real spiritual manifestation that I was literally creating in that moment, but now that I am more fully aware of my faith, I understand that these symbols are much more than just a pretty image. All the pretty characteristics have meaning behind them. With this deep reflection, I began to grow interested in the meaning of Guadalupe's cloak. It is no coincidence that her cloak is heavily associated with the colors and tones of the earth. Josephina De La Torre states, "Greens and blues are universally known to be earth tones associated with life living forces found in nature" (2021). It also makes me ponder and realize that it is no coincidence that blue and green are my two favorite colors of all time.

With further detail, La Virgen de Guadalupe's cloak has always interested me and inspired me because of its simple, yet detailed layers. Paying close attention to those details on the cloak is important because of the symbolism behind it. Bishop Robert Barron explains, "The sanctuary that she wears is an Aztec sign of pregnancy. She stands in front of the sun and on the moon. Her cloak is covered with stars. The sun, moon, and stars were all signs of gods for the ancient Aztecs" (Barron, 3:34). Growing up, I have always been fascinated with nature's beauty because of the calming sensation, as well as my experiences in nature with those whom I love. The last vivid memory I have with my abuelita on my paternal side is when we were in Mexico on the patio. We were looking up at the sky and the stars in the middle of the night. I have never seen a sky so beautifully filled with stars since that night. Similarly, ever since I can remember, and especially now that I am away from home in college, I get reminders and text messages from my mom. She will text me in the middle of the night and say, "Laura, mi chula, ¿viste la luna?" These messages from her are a constant reminder that no matter what struggles I may be facing, la luna también cambia. La luna must change

to continue its cycle. Although I have never associated the sun, the moon, and the stars with Gods, like the ancient Aztecs did, I know that when I feel the warm sun hugging me, when I look at the stars shining to me, and when I feel the energy of the moon, my faith grows stronger, and I know there is something greater.

Conexiones con Realizaciones

As I get older, the more I learn about myself and my beliefs, the more connected I feel towards La Virgen. It wasn't until I arrived to college, a Catholic institution, that I realized that La Virgen María with the blue and white cloak I would draw like myself, and with similar characteristic that I have, versus the Virgen de Guadalupe that I would draw to recreate from the infamous show, is in fact the same Virgen, a Virgen and a mother created to represent different identities and different kinds of people.

As I mature, the more and more I want to learn about others, their backgrounds, their faith, their traditions, and their beliefs. In fact, I have always been very interested in the psychology of dress, and the history of why people dress the way that they do. I have also learned to appreciate a new passion for indigenous styles of dressing, sewing, and creating. Little did I know that La Virgen placed this passion of mine in my heart from the very beginning, starting at about six years old when I would draw these pictures. This reflection has also made me realize that La Virgen, la madre de todas las madres, has always been a fashion icon! De La Torre explains, "That is why I am labeling Guadalupe as a fashion icon, because her appearance influences a worldwide devotion that employs her aesthetics in their personal way" (De La Torre, 202). She is a different version of herself for the different kinds of people, for their different backgrounds, their different understanding of faith, their different traditions, and their different beliefs. I feel connected to her, not only because of the way that she cares for and supports [people, humanity, etc.], but also in the way that she quite literally presents herself. Her way of being able to identify, relate, and care for different cultures implies a huge act on social justice. Her ability to nurture, support, and look iconic as she does it, perfectly aligns with my vocation and passions in life.

Hilos de Tiempo

A very long time ago, on December 12th, 1532, La Virgen appeared to Juan Diego. “She announced herself as the mother of the most high God” (Barron, 1:11). Although she made an imprint on millions and millions of people worldwide since that day, she also literally made an imprint on the cloak that Juan Diego was wearing. “In the Native Cloth of Juan Diego’s tilma, the fiber of the clothing of the poorest of the poor of the conquered & dominated people - the image of the unlimited & very personal love and compassion of the new center of all life and of the universe made its dwelling among us” (Elizondo 119). La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to a human and had a conversation with him, but beyond that, she took it upon herself to leave a trace using a piece of fabric worn by an indigenous man. Nowadays, fashion is always portrayed to be as bougee, elegant, and expensive, but the reality of it is that fashion is all created with the same materials that the divine has gifted us with. The cloak that Juan Diego was wearing, made of non-durable cactus fiber, a cloak that would be seen as “poor,” has an imprint that will more than likely last forever. This is the biggest fashion statement I know of, and with this statement, there is always assurance and maternal nurture for the people. In fact, Elizondo mentions, “She will never leave us because she has been intimately woven into the cloth of our suffering - resurrecting existence” (Elizondo, 120). La Virgen de Guadalupe has been a guidance to so many different kinds of people throughout different parts of the world, and I am amazed by her grace, her compassion for all people, and her skills of sewing in the needs for people en lo cotidiano, including mine.

Overall, La Virgen de Guadalupe, no matter what version we admire her as, is someone who anyone is able to connect to because that is who she is and how she presents herself to be. From the small stars in her cloak, to the everyday lives of those who think they may not matter, she will always be a mother with open arms who will intimately weave her support into the everyday struggles of the people. La Virgen es una madre con gran cariño.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Armas, Kat. *Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence, and Strength*. Brazos Press, 2021.

Barron, Robert. "Juan Diego & Our Lady of Guadalupe." YouTube, YouTube, 9 Dec. 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXyd1Gqul_Q&ab_channel=ChrisMcLaughlin.

De la Torre, Josefina. "The Virgin as a Fashion Icon: How the Virgin of Guadalupe Shapes Latinx Identity." Fashion History Timeline, 16 June 2021, fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/virgin-as-a-fashion-icon/

Elizondo, Virgil. *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*. Internet Archive, Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 1 Jan. 1997, archive.org/details/guadalupemotherooooeliz.










**¿QUIERES COMPARTIR TU LÍO?
HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?**

SUBMIT FOR A CHANCE TO BE IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

-  Submissions are open to undergraduate students from all disciplines.
-  Written work should be submitted in digital format (Word), in MLA or Chicago format, and visual arts should be in the highest resolution possible.
-  Photography should be high resolution and in JPEG or PNG format.
-  Writers and artists should submit a headshot, brief artist statement and artist bio with their submissions.
-  All submissions should be original and previously unpublished.




IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Students can submit more than one submission, but they should fill out our online form for each individual submission along with their brief statement or bio. All submissions are due by **December 1, 2024, 11:59 PM Central Time**; Our Student Editorial Board, along with the PASOS Network, will review all submissions and notification of acceptance will be sent out by **January 17, 2024**. Students who are not selected to be published will be considered for our future Journal publications.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or need further information, feel free to contact Maria Villanueva, Program Coordinator, PASOS Network, by email (**mvillanueva1@dom.edu**).







What is *Nepantla*?

Nepantla captures the essence of living in the space between two worlds. We invite undergraduate writers and artists to contribute to our journal, exploring the rich, complex, and other transformative experiences of navigating this liminal space.



PASOS
NETWORK



DOMINICAN
UNIVERSITY