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**in collab with
San Jose Strong!**

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@loveletterstosj

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EDITORS' NOTE

San Jose, the “Capital of Silicon Valley,” has been a melting pot of perspectives from the start: from the indigenous Muwekma, Tamien, and Ohlone peoples to immigrants from around the world; from the Berryessa Flea Market or better known as “La Pulga” to the honeysuckles growing sideways up Mount Umunhum.

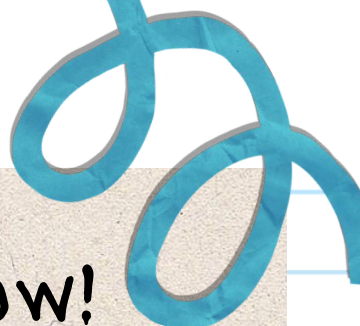
To communicate the vibrancy of this city, we designed Love Letters to San Jose in collaboration with San Jose Strong to interview, collaborate with, and exchange stories of residents and artists—now presented scrapbook style: a time capsule handmade with care. Because in the end, what is history or culture without documentation? What is a city but the people—our time here reflected in photos, art, comedy, and memories: vintage, hand-drawn aesthetics on the page, snippets of language, cutouts of stories and dreams?

We are San Jose. And here is our love letter.

Special thanks to:

**Mary and Kathryn at San Jose Strong!
and Sachin, Mimi, & Caitlin.**





I WANNA KNOW!

Do you consider yourself a visionary?
What are you doing when you feel most alive?

What makes your soul sing?
What's your favorite album you can listen to
endlessly on repeat?

Would you wear a disco ball cowboy hat?
What is your favorite day dream?
What do you take pride in?
What makes you smile a mile wide?
How do you rest?
What comfort food can you never get enough of?

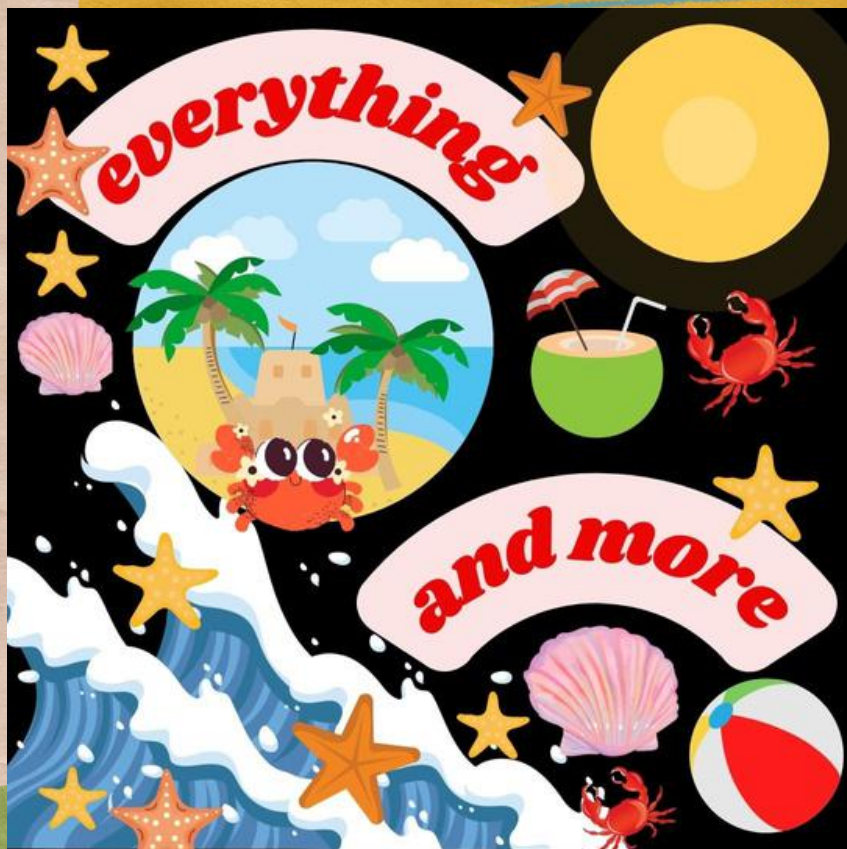
What's the worst food you've ever had?
What are you put in charge of bringing to The
Cookout?

What do you like to do for fun?
What makes you laugh out loud?
What's your favorite movies/books?
Everything and more



- anonymous







KYLE FROM WORK

I have a pre-show routine where I listen to songs that make me think of home.

Acoustic covers that remind me of late night open mics.
Japanese rock that reminds me of anime.
Jazz and reggae that reminds me of sj's many festivals

And San Jose by chow
mane cuz it's in the name.

It's a beautiful place and I'm proud to get my start in it

Kyle from Work
Comedian

@kylefromwork



So in the midst of college application season and newfound anxiety, I had no one to turn to.

I ended up reaching out to this person (*we can call them X*) because I barely knew them. Ironically, the fact that I didn't know them well made it easier for me to grow close to them.

They never learned about what was going on in my life, but the comfort of having someone to talk to on a daily basis without the anxiety that was always shadowing me helped me to get through the day. There was a point where I even contemplated not applying to college at all, but because they scheduled time for both of us to work on our apps at the same time, I painstakingly finished my applications to all the UC's.

Through inside jokes, parallel work days, and a feigned sense of rivalry, I was able to graduate my senior year and attend a good university. I ended up coming back here after I graduated college even though I swore that I would never return.

So - where is X now, you may ask?

Sadly, as most young adults do, we never really kept in touch after that fraught period in our lives.

But whenever I think of San Jose (and inevitably, remember X), I think of how close I was to not being here anymore - not being alive. And while that may sound scary, I think the honesty I have in being able to admit that shows how far I have come. I think it's too late to properly send off my friend into the next chapter of their life, but I'll always be grateful to X for being there at the right time.

While we may not be as close as we once were, they will always be part of my love letter to San Jose: the place I was born in, the place I grew up in, and the city where I thought I would never get to see again when I grew up.

But I'm here now, so - thank you X!

OF SUN AND DRY

dear san josé

my first loss, my first kiss
you hold it all for me
in a space bound by concrete
you carved the bittersweet



even without a house
not one to call my own
you sketched a home for me
with sun and dry
and roads and roots
you held it all for me



i find myself amiss
lost between two streets
of skateboards and car rides
with drives beneath the reef

of this ocean i keep for you
my love too deep to see
with waves, never mending
you carved the bittersweet

*Artist Statement:
thank you, san josé, for the times in between*





OUR BEAUTIFUL CITY,

00



OUR BEAUTIFUL HOME

FLEA MARKET MEMORIES

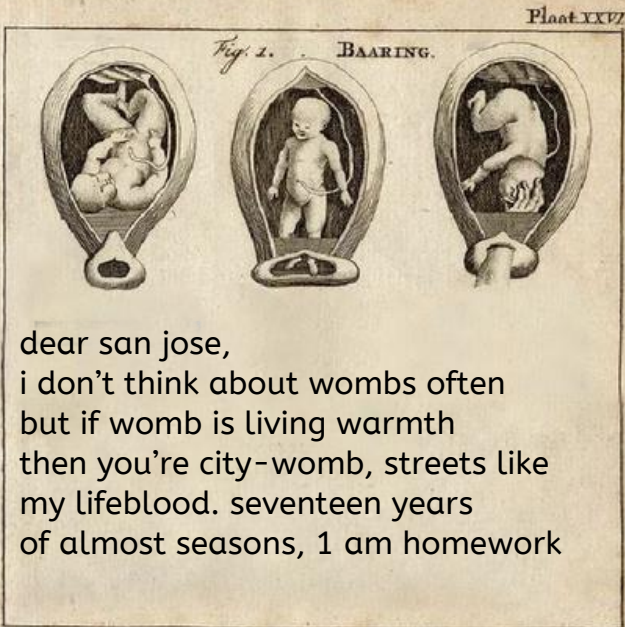
Dear San Jose,

You hold some of my favorite memories with my family, especially my dad. See you host that flea market on Capitol Express Way every weekend and Sundays, those were our days. I remember my dad waking us up around 8am so we could go to “La Pulga”. He would give us a dollar and sometimes, if we had the extra money, he would give us five! All of us would pile into the van, 9 in total to drive 30 minutes to this place. And we would walk around as a group and stop to look at whatever my dad was interested in. We would always save our money though, the best part was when my dad would let us stop at 7 eleven after to get some snacks before driving home. I remember the feeling of happiness sitting in the backseat of the van surrounded by my family, listening to music and munching away. Now it’s a distant memory. But I hold it dearly to my heart. See my dad passed away on Christmas last year. And I look for him everywhere but the only places I find him are in my memories and one of those is our Sundays at the San Jose flea market. Our happy place for many years. So thank you San Jose for being part of such a happy time in my life.

With love,
Your flea market friend

DEAR SAN JOSE,

By Thy Hope Luong , Santa Clara County
Youth Poet Laureate



dear san jose,
i don't think about wombs often
but if womb is living warmth
then you're city-womb, streets like
my lifeblood. seventeen years
of almost seasons, 1 am homework



sessions fueled by nirvana soul
birthday parties under dusty pink skies
busybodies iin city hall, siphoning
phở from metal spoons, you
hold my dreams like treasure-box

dear san jose,
I have to force my phone
not to autocorrect you into San Jose
in some ways you've Mothered
my mother, guided her into Family
- crazy to think she picked apricots
in long-forgotten orchards
and I'm here picking out colleges
to apply to. San Jose, time has
nothing on you: just the brimming
Hope of bright minded Immigrant
and the chili grit in her pocket



dear san jose,
it felt like fall started today
I walked outside and the clouds
couldn't decide between gray and blue,
it was this weird sort of charmolypti
next time this year I'll probably be gone
but I know you'll stay the same
San Jose, sweet city of mine
keep that treasure a little longer.



I LOVE YOU SAN JOSE

michelle boire
@rwc.zinelibrary



scan to view her
zine via pdf!

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UNTITLED

I moved to SJ when I was fresh out of high school, when I truly wasn't old enough to be on my own. During the pandemic, I went back "home" and I had a taste of what I ran away from.

The town that taught me to hate myself and my body and my looks and my people and my family. I wanted out, so I took the first chance I had. Yet I found myself back, two years later.

These days, I don't really see San Jose as a city that I will grow old in, for I don't quite see myself as growing old in general. I see myself living. Growing. Existing, for once. Instead of just surviving.

But despite San Jose being just a stepping stone in my existence, I appreciate the city for becoming a place where I felt safe to grow—safe to exist and live—overall. Within this city, I have learned to love myself, for myself, so through and through, I have learned to love this city.

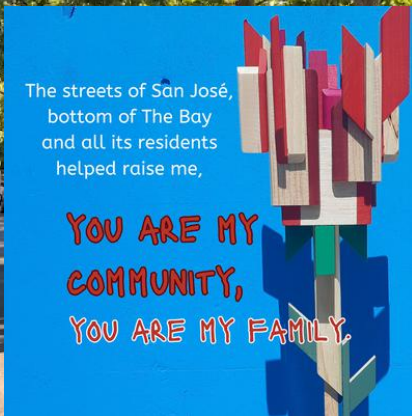
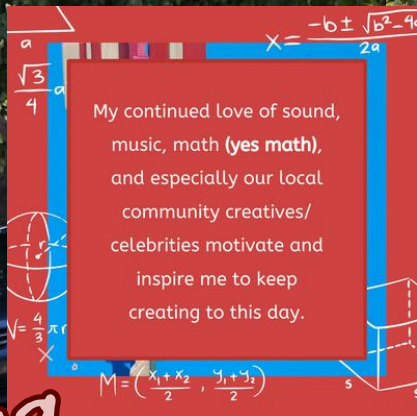
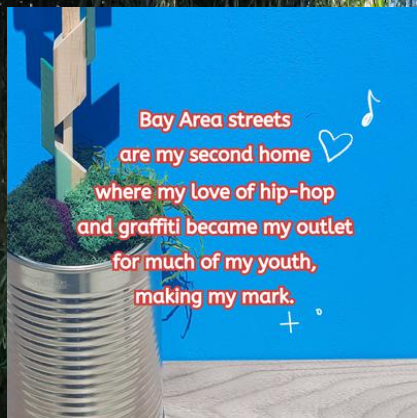
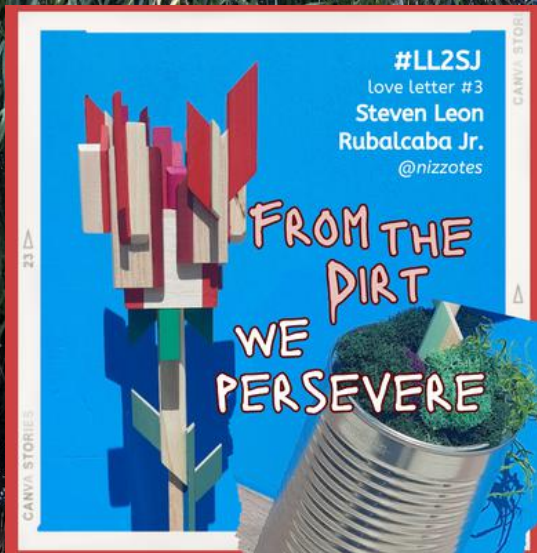


Will this city see much of me in the future—near or otherwise? Most likely not. Will I forget this city and the opportunities it aligned me with?? Absolutely not.

Artist Statement:

Whether your elders deserve respect or not, learn their stories, for they absolutely deserve understanding.

— someone who has lived in regret since october 2019





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DAN FENSTERMACHER

Wherever we travel in this lifetime,
inevitably humans are the same.



Cinco De Mayo

Where faces do not receive focus, hand
gestures embrace quirky moments of
happenstance.

Humor is a common theme throughout; a trait
that reminds us not to take life too seriously.
Adding charisma, the use of flash exaggerates
the vibrant colors of the world.



Spring Bloom

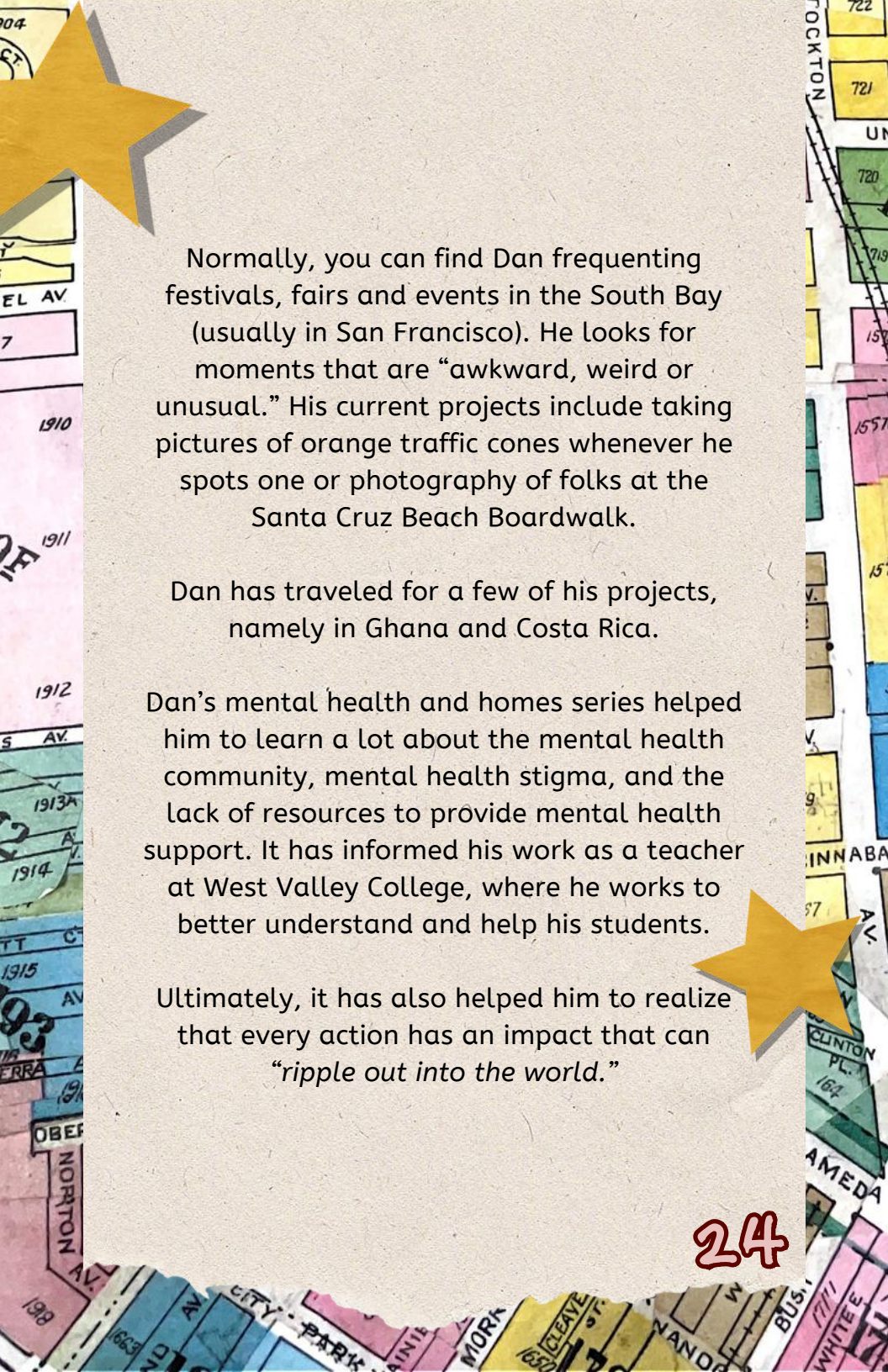
Unconventional framing creates an element of mystery, leaving a sense of wonderment about the intriguing stories of the people we meet on our journey.



"It was inspiring to have strangers let me into their home and let me tell their story."

Dan Fernstermacher became a photographer while living in San Jose for graduate school, where he "came into [his] own as an artist." Originally, he shot landscapes, which progressed to him taking environmental portraits using flash and external lighting.

For this thesis in graduate school, Dan aimed to combat the stigma of mental illness by developing a series of environmental portraits of people's houses as they lived with mental illness. friends and family; as time went on, he put out an open call on social media platforms such as Facebook asking folks to share their stories. When asked about the process of recruitment, Dan states that "It was inspiring to have strangers let me into their home and let me tell their story." To him, "the real heroes [are the people who were able to be] vulnerable with the public."

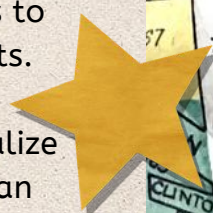


Normally, you can find Dan frequenting festivals, fairs and events in the South Bay (usually in San Francisco). He looks for moments that are “awkward, weird or unusual.” His current projects include taking pictures of orange traffic cones whenever he spots one or photography of folks at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Dan has traveled for a few of his projects, namely in Ghana and Costa Rica.

Dan’s mental health and homes series helped him to learn a lot about the mental health community, mental health stigma, and the lack of resources to provide mental health support. It has informed his work as a teacher at West Valley College, where he works to better understand and help his students.

Ultimately, it has also helped him to realize that every action has an impact that can *“ripple out into the world.”*





UNITITLED PHOTOGRAPH
NO. 23

by Matt Montenello (@bedfordtowers)

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MT. YMUNHUM

Tshaka Campbell

Santa Clara County Poet Laurete

Today on the drive home we saw a concrete peak
calling from the edge of clouds

It felt like a compass reminding us to look up to pray
for a return of something familiar

*We found later that it was more of a wanting hallelujah
dancing with the sky*

It was making vows and convincing the sun to cast
shadows in memory of Amah Mutsun



While it ached for the falling rain to coerce the scarlet
larkspur and pink honeysuckle to climb the hill so they
could listen close

Listen to the hummingbird's resting wings sing of loss
and massacred spirits longing to purge the soil



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INTERVIEW

Emma Zhang: So the poem you've submitted, Mt. Umunhum references a radar station, a landmark of San Jose. The name comes from an Ohlone phrase, meaning "resting place of the hummingbird." I thought that was really cool, how history is subtly tucked into the site that we see a lot and the beautiful longing for the nuances of the land that I don't really think just driving down. So can you elaborate on your thoughts and inspirations behind writing this poem?

Tshaka Campbell: To your point, it's like, I've driven past it so many times, but it just felt like you always see it in a distance, right? But I've always felt like there's a calling. Then I'd a little bit of research, you know, not not actively, but I'd be somewhere, and then there's a little factoid that I didn't know. It's a radar station like "do-do-do-do" it's calling me. I was like, Okay, that makes sense. Then I love hummingbirds, and to find out like that connection with the hummingbirds! There's also certain flowers that grow in that space. How it grows, on its way up the hill, I was like, Oh, my God, this is just like, everything about this space is calling..

I wanted to sort of honor the space, but also expand on the rich history of the Ohlone people in the area.



Emma Zhang: San Jose has so many layers. It's really fascinating. A lot of times we don't acknowledge everything that's around us or came before us.

Tshaka Campbell: Yeah, that's so true, I was also trying to get out in in the poem is that are all these beautiful things that are around us that we take for granted. And you don't really understand the history or the importance or how instrumental, these things of these situations were in sort of building the community or where we are now. That's not just a hill with a thing on top of it, you know, there's so much more and then when we go into the name, and then we go, like, there's so much more and we just sort of, like you said, idly go past it, a glimpse of like, "oh, there's that."

When we look at the Guadalupe River: my daughter had a school trip of looking at the ecology of just that. And that, within itself, is amazing. You just see it on the signs driving through, you know, Guadalupe with a riverbed over here, you don't think about it. But there's just so much beauty and so much history—steeped history—in San Jose, that I feel like we just we take for granted. So that was sort of my one of my steps in trying to highlight that and, and just kind of put it out into the public.

MORRO ROCK



Jillian Simpson

This is a sketch of Morro Rock in Morro Bay, a place that brings me great peace.

I call San Jose my home, but I love the routes stemming off of San Jose that allow me to easily access places such as these while still being close to home. San Jose provides a place to thrive while also providing connections to many beautiful spots. From the SF Bay, to Morro Bay!

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GROCERIES WITH MOM



đi chợ
với
mẹ!



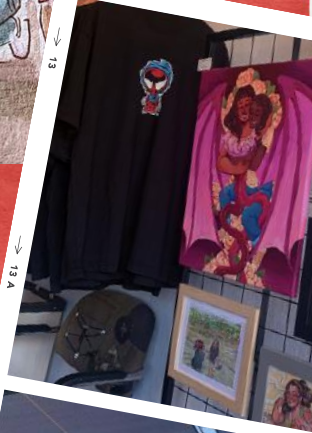
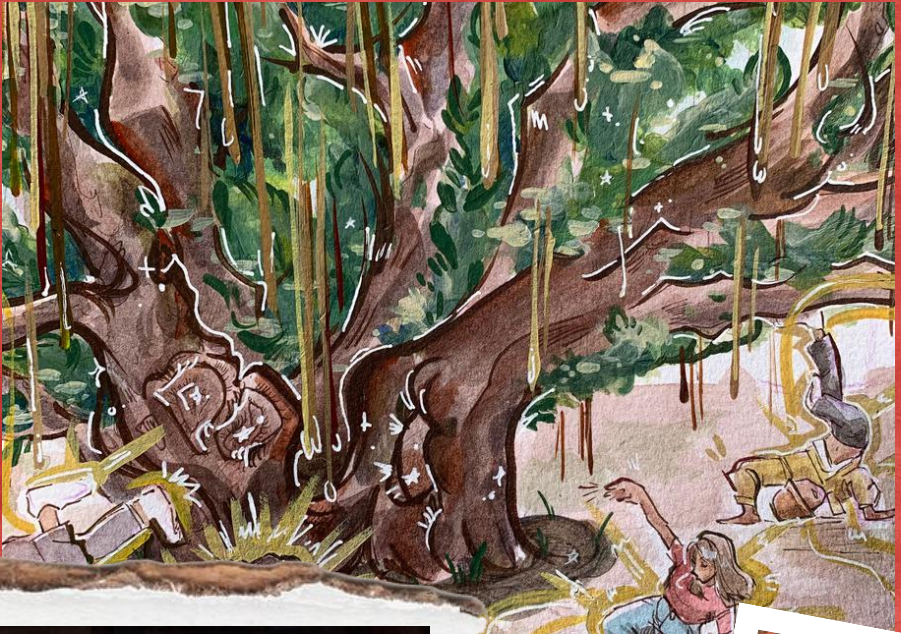


WHAT YOU'VE GIVEN



frances mendoza
@putchinta

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→ 14A

Dear San Jose,
Your creative communities have welcomed me and
given me space since I was not yet a teenager.
You've nurtured my drive to grow and learn!

You've given some of my family a space to give their
ideas from. You've given my partner a family who
sees him. You've given me artists, poets, and
dancers who continue to inspire me.

Dear San Jose,
You are full of history and culture that influences
the people within you and around you whether you
are aware of it or whether these people are aware
of it themselves. I will continue to be grateful for
you, without knowing the exact words to say to
be able to properly thank you.





I got to be a part of my first group gallery show with Know Future Gallery over a year ago, in Japantown. Then I got to vend and sell my art for the first time at its closing reception.

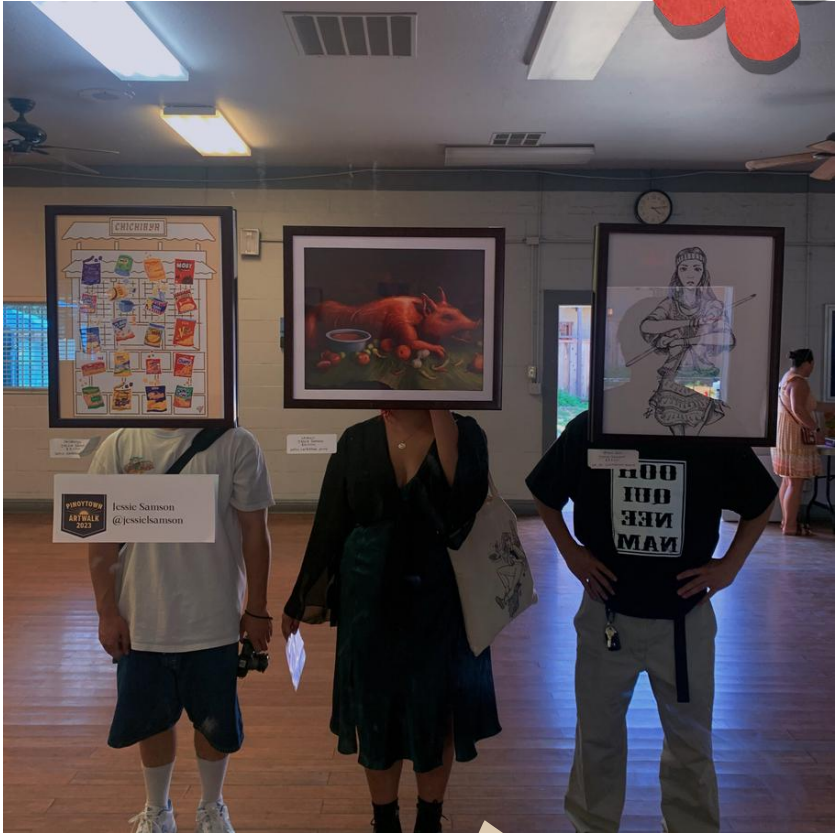
Then I got to be part of another show with Martha Street Art Night, just at the other end of Japantown. Then I sold at Fizzy Fest for multiple months this year at Crema Coffee on Alameda. And soon because of the Pinoytown Artwalk I participated in for Filipino American History Month, I'm gonna be part of something that I think is even more amazing!

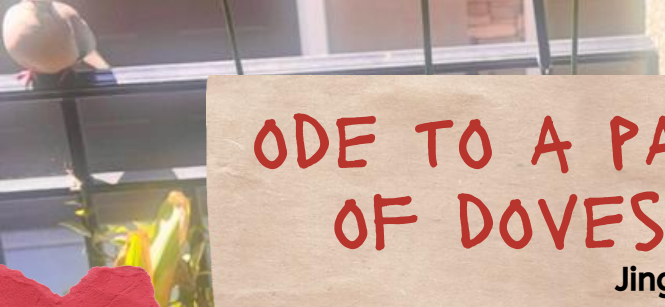
Essentially, you've given me so much. So many opportunities and experiences and people. And I just want to thank you for that. Again, for everything you've done for me as an artist.

Without the artists you've given space to, pop-ups to vend at and the large, continuously growing artist community here to support and share space, I would never have been able to make it known that I can do something with my art, and that my art can take me further than other people may believe.

San Jose, Thank you :)







ODE TO A PAIR OF DOVES

Jing Jing Yang



in pairs you come
you've made my balcony your home
with the two precious eggs
each month you bring a delicate trust
fourteen days of incubate
as the parent doves patiently alternate & wait
nurturing hearts in unity
a love song of avian serenity

babies hatched, small and frail
feeding them crop milk, you tell a love tale
of a world beyond the nest
where courage, and commitment manifest

as they grow fast, you step aside
come and go, wings open wide
two weeks later, a reluctant, bittersweet goodbye
encouraging chicks to the open sky

if they hesitate, you softly insist
in silence, you persist and persist
until they take their soaring flight
leaving the nest, embracing the light
I celebrate your immeasurable devotion
your grace and dedication

you made my heart wander and roam
as you've made this dwelling, our cherished home



SAN JOSÉ

by Mayra Flores

Roasted cacahuetes, roasted maíz
Mango nectar dripping, salty y sweet
con un poco de pica, laughter rumbling
from the deepest parts of a 6-year-old's
soul and the 'pase pase pase a probar'
from the fruteros and their families

Rows and rows of brand new
calcetines and chonis, tamaleras and
molcajetes; plastic dollies and guns
from China, and every type of phone
charger in every color made and
imagined to power up our disconnection

The silky smooth voice of Marco Antonio
Solis crooning to our mothers and their
daughters, the promise of love in every
chorus, the symphony of Español,
Japonés, Inglés, and every language in
between together in perfect unison

If you stand still and close your eyes,
the waves of each sensory stimulation,
simulation, will drown you in their
delectation of this recreated world
mirroring home.





INTERVIEW

Emma Zhang: What inspires you to create, like in the general sense, or in the personal sense? What are your main goals with your poetry?

Mayra Flores: Being being a daughter of immigrants, I always felt a little bit disconnected, because we didn't have roots unlike a lot of my counterparts in school and in my community. We didn't have anything tethering us to this place or here. So a lot of the things that I did was trying to figure out ways to be able to connect, and to kind of establish those roots for us. And in terms of like writing in the creative process, a lot of why I write is to capture those moments, capture those memories.

And I'll share a little bit about myself. My parents, they're both from Mexico, two different States, and they actually came here and they met here. But particularly on my mom's side, my mom is from a rural community that still doesn't have running water or electricity. And it was near the side of where the Mexican Revolution started. And because of that, a lot of the documentation, a lot of the things they had—photos, memories, legal paperwork—everything was lost. A lot of the stories of my family, it's just, it's like bits and pieces.

**VIVA
MEXICO!**

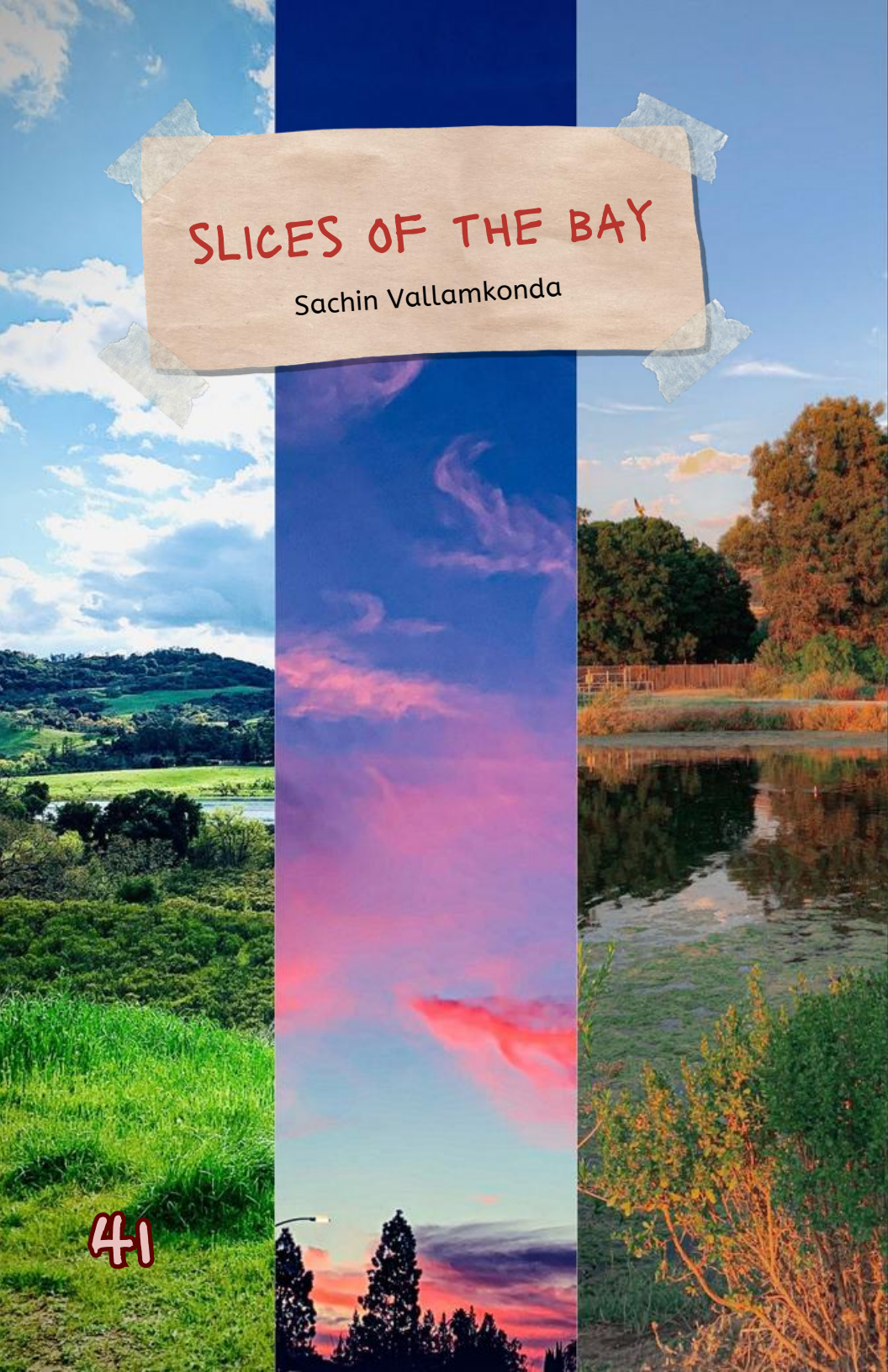


I felt at an early age that I was like, "Oh, I have to start writing things down." Because we don't have anything to look back to. We don't have anything to reference. I kind of became this unofficial like historian for a family.

And then for the community, and I spent about a dozen years or so of my life as a reporter. So I was a journalist for a very long time. I started documenting the stories of the folks that live in this community in San Jose, all around, and it just became really important. It became super clear, especially when I went and talk to people: there's so many folks out there that have stories and memories and things to share, just waiting for someone to ask, waiting for someone to like, you know, listen to them go on and on or whatever. And, and it's just fascinating to see complete and total strangers open up to to people, because they want to feel that connection. They want to feel like someone is listening, and they want to share their stories, because all their stories matter. And being able to share those was just such a joy. And I find poetry is like another avenue to be able to do that not only share the stories of my family, but also the stories of San Jose and the stories of the people that make this place so great.



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SLICES OF THE BAY

Sachin Vallamkonda



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LITTLE DARLING SAN JOSE

Anh Le

If you asked me to tell a time when I was happy,
The moments are few.
If you asked me to share a time where I have shed
my tears,
The days are endless.
The memories I have here coincide beyond the
existence of the hundred-year
giant tree,
Where I stand is only a fraction of that tree's lifetime.





This city has birthed a lot of masterminds,
In some deadening nights, it has taken some.
Early morning hits the herd of cars honking to the
rising sun,
And yet the sunset returns with a sea of sharks.
Each portal subjects to a different place in the world
From the bolstering dances of Mexican cuisine to the
distinguished noodles of
Japan.

¡VIVA
MEXICO!



Many have come here to this land of wealth,
freedom, and opportunity,
But only a few can dance with her.
If San Jose is that darling of the Bay Area,
Listen to her and sing to her songs.
Where there is a lot of space extends a lonely path,
Though where there is promise is a family you're
waiting for.



INTERVIEW

Emma: What was your process when writing “Little Darling San Jose”? Why is San Jose a “little darling” to you?

Anh Le: Growing up, I felt that San Jose was a small place for me. When I didn’t know how to drive, my spaces were only in San Jose and Vietnamese neighborhoods. It wasn’t until I learned how to drive that I got to explore different neighborhoods, parks, and art scenes. I thought it was remarkable to see that San Jose still retains its charm and continues to evolve for people to make it their home.

Emma: I find the ending of “Little Darling San Jose” really interesting. What do you mean by “only a few can dance with her” and “Where there is a lot of space extends a lonely path, / Though where there is promise is a family you’re waiting for.” What did you hope to communicate with this?

Anh Le: In the context “only a few can dance with her,” I think of San Jose as a city of bustling opportunity, but there are only a handful who can make the best out of the place. There are many neighborhoods that exist and in “Where there is a lot of space extends a lonely path...” San Jose is so diverse that you can get a family anywhere. I believe there is a place for everyone here whether it is in the tech scene, the art scene, and many more.

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