

Welcome to San José

**Wish You
Were Here**

Zine #2



Naglee



E Santa Clara



Julian



Dana



Hostetter



N 7th

N Almaden



Editor's Note

By Vivian Ha



What's the first place that comes to mind when San José is mentioned? Is it getting the hot chocolate snowman from Christmas in the Park or the busy sun-beaming flea market off the Capitol Drive-Thru? The neighborhood park where we grab flattened cardboard and go down the Brigadoon slides?

Perhaps it's none of these places but the memories of the past where foundations no longer exist. Where towns and apricot trees stood, and where open fields and hills ran wild. Our city changes by the day, yet we hold these places deep in our hearts

through photos, art, and an exchange of stories.

The theme "Wish You Were Here" explores places and spaces in San José near and dear to us. Where history bleeds into the culture of diversity and the exchange of it; we cannot help but appreciate being here in the moment. We created this zine so our cherished San José communities can be seen, and for others to understand why we love the way we do.

A postcard to a friend, wishing they were here with us, a love letter from one place to another.

Special thanks to Mary at San José Strong, Kiki, & Emma

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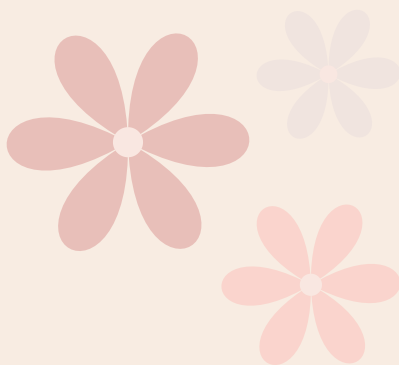
“We use language to signify who our home is.”

By Keana Aguila Labra

Artist Statement

This poem was inspired by a quote from the Santa Clara County Youth Poet Laureate Director, Karla Santiago-Reyes: "We use language to signify who our home is." It was written as a response to a fellow student in my MFA program who responded, "There's nothing in San José," when asked what they liked about living in San José. I've always loved San José, but my love deepened for the city after my lolo passed. This is what

connects us even now that he's gone. So, I'm heartbroken for this person because it isn't true. How can there be nothing in San José when it is everything?



Author Biography

Keana Aguila Labra (they/them/she/her) is a Cebuana Tagalog Filipinx poet & (newsletter & script) writer in diaspora residing on stolen Ohlone Tamyen land. She co-created literary spaces for underserved & underrepresented communities as co-Editor-in-Chief of literary magazine, *Marías* at *Sampaguitas* and the co-founder of BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ publishing house, *Sampaguita Press*.



The house where Cathay meets Loyala
is born a god. Is born a choice.
Fingers that chose place, paint and person.
Where red becomes beige below brown, and the god
realizes they're born of mortals.
Minor deities and their guards,
feline eyes of warning. Kneel
each morning a humble offering
of Krispy Kreme. Sidewalks of
eternity, sneakers in appreciation and
knowing. This universe, this design
of atomic pooling was the most
beautiful. Where god's scooter is met with
waves and smiles. Around the corner is
Pops. Back up are the Titans, the Royals, a
smack and chew that can only be described
as intimidating. How can there be nothing in
San José when it is everything?



“All you need to be happy”

By Andrew Hsieh

Artist Statement

Growing up in San José, my friends and I would complain constantly about how bored we were. "There's nothing to do here," we'd wail, circling Flickinger Park for the 16th time, wondering if we could hitchhike to Nickel City.

Now that I'm working for what feels like the rest of my life, wandering the park aimlessly sounds pretty good. It's a dream to tear out of your job, pick up your dog and rush to the park to do absolutely nothing.

Sometimes, all you need to enjoy life is to watch someone else enjoy it ... and I know my dog doesn't need a lot to enjoy life. Turns out, all a little maltipoo needs is some warm grass on an empty baseball field, the sunshine making everything look like memories. The good kind, made in the same park you walked around aimlessly as a kid, in a city you're happy you didn't leave.

Shot on Kodak ColorPlus 200 on Canon EOS Elan. Scanned and developed by Foto Express in San José.



Author Biography

Civic tech designer born and raised in East Side San José, Andrew used to photography artistic landscapes and sweeping city horizons. These days, he mostly takes pictures of his dog and baby.



Vivian: How has your perspective on San José changed? And what is it about San José that you want your son to experience, since you mentioned being able to bring him to the same places you've shared?

Andrew: I happen to be living around the same area where I grew up. It just so happens that he's going to go to the same high school that I went to, assuming I stay here. And so I have thought about it, "Oh, maybe they'll have the same high school teachers," or, for example, it is a little surreal to think he'll be walking the same campus that I walked, at that point like 40, 50 years ago before him. I guess I just want to see his reactions to the same things that I did as a kid. But what does that look like in 2040 or in 2050 when he's older and a teenager or an adult? Nothing is stagnant here, and his reactions will be totally different from my reactions.

I also think that I hate it when people say, "San José is in the heart of Silicon Valley, and technology changes"- whatever. I just hate thinking about it. I do know that technology changes and things change with it. I remember taking him to Emma Prush Park, a park that I have fond memories of going to as a kid and chasing the chickens. But now there's a massive

playground that is shaped like a chicken. It's really cool, actually, and I brought him there, and he was too young to play on the playground. But I looked at that giant chicken playground and thought, "Wow." Part of me thinks, "Why did there have to be so much change" in this park that I have great memories of, but part of me is also like this is how you're going to get kids to create new memories.

This is how you're going to get kids to appreciate something that maybe they wouldn't have appreciated if there wasn't a giant chicken playground, for example. I think that I want him to understand that change can be good, and change often is good, and even if change is bad, what are the ways that you can adapt? At least to adapt and maintain throughout that change.



Vivian: Going back to the idea of authenticity in photographs and in life: I would love to know, what was the process of the photos that you took for your submission.

Andrew: I very intentionally chose to submit photos that didn't take long to shoot, that were really "I'm going to take a photograph in the moment without thinking this is potentially a photograph I'll submit to something." Because first of all, with the question of authenticity, I feel like every photo someone takes is authentic.

There's a conversation I'm sure plenty of YouTubers and influencers have about, "If you edit your photo, it's no longer authentic." But even in the 1800s, people were out there rubbing their photos and doing early Photoshop. So I don't think that's inauthentic.

I think everything an artist makes is authentic to them, at least. So in regards to these photos, if the best way for me to ensure I'm being authentic to myself is not to make a photograph explicitly for the purpose of submitting it, I think there's a time and place for that. But for my purposes, for the

story I wanted to tell, it wasn't something I actively thought about.

The conversation I wanted to evoke with the narrative I sent is, "What are the mundane places we think about in our lives that we don't give enough credit for?" The times in our lives we forget about because we don't think they're important.

But 20 years later, you're suddenly thinking about all those times you walked around some random park with your friends, thinking, "This has to be the worst life could possibly be," because you're bored out of your minds. But actually, time with your friends is valuable, and time with your friends is really poignant when you think about it 20 years later- when it's so hard to get eight adults in the same room at the same time. Taking those photos, it's like, "Let's try to evoke that same moment" where you take a photo that may not seem important at the time, but 20 years from now, maybe it'll feel really valuable.

“Guardian”

By Betty Nguyen

Artist Statement

Chuck E. Cheese was my unofficial babysitter. I remember my uncle dropping my sister, cousin, and I off there and using a coupon to buy a pizza that gave us enough tokens to play for a few hours while he smoked outside. As a child, I developed my fine motor skills, immune system, and sportsmanship there. When I am stuck on the 101-Tully exit ramp, I like to give the old mouse a greeting. Thanks for watching me grow up.



Author Biography

DACBEET (Betty Nguyen) is a nervous artist, born in the year of the rat, with roots in

Southeast Asia and Southeast San José.



Vivian: What was the initial development of your submission piece and how did you decide the focus in regard to the theme?

DACBEET: When I think of San José, personally, certain streets are most relevant to me like Senter, Tully, Capitol, McLaughlin, and that bunch. That's just where I grew up, went to school, that's where my people and places are. So I tried to think of a few things that stood out to me and were important to me. I think that I have a very love/hate relationship with San José where, yeah, I'm so glad I'm from here and there's a sense of pride in coming from here and you can recognize when someone is from here too and the nod of recognition and shared experience.

But also I hate this place and I want to leave, everything here is dumb. Growing up I felt that way, like "Oh people just care about the dumbest things." It's interesting that there's a lot of things in San José that I appreciate from afar but when you're in the thick of it and you're in the hivemind of it, it can feel very restricting. I've grown to appreciate a lot of what it is, especially through the people here, but there's always changes and parts of it that I still do not like or disagree with.

Like the way that tech and everything make it so hard to live here for so many of the people who have been here forever, that's hard.

I'd say I have a love/hate relationship with the Chuck E., Cheese guy too. I love Chuck E. Cheese, I grew up there. My parents would drop us off and we would just spend our whole day there and it was a key place where I grew up and hung out with my sibling and cousins.

Nowadays, I find myself like "No one wants to be stuck at that intersection." When your Google Maps says "Exit on Tully" you're stuck there and it's so sunny, the sun is beating you down, and you're behind a bunch of people who don't drive well or choose not to obey the ways to drive or it's gridlock. I can remember it fondly but when you're stuck at the intersection at that time you're like "Damn." At the end of the day, when I see the Chuck E. Cheese, it's a piece of nostalgia and everyone finds themselves stuck there at one point or another.

“Eastridge”

By priya v.

Artist Statement

went to Eastridge mall today; got nostalgic. :)



a merry-go-round pings:/
ring around the rosie/

sweet grainy lips from the
Auntie Anne's i begged my mom
for,/
greedy eyes hovering over
cookie monster cookie cakes,/
food court free samples followed
by a slice of Sbarro./

for new releases, the Barnes &
Noble served as a temporary
library,/
buying books on telling time
while losing track of time in
rolling hills of shelves and a/
Hallmark's only purpose was to
look at Webkinz, wanting
nothing more than to take one,/
or two, or four fuzzy friends
home./

a pocket full of posies/

3am black fridays, shopping with
parents trailing behind, then
shopping without them, finally!/
tuesday summer movies, white
and gray ticket stubs jammed
into clear phone cases/
ding-dong-dinner ditch drinks
dripping off faces over Olive
Garden breadstick baskets/
sharing a piece of home, sleep-
deprived delirium in the face of
love with no conquest./

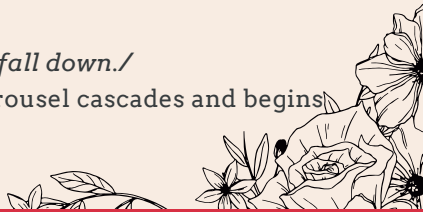
ashes, ashes/

the Sports Basement is now a
roller rink, and the Sanrio store
is now a spa./

the Hallmark is now an airsoft
range, but the scent of Cinnabon
still wafts over./

a garish yellow that once settled
into the dry, golden, rolling hills/
now stands white and gray and
white and gray and white and
gray;/
we all fall down./

the carousel cascades and begins
anew.



Author Biography

priya was born, raised, and
currently resides in San
José, California. They enjoy
indie nail polish, all things

art-related/creative, cheese,
and learning about ocean
creatures.



“Cul-De-sacs”

By Samantha Denny



Artist Statement

The neighborhoods I grew up in around San José were typically ones with cul-de-sacs, and I have a lot of fun memories playing in the cul-de-sacs with my neighbors. I wanted to reflect these times in a short and sweet little love letter to the past, but also inviting people to take a look around if they find themselves in one today. I imagine that even though the times have changed, the play-ability of cul-de-sacs is still strong.



The cul-de-sacs of San José are where everything happens. The cul-de-sacs are where children play, where adults walk, and where people live and spend their days. The cul-de-sacs are where kids set up street hockey nets and make their arena a hazard to the kids who aren't playing. The cul-de-sacs are where kids still have to shout "Car!" because someone's coming home from work or school, someone's coming to visit, or someone's gone the wrong way.



The first cul-de-sac was where the oldest son of a family friend chose me, a first grader, to be his practice goalie one evening. I think he really just needed a body in the net to practice doing slapshots on, so he dressed me up in pads, gloves, and a mask and showed me where to stand. I think I missed every puck too, except for one. He yelled about

Author Biography

Samantha Denny is a graduate of San José State and a Bay Area native. When she's not writing, she's

taking long walks around her neighborhood and playing on her Nintendo Switch.

how great my save was, and I remember feeling on top of the world that *I* could block a big kid's slapshot.

Years and years before they took away the school buses, we'd walk up the street out of the cul-de-sac to wait on the corner, our bags at the ready and the parents of the youngest students watching and waiting. And sometimes the grandmother from next door would come out to visit, walking the snarling, angry little Pomeranian that terrorized the neighborhood. But she wouldn't walk him on a leash, no; she'd walk him by holding his front paws in her hands, almost like she was guiding a toddler. It didn't make the teeth less intimidating.

And then when we moved, we'd walk down the street out of the cul-de-sac, loop around the bend, and wait on the main road for the yellow bus to crest the hill. There we always stood, some of us still yawning and waking up in the cool morning air.

But that cul-de-sac was on a hill, which was perfect for the kids who liked to roll down the hill on their scooters and break before

they went flying off. We'd scooter over the flat parts and down the long driveways. Some kids once army crawled on a neighbor's grass, and then complained about rashes the next day from what the neighbors had used on their grass.

There was no street hockey in that cul-de-sac, but there were boys who played football and baseball. There were times we'd all create a makeshift diamond, designating sewer covers and lampposts as bases, and some of the adults would come out to play with us. They looked comical holding the little plastic bats compared to the rest of us. I liked pitching the me and one dad called me 'Iron Arm' for how hard I threw that ball. As someone who only played baseball in the cul-de-sac, I thought that was a high honor.

If you find yourself in a cul-de-sac now, the kids are probably still yelling "Car!" and scattering. People are still walking and taking their dogs outside. Things look different in the cul-de-sacs, the games are changing, but the world still turns.



The Coterie Den - Lucas Millan

A Community Interview

Vivian: What inspires you and what specifically attracted you to rap?

LJAME\$: I've always loved to express myself and I felt like rap was a great way where I can express myself to the fullest ability. When MySpace was a thing, I remember releasing a song with my family, and before even viral was a thing, I remember touching a lot of people on there and kind of seeing that song do numbers. It showed me at an early age that I have some talent for this and people were widely accepting it. I've been super rap-influenced, but I also love all

types of music. With my pops being a DJ, he had *corridos*, and he had house music. I have uncles who are house DJs — just a wide platter of genres. Just an accumulation of all these genres, rap was also heavily influenced by that funk and that soul, the blues. Even in rap, there's a lot of genres mixed in, so I felt like rap was the one that represented me the best. I also love the culture — I love the *cultura* of hip-hop, the fashion, the art. Everything about hip-hop influenced me and inspired me while growing up.

Author Biography



LJAME\$, is an Indigenous - Chicano Artist / Entrepreneur from San

José, CA. He has been making waves in the Bay Area for 10 years and has collaborated with many West Coast Factors such as TOPE and Drew Banga . His sound is a contemporary spin on the classic Westcoast Chicano sound.

His business — The Coterie Den — is reaching its 3rd year of business and has helped the established, local, and amateur creatives improve their crafts through services & workshops! The 28 year old, although highly decorated with accolades, is far from finished and hopes to continue to scale his artistry & business!

Vivian: The Coterie Den have hosted pop-up sessions with different people: what are some of your favorite events that you've hosted at Coterie Den? How did Coterie transform into a venue space?

LJAMES: When we started The Coterie Den, we wanted to be a resource first. With all of these open mics and even the services we've introduced and had, we always started as a resource first, meaning free sessions, reduced-rate sessions. The open mics – you can win free studio time. We were running open mics at \$10 a slot and the winner receives 2 studio hours and a free mix and master. I truly think nobody is a loser when they come to the open mic, 'cause everybody who has come, has left with some sort of fan base, with one, or two more people checking out their stuff. It's just an overall win.

Some of my most fun events have been the open mics. I think it's where we start as a resource first. Now these open mics, we've taken a little hiatus but we've been getting people like, "Yo, when are they coming back?"

The hype is around it and I love that because people genuinely know, "When I come to these open mics, Imma get my bars up. I'm coming here and leaving leveled up in some way." Whether you win the [open

mics] in front of everybody and you get the studio

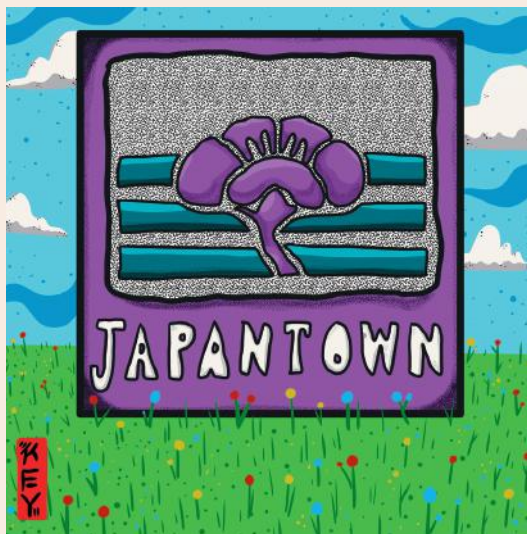
package and all that; or, even at a very minimum, you are leaving with your skill sharpened.

I wouldn't call ourselves a venue space: we're more of a multimedia space. On the regular day-to-day, we do photography, videography, and vocal recording. There is literally a session going on right now while we interview. That is more of our bread and butter. On certain days, I like to open it up for the community. When we do events, while it is all inquiry-based, it also has to align with what we're doing — I love to host anything creative. We've been able to have a wide variety of events because of that. Comedy shows, rock shows, fashion shows — even the fashion show turned into a little mini rave. Leaving it as a multimedia space has allowed for more opportunity and doesn't box us in.



“My Roots at Home”

By Key Dyer



Communicating with people in the city is my inspiration. Whether putting up stickers or showing paintings, it creates a conversation. I hope to connect with the insane amount of talented artists in San José/ the Bay Area, because community is so important. I hope others feel seen, validated, or even just smile because of my art -

I certainly feel all those things when I look at what the San José art community is capable of.

As a Japanese-American, Japantown is so important to me. From karaoke to Obon, I find myself connecting with my community on multiple levels when I find myself in Japantown. Truly a wonderful part of town.

Author Biography

Character/Abstract Artist from San José, CA. I love color and I love my community.

Vivian: One of the things I love about your work is the mixing of horror themes with vibrant bright colors in your unique style. It's so much fun, especially as a horror film fan! What is your creative process when it comes to illustrating and painting?

Key: I absolutely love horror! It is a year-round thing with me, haha. Horror themes come to me naturally, so no matter how cutesy and colorful I make them it always has a sense of the macabre! My process is usually to throw on some horror or true crime documentaries while I paint, and inevitably something I am watching will inspire me and make its way into the painting itself. I try to incorporate a little bit of everything into my work, so staying open to inspiration is crucial for me.

“Limbo: Ode to the Benches of San José”

By Sanjana (Sun) Sukumar

Artist Statement

An ode to the benches of San José for allowing me to breathe and supporting me with a moment of pause. In the chaos of high school, as I grappled with change, mental health, queerness, and substance abuse, I knew I always had a bench in SJ to hold me as I was. “Micro” forms of public spaces are being policed and taken away from us. We need more spaces that are accessible to ALL communities.

That said, I am beyond grateful for the existing spaces in SJ that center authentic community connection.



Author Biography

Hi! My name's Sanjana/Sun and I'm a queer South Asian artist from Santa Clara/San José! One of my life joys has been getting to know SJ in my adulthood. With a stronger sense of self and a drive for connection, I am beyond grateful to be held by SJ as I grow into my 20-somethings.

Existing amongst us/
A resource we share/
They offer their sweet embrace and their care/

Seeking rest and refuge/
As we often crave/
They patiently wait as we make our way/

**How was your day?/
Don't care to answer that question?/
Rest your legs and mind, I make space for your presence/**

From people watching/
To rendezvous' with your partner/
Make sense of your world, as it is yours to ponder/

They try to police me/
Misunderstanding my purpose/
Strip my embrace, inhumanity I witness/

**I learn to accept/
Radically love with my heart/
For in this cruel world, a bench like me goes far/**

*To the Benches of San José/
I declare my appreciation/
In the limbo of school and home, you gave me your best and I am
grateful for your creation/*



Vivian: How long have you been writing and what motivates you to write?

Sun: I've been writing for a really long time. Actually, I started with songwriting when I was younger. I have a back-burner dream of being a singer and performer. However, I think sometimes being an artist can be very exhausting in light of perception, right? So I always try to validate my art by just creating and having it for myself.

Art doesn't always need to be perceived or interpreted by other people for it to be validated and to be art. In that way, I have been creating for quite a bit of time. It was definitely more songs, and then I would write short stories, and recently I started writing poems. I do tiny little verses, and I try to have some sort of rhythm, usually by counting syllables, etc. I am no poet. I'm very new to the poem world, but I have been writing for a while. This is really the first time I've ever publicly shared my writing.

My main motivation is when I read the phrase, "Love letters to San José," my immediate thought was sitting on a bench in San José, just pondering my life and

what it means to exist and come of age. I think specifically, "The Ode to Benches," is just my craving right now for public spaces, third spaces, being in community, etc. But sometimes that search through my adulthood gets lost when I don't count the other public spaces that are available, right? Like the fact that - I know this seems trivial to say - you can go to a park and sit on a bench and spend time there that in itself is something. I wanted to share gratitude for.

That's really what this poem is about. I mean, public spaces are being policed. They are being taken away from folks, and that's something I also wanted to add commentary on because there isn't a lot of protection and public service in that sense these days. And I think sometimes the definition of public use is skewed. But all that said, my motivation was really just my love for the micro spaces in San José, among the other community spaces I am a part of.

“They Never Fucking Ask Me “Where Are You Really From” in East Side”

By Keana Aguila Labra

Artist Statement

This poem was born from experiencing a microaggression while at work. When I am in East Side San José, no one questions my belonging. I am a part of the community. I wanted to pour my love and gratitude of that feeling into this poem.

I'm only twenty miles from home
but always/
sick of their shit, my arms
pulsating rage,/
causing time to slow and break
down into/
its smallest, simplest parts: I am
one second/
away from “fuck this shit,” one
impulse from/
“fuck this place,” one breath
away from fucked up./
I return to my prayer, this wetted
anger,/
and we meet in the autumn./
The origin of us began with a
choice,/
with Lolo's eyes on a map. If
only/
they knew the preciousness of
this?/
How when I see the triptych of
McKee,/
Alum Rock, then Capitol, I know
that I/
am home. Yes, our blood is
Ilihan,/
Mandaue, and San Fernando but
/
East Side is where he drew his
last breath./
So shut your fucking mouth,
where I'm really/
from. Where I'm from, my
neighbors baptize/
each other in mariachi. No
questions asked,/
they lift Lolo from the floor.
They wipe the/
sweat from his brow. When he is
gone, I don't/
have to say a word. They already
know./

“Y Market & Liquor before sunset”

By Yuchen Tian

Vivian: How long have you been doing photography? What inspired you to get started?

Yuchen: I am mainly a street photographer. Usually, I will pick a part of the city I haven't visited or visited but didn't bring my camera with me. Driving around, and when I found something that is photo-worthy, I just stop and start taking some photos. Later I will post-processing my photos using CaptureOne, to make the coloring true to my vision.

For the submission, it was an accident. I was driving around, trying to reach the Alum Rock park before the sunset. But the traffic stopped me. However, on that day, the sunset was just unbelievable, and as I was trying that pass the Y Market, it captured my eyes instantly, so I stopped and took the photo. The photo is just good on its own terms, I ended up not editing it too much.

Vivian: You mention you're a memory hoarder and that though you're not from the Eastside, it feels like home. Can you elaborate on these memories and what home means to you?

Yuchen: I think Eastside has some weird nostalgia for me. I haven't lived there in my life, but it is very close to my hometown back in Asia. It is not over developed, there is a genuine sense of community among its residents, people just feel closer to each other. So coming to the Eastside brought me that part of my memory growing up.



Author Biography

Engineer and Photographer.
Memory hoarder with a
Stephen Shore inspiration.

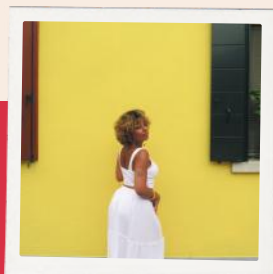
“The City that Became Home”

By Kaiyah Kenny

Artist Statement

I moved to California from Florida about five years ago to start college and transferred to San José State University in 2022. Even though I’m not from San José, this city holds some of my best memories, which inspired my painting. This city has seen me laugh, cry, scream, and cheer. This city has helped me realize my potential and grow as an artist. This city has shown me that change, although it can be scary, is beautiful. Illustrated in the painting are some of my favorite places in San José! Hope you all enjoy it!

Acrylic on Canvas, created in July 2024



Author Biography

My name is Kaiyah and I’m a painter, student, and nature fanatic in the Bay Area!



Vivian: It was a nice surprise to see California Wet Burrito in your painting. What made you paint it?

Kaiyah: Honestly, California Wet Burrito holds sentimentality for me because I met someone there who was also an artist. She and I are very alike in how we create and how we approach art. Also, the food is really good, and no one knows about it—they all go to Cali Spartan. So, I put that there for

that reason. San José has seen my ups, my downs, and my in-between, and I can hardly believe this is my last semester, and that I'm already about to move on. I've met a lot of the people I'm close to now.



Robert Ragsac

Community Interview

Robert Ragsac is a retired aerospace systems engineer, having worked in the commercial aerospace and defense industries, and NASA projects, in various research and project management positions. BS in Mechanical Engineering, and charter member of Phi Kappa Phi honor society, San José State College, 1954. MS ME, California Institute of Technology, 1955. Born and raised in early Sixth Street Chinatown, San José. Currently documenting, preserving and presenting.





Japantown History Detectives



Curt Fukuda

Curt Fukuda is a writer and artist. He grew up in East Side San José and remembers riding his bike down King Road when farms flanked the street. Interested in a wide range of subjects, his books include “San José Japantown – A Journey” (co-authored with Ralph M. Pearce), “Cuentos de el Día de los Muertos” (with Salvador Gonzalez) and “Día de los Muertos – When Two Worlds Meet” (co-authored with Dr. Shawn Haley). In the 1980s, Curt met the members of the San José Taiko Group and started photographing their concerts and events in San José Japantown. Curt gained a deep knowledge and appreciation of the community’s people, history and diversity. He has been fortunate to work with fantastic collaborators on a number of historic/cultural projects. A professional photographer, videographer, technical writer, instructor and exhibiting artist, Curt’s work has been shown internationally. At the end of the 1990s, Edward James Olmos invited Curt to participate in the Smithsonian’s “Americanos!” project. Curt lives in Mountain View with his wife, Monica Smith, and has two children, Richard and Eileen.

Vivian: How did the nickname Japantown Detectives come about and how did you guys get started with that?

Curt: Robert and I have this wonderful email correspondence, I don't remember but at one point, we'd always signed off as "Cordially, Your Co-researcher," "Your Colleague." At some point, either Robert or myself accidentally put "History Detective," y'know "Your History Detective" That's where it started.

Robert: Your Humble HD [laughing]

Curt: The both of us have this appetite for collecting stories, learning about history -the narrative is really important. Both of us are analytical enough where we want to know all the information. Robert has taken some maps, that I've sent him, that are just annotated down to the year how each building has changed.

Robert: In response to the fact that I keep saying, "I'm not a historian." I don't know how to be a historian. If I'm not a historian then, what am I doing? We're sort of detective-ing and finding stories, people. I'm really not a historian, I don't do that. But I do what I am doing now and I don't know what to call it other than being a history detective, just like you said, Curt.

Curt: I never considered myself a historian in fact it's a really funny thing, in that I'm a great example of how sometimes there's something inside a person that you can't escape your own urges. I grew up in a very strict Japanese American family and by the time I was going to San José State and I was graduating, the last thing I wanted was to be around Japanese Americans. It was post-hippies days, everyone was free and exploring. During the 1970's Japantown was one of the places I did not want to be around.

But thanks to a woman I went to the same high school with (she's one the founders of San José Taiko) she had me come down to Japantown. She had me do publicity photographs for San José Taiko and at that time it really turned me around. I realized there were a lot of exciting things done in the Asian Community. So this community I thought of as backward and rigid and strict was actually very adventurous and exploring things. From the mid 80's I started photographing more in the Asian Community.

Vivian: How did you guys meet each other? [Starting from a VR Project to a Japantown book]

Vivian: What inspired the Pinoytown Walking tours to come about, and see the visible changes to the neighborhood you grew up in?

Curt: Since the beginning, I really wanted the book to not only be about the Japanese, but also the groups that made up Japantown which was the Chinese, the Filipino, and African Americans. I was able to connect to Connie Young Yu and she told me about the Chinese [experience], but I could not connect with the Filipinos. I went to the Filipino Community Center, I left messages and talked to the people there. No one knew anyone that I could connect with.

Robert: It actually started amidst doing the interviews for the Japantown book. Some of my friends - my generation - were reminiscent of these places in Chinatown. So we went informally, walking around like "Hey you remember this place?" and somehow the word got out to some people who said, "Hey, heard about you're talking about the Filipinos in Chinatown." The tour was not called Pinoytown, that term was coined later.

Then, around 2006, Ralph Pierce was brought on as a second writer for the book. Ralph's wife, who is half Japanese and half Filipino, knew a fellow named Robert Ragsac who might have a connection to the Filipinos who could tell us the history of Filipinos in Japantown. We had a huge group that we videotaped and interviewed and we were so fortunate to do that because a lot of the people passed away soon after. We were just lucky to capture history.

It was the Filipino American National Historical Society and some other groups who later asked for a tour because they did not know there was a Filipino enclave here on 6th Street. So the very first tour we formally did was in April 2019, just before COVID. We got a group together, and fortunately, it was documented, took pictures of us, and just cooked up a route of places to go to. I quickly made up a little booklet of places that highlighted spots we would cover about 1st wave Filipinos. That's how it became the basis of the formal Pinoytown tours.

“Open All Night”

By Nathan Kavanaugh

Artist Statement

Inspired by the Coffee Shop at Fourth Street Bowl, my favorite San José institution. The “Open All Night” sign is purely wish fulfillment, as the diner closes before 9 p.m., and is an ode to the dying breed of the all-night diners in the South Bay (Denny’s not withstanding), which is sorely missed.



Author Biography

Nate Kavanaugh has been making drawings, paintings, music, and films in San José his whole life.

Vivian: What's your creative process when creating this love letter?

Nathan: I like to draw landscapes, places I'd like to see or go to, or return to, places that give me some sense of comfort. That doesn't always translate to something that is necessarily comforting, but for whatever reason, the act of making it is something comforting for me. I love the corners of the city that are a little off the beaten path, nestled between a suburb and a train track, just off the main drag, a few blocks away from downtown.

The foot traffic starts to cool around these places, quiet corners and lightrail stops you never hear about. There's almost no one outside, but you walk in and there's people there who are totally at home. They go out of their way to go there, because it's a place that feels right. There's nowhere else like it around, not here, not anymore, and your heart warms as you walk in and find a seat.

Vivian: In your love letter, you draw the Coffee Shop at Fourth Street Bowl as an ode to late-night spaces. Can you share a favorite memory attached to the Coffee Shop or an aspect of San José that you love?

Nathan: I've had birthday dinners at the Coffee Shop, date nights, dinners with bandmates and childhood friends, last meals in town with best friends before driving them to the airport because they wanted to make sure to eat there before leaving. It's hard to live here for a great many people, and for all kinds of reasons, people move away. It's always hard when that happens. We know two great families who are dear friends, our kids are friends, and both

are moving within the year. Not everyone has the same ties to this place, but we're still here, and some folks even move back. The ones that don't move back still visit family and friends, and if they want to grab a bite while they're in town, I know a place.



Raffy Espiritu

A Community Interview

Vivian: What is it about the open mic scene in San José that keeps you coming out, keeps you performing there?

Raffy: Well, 1st of all, it is the sense of diversity. In the open mic, you attract all generations: from Gen. X to Gen. Z. From the millennial to the boomer. So I'm a boomer, but I'm attracted to a venue where the community comes together. Sharing their talent, their experience - whether it's a cover song or an original song.

To me, it is very inspiring to listen to the evolving experience

of people because when you share a song, that song means something to you.

You are broadening your own experience by trying to understand better. You know the different perspectives of people, how they capture their experience and what matters to them in a song, in a poem, or even in a comedy skit.

Author Biography



Raffy Espiritu is a beloved Silicon Valley troubador, who writes songs about love, connection, and life in the Silicon Valley. Over two decades ago, Raffy started Impec Group, a company providing workplace environment and facilities services to fast-growing

companies in the Silicon Valley and several across the nation. Though his own experience as an entrepreneur and CEO, Raffy shares soulful songs that weave the high-paced nature of innovation and technology with eternal and gentle themes of love and connection.



So to me, that is a joy for me to hop from one open mic to the other because every venue is also kind of unique. So having to be exposed to different types of venues and the different kinds of people that they attract, is a joy.

You understand better your community. At the same time, you're able to share your own music with these folks. So it's really an interaction between the performer and the audience.

“Babe, The Alameda, San José”

By Mary Anne Gerhardt

Artist Statement

I have lived in San José my entire life. I have documented the changes in this area by way of photographs. Driving, walking, and taking photos of places and things (and a few demolitions) that are what I call "Old San José." Sadly, some of those places are gone now. I have many photos that have captured parts of a San José I knew growing up.



BURBANK

Here are more photos of San Jose. Places that hold memories..the relic of Woolworths

variety store, from a time when downtown San Jose bustled with retail and restaurants day and night. Cafe Frascati is now Nirvana Soul. The site of the derelict empty Cuban restaurant is now JTown Pizza.

LEE YICK
Laundry & Cleaners

Century 21 Theater was saved thanks to a dedicated group. And how could I resist getting out of my car at 6:15 am one winter morning when I happily saw the Burbank Theater lit up for the first time in many years.



“A Quiet Café”

By Aisha

My Cafe Memoir,

Moving to San José this semester was a big change for me, but thankfully I had some places that I am already familiar with.

Traveling with my family to escape from the Sacramento heat every summer we always find ourselves in the dire need for a little sweet treat. “Croissante” bakery in Santa Clara and “K Cafe and Patisserie” have both provided my family and I with a sense of luxury wherever we walk through the doors.

Although usually there is a line stretching all the way outside the door. Looking at the exciting floral decor in K Cafe makes me excited to move to the city of San José knowing that there is such a vibrant and colorful atmosphere. And not to mention a great bakery close-by!

My parents and I would often yap and yap about all the adventures and the same old retold jokes of the past while proceeding to talk about future plans. Enjoying a nice strawberry croissant or Pain Deux Chocolate has eased and fed my belly with tasty treats as I am transitioning into my next chapter in life!

- Aisha Rehman



Author Biography

Hello! My name is Aisha, I'm originally from Sacramento and am coming to SJSU as a

transfer student majoring in Animation/Illustration!

“Orchard Supply Hardware”

By Eddie Ramirez

Artist Statement

I used to work at Orchard Supply Hardware for many years and used to look at this classic sign daily. I admired the artistry, and the vintage vibe it gave to the location. I painted this while it was still in its original location on San Carlos street. This

painting started me down the path of painting more classic signs and locations of San José. The nostalgic feeling I get and people have told me is why I keep painting. I love hearing people's stories that go with my art.



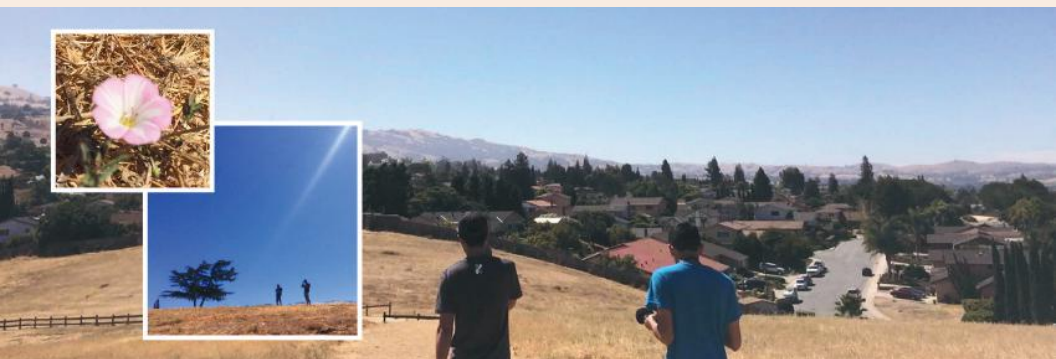
Author Biography

Eddie Ramirez is an artist and teacher who has lived in San José, California for his entire life. Showing his talents at an early age, he excelled in the arts in both

high school and college. Eddie's main area of expertise is acrylic painting and his focus is on urban landscapes.

“Groesbeck Hill Park, July 2016”

By Marissa Martinez



Artist Statement

Everything I write comes from my experiences and emotions. I think about Groesbeck Hill Park, the summers of my adolescence, and what it was like to be 12 or 21 and it makes me feel sad and wistful... Life was simpler when I used to go around that park; a lot has changed since then. Some things are harder now and some things are just more clear.

It can be overwhelming thinking about the past. Luckily, I'm able to make sense of my memories and emotions when I write it all down – which can be hard and does not happen quickly, but the feeling of understanding myself is always worth it.



Author Biography

Marissa May Macaraeg Martinez is a playwright and arts advocate born and raised in East San José. Inspired by her experience as a second generation Latina-Filipina, she writes about identity, growing up, mental health, friendship, and fruit. She also enjoys painting and making zines!

*the park up the street from my childhood home
overlooking my hometown
and so many memories*

**pokémon go had just launched and we trekked up the hill to the
park to catch a few. i wasn't really playing actually – my brother
and my boyfriend were. i just went along for the ride.**

*dried grass all through summer
tennis courts bumping all weekend
familiar faces stroll by*

**the park was full of virtual reality creatures – and it was also full
of living, breathing life. i imagine it still is. but, i moved out that
summer. and my parents had to leave behind that house two
years later.**

*to walk aimlessly
and bask in the sunrays
is it possible to still have that carefree feeling?*

**i used to walk loops around that park. by myself. with my brother.
with my friends. climbing the playground and exercise
equipment. every walk was an adventure.**

*staring at the shadows the trees would make
listening to the neighborhood hum
watching the wind float up and down the hill*

**you don't really know how much you miss a place until you really
think about it – i'm thinking real hard now and i'll hold on tight.**



Vivian: Can you talk about the playwriting experience because it's so different from writing poetry?

Marissa: I started writing my plays and after writing the play, then you have to perform the play and rehearse the play. And that's been really fun for me, the rehearsal process, having people read what I wrote and then they interpret it - however they're going to interpret it. Or they ask me questions like "What did you mean when the character said this?" or "What about the relationship with so-and-so?" So they would ask me very interesting questions that I hadn't thought of yet, and that's why I like the rehearsal process. It helps my writing become stronger and

I can fill in the blanks a bit to make the play stronger to the audience.

I definitely have a style of writing in my dialogue and everything. I think it's been fun to develop my style as a playwright. I didn't start writing poetry until after I was writing plays. But over the years, I realized that my playwriting also sounds like poetry or my poetry sounds like my plays. You can have a lot of fun with any type of writing that you're doing and so I feel like with my plays I try to incorporate poetry too.

Vivian: The poem seemed to be like two stories unfolding simultaneously. One has a calming effect where you feel like you're in the park and one that is more wistful and reflective. What was the initial development for this poem and why these creative choices?

Marissa: When I was writing the piece that week, I had to go talk to my brother on the phone and — y'know — now we're adults, it has been eight years since I took those photos. I realized later the kind of sad nostalgia that I was bringing to the piece because I just had talked to my brother about some hard things in life, like growing up and being an adult.

It definitely colored the way that I wrote the piece too, that feeling of wanting to just walk around with no agenda and no plans. I didn't know that phone call with my brother was gonna color it that way. But I think, thinking about that park too, even before I had the phone call, I knew I wanted to write about nostalgia. It became a sadder tint when I finished it.

“Heart of the Rose Garden”

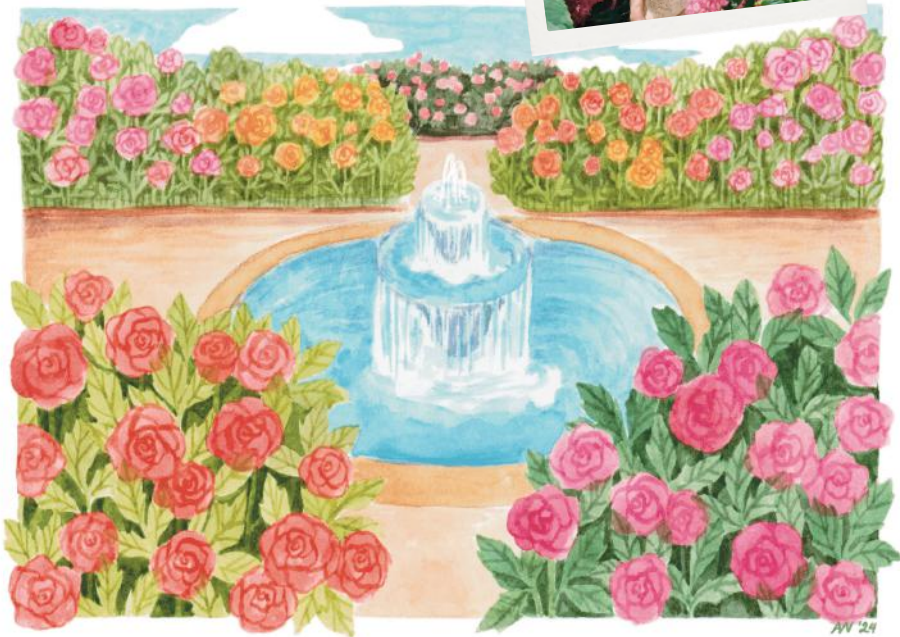
By An Nguyen

Artist Statement

My love letter is to San José's Municipal Rose Garden.

The Rose Garden has always been my favorite place to visit in San José. The abundance of roses and its sweet scent fills the air. I love walking through the paths and having picnics among the flowers. At the heart of the rose garden lies a lovely water fountain. It is such a calming place to be.

This rose garden has been an inspiration for me in my paintings. It is a place from home where my dreams come true — to be fully surrounded by flowers in every direction.



“Shark Diving”

By Tyler Lawhead

Artist Statement

Shark Diving is an honor to my father and the love he gave me for San José. Growing up, he worked as a bartender in Downtown San José, so San Pedro Square has a very special place in my heart. Additionally, he raised me to be just as big of a Bay Area sports team as him, a trait that

has never left me, including San José's team, the Sharks. I'm the second generation of my family to be raised in San José and the fourth Generation in the Bay Area on each side of my family. This piece reflects on my family roots, childhood, love, and connections to San José.



Vivian: Can you tell me about the inspiration behind your submission? What was your thought process and the meaning behind it?

Tyler: There was a specific artist who I really love – I don't remember their name, but they did that style where they would paint animals in very odd situations. I think one of them was a pig smoking a cigarette, and it was just these really silly paintings. I thought, "Oh, well, that would be really funny to emulate." Ironically, completely unrelated to the San José Sharks, but sharks are my all-time favorite animal.

I was going to take a shark and put it in a really silly scenario the way this painter does. Then somewhere along the line, it became a bar because my dad worked in San Pedro Square, literally the Britannia Arms. I spent my childhood in this pub, in a not inappropriate way—I was visiting my dad at work, sitting at the bar. He would put cartoons on the wall, and I would have a little cup of apple juice as a child. And then it kind of turned into San José specifically, and where I grew up. I think it's in the top corner of the piece, you know, those "This is Sharks Territory" posters that are everywhere in San José. I feel like if you take a walk around

anywhere in San José, you're going to see that sign. I remember I was so baffled when people didn't get it.

I often just go for a fun, kind of silly, goofy vibes. I just love making normally in a lot of my other work — I took a painting class, and pretty much everything I did was as violently colorful as you can get — and a lot of my other drawings in my classes have always been really fun pieces that I enjoy. I don't like making super serious art because there's enough really serious stuff. And when you sit in an art class, sometimes people get very pretentious very quickly, and you're like, "Okay, guys, it's 10 a.m. Can we just laugh a little bit, please?"

I think with my shark piece, that's exactly what I was trying to do. I just wanted to make something silly that we can all laugh about because it is 10 a.m. I understand there are deeper things to talk about in the world, but sometimes I just like going to an art museum, seeing the silliest painting possible, and giggling at it.

“In God We Trust”

By Edith Lopez Torres

Artist Statement

My dad would take us cruising around East Side San José for late night drives listening to 100.3. He once had a low rider he loved but couldn't afford to maintain. Every time we spotted one on the streets, he would point it out and say how much he wished he could own one. This makes me remember my parents sacrifices and dreams.

Vivian: Could you tell me more about your submission? It is a lovely photo.

Edith: Yeah, I think I'm just very self-conscious about the pictures I take. This was actually the first time I mustered up the courage to submit something or show someone other than my friend something I've shot, but I think it's such a cool concept—Love Letters, you know, from San José. I have family all over, and friends all over, too, who have a strong connection to San José, and I want them to maintain that love and space for San José. So, I would love to send a postcard or something that reminds them of the East Side or San José.

That picture—we went to an event for Cinco de Mayo with my friend Laura, who's not from San José, but I tell her so much about the lowrider events. She finally came out, and it was just an epic event. They shut down the freeways, and we were able to go under the tunnels. I don't know if you attended, but there were food trucks under the tunnels, and I think that was my favorite part. But looking back through the pictures, I was like, “This is my experience.”



Author Biography

Born and raised on King and Story, my appreciation for lowriders started at an early age. The East Side of San José raised me and I carry the lessons I learned in my public health career.



“An Art Director’s Day Off”

By Noah Maestre

Artist Statement

I am inspired to express myself through poetry using many topics, but for this love letter, I wanted to share an experience that impacts me daily.

The San José weather and terrain have been a strong part of what keeps me sane, and I take advantage of that everyday on my morning walks.



Walking outside to an explosion
of color

It’s beautiful and hurts a little

My eyes dart between the sky
and trees

Until it settles on one

I step more, and see the whole
picture

The mountains, the forest, the
people

Do you feel the warmth on your
face?

I do

Until I step into the shade

And a cool breeze comes

It feels like the first day I’ve
stepped outside

Or the last day I ever will

Until I do it again tomorrow



Author biography

A second gen Latino American raised on passion and persistence. I find inspiration in lifting up the community and building interactive games and experiences.

Vivian: How has your move to San José influenced your work, and how do you see community playing a role in your creative projects across different industries like tech, gaming, and entertainment?

Noah: I started a lot in the in-between zone, working at companies like Oracle, iRobot, and many others. But when I came to San José, I started working for companies like Facebook—at the time, now Meta—Apple recently, and video game companies, focusing more on ideas, not just the pipeline. How do we do it?

But the hard questions are: Why? Why are we doing this? What is it for? And who are we targeting? That naturally pushed me into art direction for entertainment, games, and technology. Recently, I've even been part of a film project, which is my first time working on an official film. It's been a great experience, and a lot of the same principles apply.

I think being part of a community is important to me. I like to create. I'm very much a "keep my hands busy" kind of person. So my portfolio is filled with things I was curious to build or inspired to make. I often

create tools that make my life easier and then release them to a community for others to use—for free—because I'm not the best at polishing things, so what I make isn't always at the highest bar.

But I really love what I do, and I think that by releasing and sharing, people find me. They feel I can bring something to their team.



“createtoliberate”

By Jess Gutierrez

Artist Statement

I created the ArtBox piece “Create to Liberate,” located on 11th and William Street, to represent life, love and joy! It brought me personal joy painting this little brown girl that my nieces, daughter, and other little brown girls can look at and feel represented in a positive way in a public space.

Although it was hot, I enjoyed spending time with my baby and partner over several days of completing this piece.

This artwork was made in partnership with the South University Neighborhood in San José, ArtBox Project SJ, and Phantom Galleries.

Author Biography

Jess Gutierrez (she/they) is a mama, educator, artist/designer, arts curator, and community connector. Jess believes everyone should have access to create and express through art. She actively seeks ways that she can engage people in meaningful creative expression and build bridges across communities through active engagement, curation, workshops, and collaborations with other local creatives.





“my grandparents’ house just off grandwood way”

By Anonymous

I always found it fascinating that my grandparents lived just off Grandwood Way. Right in the middle of my first cousins’ house and mine. A short drive down the expressway, one left turn, and magic! It was as if we had entered a world where everything was Grand. From the Grandfather clock to the chandelier in the living room, the entire house held memories of intergenerational bonds and love. My mother and uncle lived in that house through their middle school, high school, and even college years; my grandparents had kept it ever since. That was the house where my whole family, first cousins, mami and mama (maternal aunt and uncle), my siblings, my parents, and my ma and dada (grandma and grandpa), would occasionally convene for a rich dinner of khichdi and saak, chaas, and cucumber with jeerumithu (cumin salt). When I think of my childhood in San José, I think of food. When I think of food, I am always reminded of love. Even after we moved out, I recall how my

mother always had fruit out for my siblings and I when we came home from school or how my dad offered me the last bite of his sandwich before we boarded a flight. My roots in San José show me the importance of uniting people under a common value and how that fosters strong relationships in my life. Today, I often exhibit my mom’s habit of offering my food to the people I love the most as a subconscious expression of unity and care. To me, food will always be a manifestation of what my life in San José taught me. Even when I’m older and move again, I’ll always remember the influence of my grandparent’s house just off Grandwood Way.



“SJ Coloring Page”

By Color For Charity

Artist Statement

From humble beginnings vendoring at the Rose Garden to running the craft area at the biggest Pride event of the year, San José and its community has

been the tape holding our organization together every step of the way. We wouldn't be here without it!



Author Biography

Color For Charity is a youth-led fundraising group based in the Bay Area that raises money by designing and selling art products

Vivian: How did Color 4 Charity get started? How long have you been creating? How did you decide what organizations to support with the funds you raised?

C4C: Color For Charity first started as an idea born March 16, 2024 by Arcus Foo. During this time, people started to shift from websites like GoFundMe to social media like TikTok and Instagram to raise money through interaction instead of direct donation. Popular artists also increasingly used their platforms and art to raise awareness— successfully! Inspired by both of these growing movements, Arcus wanted to create a way for everyone to make a difference with their art. This quickly spiraled into a frantic phone call with Carl Chiu, hesitantly boothing with him for our first event, obtaining a fiscal

sponsorship, growing our small team, boothing at more events, networking with other amazing Bay Area nonprofits— and the rest is history! We're a very new organization but we aspire to be like the many accomplished nonprofits who paved the way for us.

Every month, our team brainstorms and votes on a new cause to support. Sometimes it's a specific organization like the Rainbow Railroad, and other times it's more general, such as redistributing school supplies to those who need it. No matter the type, it's a cause that we all agree could use support and attention.



Vivian: Based on your experiences here, this could be anything, but what would you include in your love letter to San José?

C4C: While we have many amazing memories of places and events in San José, it's the people and amazing organizations we've met that made us truly fall in love with San José. Especially the vibrant LGBTQ+ community, who supported our very first theme and events. As a small team of teenagers who had no idea what we got ourselves into, we were truly winging it at

events. Despite our awkwardness, the community welcomed us with open arms; some even took us under their wing like Cosplay with Pride. These groups continued to invite us out to events, gave invaluable advice, and kept our momentum rolling. For this, we can never be grateful enough.



“Día de San José”

By Luui Art

Artist Statement

"Día de San José" is my tribute to the vibrant Hispanic community in San José, who have not only welcomed me, but also enriched my understanding of their rich history and culture.

This piece, created in Procreate for Hispanic Heritage Month, celebrates that heritage and serves as an homage to the iconic Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo, whose work continues to inspire me with vibrant color and empowering stories.



Author Biography

Nhi Nguyen, aka Luui Art, is a multimedia artist from Vietnam. As a 90s kid, she fell in love with digital art through the Internet. Though she studied interior design, her true passion is art that connects people. Her style blends beaux art with modern methods. Based in San José, Nhi enjoys public works and frequently collaborates with

local artists. Some of her current works include digital illustrations, traditional paintings, and large-scale murals. She exhibits regularly at Works Gallery in San José. Check out her works here:

nHINGUYENBUSINESS.WIXSITE.COM/ARTS



“Monster Bones 48 x 60 oil on canvas”

By Ruthie K. Yamada

Artist Statement

Seven years ago, I unexpectedly and happily came across an “Art Studios For Rent” sign in downtown San José and my life has forever been changed.

Finding this studio space has allowed me to really sink my teeth into my art practice. I’ve been able to explore, improve on my craft, grow, make mistakes and play!

I’m currently working on a series called “Parallel Universe”. I paint images that appear to be merging together or apart, creating a mirror effect. I’ve been drawing inspiration from my roots in Hawaii, using the botanicals found on the islands.

So much gratitude to this sweet sunny little studio at the Citadel in downtown San José, where it has been nurturing my artistic voice and allowing me to bloom.



Author Biography

Ruthie K. Yamada is a fourth generation Japanese American artist, living and working in San José. Ruthie has had careers in both fashion design & the healing

arts before turning to art full time. When Ruthie isn’t painting you can find her gardening or outside with her rescue dog, Bowie.



“Local Disco”

By James Mertke

Artist Statement

This piece was created for display at the Santa Clara County Fair in 2023. Inspired by the area, I wanted to create a still life painting that incorporated as many natural elements of the local landscape that I could. This piece features produce from the orchards that used to cover San José. From, apricots to plums and cherries to almonds, this painting has many of the fruitful trees of the past represented. Also on full display are the flowers native to California including as the iconic orange poppy and purple lupine.



Author Biography

James Mertke is a self-taught acrylic painter from San José, California. He loves painting contemporary

still lifes with bold, saturated colors and familiar subjects.



Lorena Cortez

A Community Interview

Vivian: How has San José influenced your work?

Lorena: The diversity that I am surrounded by in San José has me influenced me greatly in all the work that I do. Because of it, I make that my highest priority in all of my work which is including that in front of the camera and behind it. So I make sure to hire women of color, female filmmakers, and a diverse crew of multiple different backgrounds.

I'm very much into 40s and 50s aesthetics so I like to tie that into a lot of my work as well. And really just reimagine what it's like to tell a glamorous story set in the 50s but with a diverse cast and crew. When I used to watch movies from the 50s, I would notice it was very much centralized to American people or white people. So I want to reimagine that, be kinda different in that way.



Author Biography

Lorena Cortez is a Latinx filmmaker with over 7 years of experience as a director, producer, and editor, bringing powerful stories to life on screen. Her talents span multiple mediums, including costume design and production design, where she adds her unique creative touch to each project. Lorena is also a successful fundraiser, having secured \$35,000 for

her most recent short film *Copacabana*.

Drawing inspiration from Old Hollywood glamour, she reimagines that golden era while amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities in her work. Her commitment to diversity and inclusion fuels her mission to create space for minorities and women in the film industry.

Vivian: I would love to learn about the film process of Copacabana and how it was, especially this being your first film.

Lorena: It's my first big-budgeted film, I would say. I've worked with a lot of films that were either no-budget or small-budget, but it was my first time having access to \$30,000. The cast and crew, it was about 40 people - I cannot speak more highly of them. They were just incredible from Day 1. A lot of work went in even before we even got to set, so everything in preproduction included meetings, rehearsals, dance rehearsals, planning the set dressing, planning props. There's so much that goes into it before we even step foot onto the set. But once we were all together, it just felt magical to be on set. Everyone was so excited to be there.

For many of us, it was the biggest set that we've ever been on because the location was insane. It was actually shot at the Corinthian Grand Ballroom in Downtown San José, which is a historical building - it was crazy. Just the magnitude of the project really excited everybody, everybody brought their A-game.

Yes, I'm the one who created the story and brought us all together.

together, but everyone on my crew in their role, took the idea and elevated it to a level I would never be able to do by myself. It was a big team collaboration. Now that we've filmed we're in postproduction, I'm editing the film together because it's one of my favorite parts of the film process. Then I have one of my friends helping with the color grading, I'm hiring a sound mixer to do all the sound effects and we will do a private screen in February 2025.

My mission with this project isn't only to make a film for the sake of making a film, I wanted to be very intentional about having a mission behind it. I chose to hire mostly female filmmakers to lead all of the teams, it was about 90% female filmmakers. I felt like it made such a difference on set having so diversity and female energy. I often find that I am the only woman or minority on set and I want to be the change in the industry because there is still a lot we have to work towards and progress in Hollywood and the film industry. I want to be part of that change.

“Dear Ice Cream Truck,”

By Anonymous

Dear Ice Cream Truck,

It's curious to find myself writing a love letter to a vehicle, but here I am, driven by an unexpected affection. Every time I hear your familiar chimes and spot you in the distance, my heart races with the thrill of the chase. The excitement of pursuing you down the street, hoping to catch up before you drive away, makes the experience all the more exhilarating. Your presence transforms an ordinary day into an adventure, turning a simple pursuit into a raging chase.

In your presence, I find a rare blend of nostalgia and excitement. You embody a carefree spirit that seems all too fleeting in daily life. When I indulge in the cookies and cream scoop in a waffle cone you provide, my summer day cools down.

So, here's to you, dear Ice Cream Truck. Thank you for the sweet surprises and the moments of joy you bring into our lives. You might be just a vehicle, but you have a way of touching hearts and creating smiles. For that, I am truly grateful.

With fondness and appreciation



“Another Love Letter to San José”

By Anonymous

first summer in san jose, san jose summer, was a weird one. my heart was stuck in santa cruz. i left in a rush
 living in san jose gave me the ability to visit a lot, which was good and

ANOTHER LOVE LETTER TO SAN JOSE

Who is “in” — and thus who is marginal — is not fixed and absolute. and i also remember seeing paul baribeau at some house show in san jose. we had seen him at zami co-op too, and he asked everyone to not sing during ten things, which i thought was weird, but whatever, respect the art or whatever. and miguel of oakland played too. and it was nice but awkward because i had made it that way. i was good at that, stay in and of the house show it was a potluck but we didn't know so we had nothing.

actually, i think it's better if the ball is in my court [he said] [as though we weren't all shocked by this revelation] because regardless of what they tell you, a narcissist is always a narcissist. of course it was going to end that way. quick goodbye (fare thee well) and that was it xo



like anyone was really surprised your mom said she is californian was a girl who would run away and you have transformed into something new. disappointed (we laughed then) because at the end of the day we knew the girl was up. u had plans in place, i was not needed.

because of some point the less get too tangled and something has to give either you or them (or me).

Feel bad but she'll figure it out soon enough i am sure.

and one time, while walking in downtown after first fridays or something like that, i heard a familiar song drifting out of a gallery's doors. \$5. oh okay, here you go. it was against me playing in a gallery. so fucking random. i don't even think i knew anyone. it was too dark to know anyways. laura jane belt out their vocals, and i remember thinking how lucky i was to be there in that time.

and i remember that you told me that a revelation happened that day. i remember that you didn't tell me how truly it was a revelation. i was not needed.

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metaphorical bandaid off and say goodbye. it hurt but it was new beginnings or whatever. my first san jose home was actually in 2004 when my dad moved to live with his girlfriend. she lived in south san jose. this new home was a two bedroom apartment in downtown campbell with my best friend at the time. this was both a saving grace and a huge mistake. it ultimately ruined our friendship. but also saved my life.

and to be honest at that point, you became the only reason i had to stay. the commute was killing me but you made it worth it, although driving to SSJ after working in MA wasn't ideal and you didn't seem to see that. i was so tired but i didn't come, then you'd make me feel good, or at least like i was doing something sus, reality is i was just so tired i wanted to lay down and not perform. doing a friend, you couldn't understand my introvertedness even though you were too.

san jose, you and new york, you are two different roles. i don't even recognize you anymore. who is this person you have become?

the metaphorical ball is still in your metaphorical court.

i love you forever and after that too.

i love san jose as much as the next person, but you got it. stop being the girl who's the number 1 priority and be the girl who's the number 2 priority.

we used to play records together ut on the carter music, but we have it taken in years. remember i had an art show there once.

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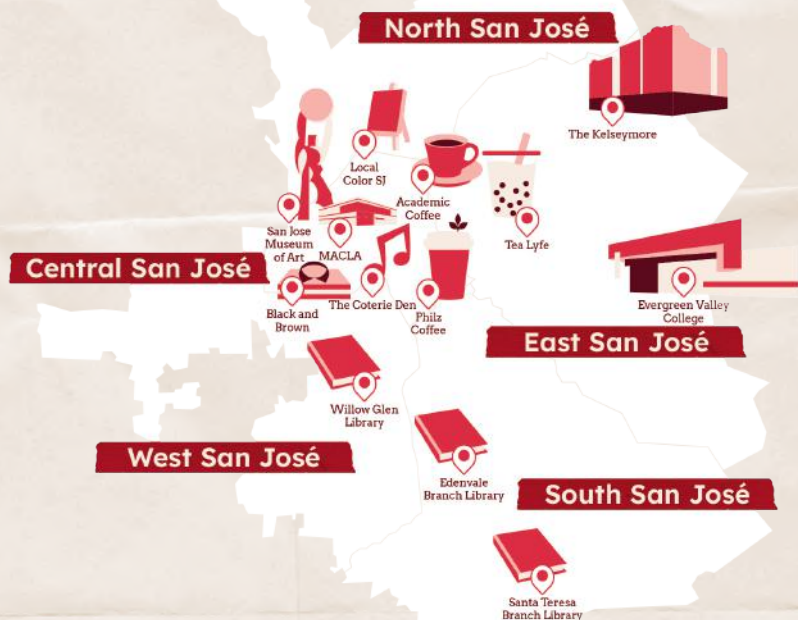
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ZINE #1

DISTRIBUTION SITES

- A running list of locations
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Redwood City Zine



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Thanks for reading our zine, "Wish You Were Here." We hoped you enjoyed the collective of stories and art we put together from the members of our San José community.

— LL2SJ Team



Vivian
Project Lead,
Editor
@vivianahhaha



Emma
Co-Founder
@emmaa_zhang



Pauline
Design
Coordinator
@paulinexpedition



Tammy
Graphic
Designer
@pixelsbytammy



Cecilia
Designer,
Photographer



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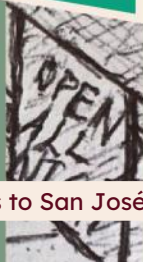
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Special thanks to San José Strong