



Zine #3

Portraits of, SAN JOSE



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From the Editorial Team

Portraits of San José is a theme about people. There are many components that make up a city: buildings, food, culture. But at the core of every city lies the people. Who builds that infrastructure? Who cooks that food? Who defines the culture? It is the people who provide a city with fecundity and identity.

And yet, this issue isn't necessarily about any of that. Rather, it aims to take this concept of love letters to brass tacks. Where previous issues aimed to focus on San José as an entity, we now aim to focus on San José as a conglomerate. Essentially, this issue is a way for us to find out how people view San José through the lens of its residents. We've gathered responses from many people who range from educators to parents to creatives of all sorts, which should give you a good idea—despite being all but a glimpse—of the people who make up San José.

Lastly, we want to acknowledge that the portraits of San José include all the experiences of our community. This is especially important in regards to ongoing events related to the deportations of undocumented folks and immigrants, as well as the various breaches of rights inflicted upon our community members.

At the time of our publication, there are ongoing protests in LA County and across the United States against unlawful deportations of our community members. This moment is not isolated or unprecedented: as seen in our submissions, they are a reflection of the ongoing and historical work we have done together to protect each other and demand for a better future.

At Love Letters to San José, we stand in solidarity with our community and hope that this issue reminds you of our resilience, our stories, and the future we have yet to build. Portraits of San José is a paean for the people of this beautiful city. We hope you enjoy.

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Artists Series - Joe Miller - 2024

By Natasha Kramskaya

Meet the Artist — N a t a s h a K r a m s k a y a

Interview conducted by Vivian Ha

How did you get started with the “San José and the Bay Area artists?” What was the motivation behind creating portraits of other San Jose artists?

I was meeting a lot of local artists on social media, but I wanted deeper connections. I started meeting artists in real life, specifically through Works and Joe Miller. Portraiture has always been a core part of my practice, and after I had learned about Alice Neel's portrait exhibit at the de Young Museum in San Francisco I felt really inspired. Seeing how she captured fellow artists (alongside other figures) really spoke to me. It reinforced the importance of documenting the artists around me — the creative voices shaping San Jose's artistic identity.

One of the things that stands out to me about your art is the use of bold bright colors, I am curious about how your identity has impacted your art especially when it comes your statement “exploring the intersection of cultural identities, compassion, and life's fragile beauty”

Ukrainian-born American contemporary artist Natasha Kramskaya delves into themes of empathy, cultural identity, and the fragility of life. She is captivated by the intensity of color, the interplay of light

and shadow, and the textures and patterns that shape our world. Her work beautifully balances realism and abstraction, creating a captivating visual narrative.

Thank you. Yes, color plays a very important role in my work. I grew up surrounded by brutalist gray Soviet architecture where bright colors were a special occasion. My work has also been affected by the recent invasion of Ukraine. I believe that violence only breeds more violence, and hate only deepens hate. To break that cycle, we must actively cultivate kindness toward all sentient beings. My paintings reflect this belief, serving as a visual language of compassion, resilience, and hope.

Feel free to speak with candor and share your own love letter to San Jose.

I chose to submit my portrait of Joe Miller as a heartfelt thank-you for everything he does for San Jose's art community — especially through Works. The fact that any artist can become a member and exhibit their work — regardless of subject or style — is truly special. Works is a rare, one-of-a-kind nonprofit that uplifts artists of all backgrounds, and it's entirely volunteer-run. They could use more of our support. We could all help by either volunteering our time, becoming a yearly-member, or donating art to their once-a-year community auction.

and shadow, and the textures and patterns that shape our world. Her work beautifully balances realism and abstraction, creating a captivating visual narrative.

Meet the Portrait — Haley Cardamon: San José Day x Spark Community Productions

Interview

conducted

by

Vivian

Ha

What influences you to create specific projects like Back Magazine, San José Day, and Spark Productions? When did you decide “I want to start up Spark [Productions]”?



I had worked with Local Color for close to 5 years and I managed their creative services and public art programs. So I got to facilitate mural projects and work with tons of local artists in San José doing different creative projects. During the pandemic, I felt like I was really going through a lot of mental turmoil and depression, and just feeling super lost in myself and feeling like I needed to change and had this desire to be more independent. When I am a part of something, I really give my all. Even though I was passionately putting my energy into Local Color, I had a problem with omitting myself from any acknowledgment of the energy that I contributed, or the creativity that I contributed and I was craving to be more independent.

In December of 2021, I decided to step away from my nonprofit career with Local Color, to just take care of myself and discover “who is Haley without Local Color.” I moved to Stockton, California for about a year, and I had a vision of creating a nonprofit that is strictly more focused on community events like San José Day. I was just trying to figure out, “How do I start my own nonprofit?” I quickly realized having a plan and not having money was not sustainable, so I worked towards getting a job again.

While I was working for these corporations, it was great to experience that corporate money, but ultimately, I did not feel fully fulfilled in what I was doing, and I was deeply yearning for more creative autonomy around community facilitation. And so in the background, I was working on creating my nonprofit and in 2024 — a couple of weeks before San José Day — I left my job at Google, launched my nonprofit, and kicked off the 6th annual San José Day.

The event "San José Day" is quite literally my love letter to San José, and it's my way of paying homage to the place that made me who I am. I don't have a strong cultural background, I really feel like the streets of San José and my friends, and their parents that brought me in and invited me over for dinner, invited me on family trips and

things like that — all of those things made me who I am. My experience being in the community at such a young age, really helped shape me to be the adult that I am and have the career that I have today. San José Day is my way of expressing my deep love and pride for where I come from.



San José Day 2025. Photos by: Miguel Ozuna

Do you have any advice for somebody that is relatively new and interested in community building?

There are definitely a couple of things that come to mind in terms of important factors for becoming a community facilitator, or even just becoming a part of a community, and I think a big one, is actually doing the work. That means like "boots on the ground" mentality: getting out into the community and actively being a part attending events and being a comrade of the community with the spirit of 671413for competition. There's so much room for all of us here, because all of us are so uniquely different. But then we have things in common, right? We're passionate about the arts, and we're passionate about community gatherings. But my perspective of what that means could

be different from somebody else's, and so, ultimately, your vibe, will attract your tribe, and you should focus on the people that are there in front of you and the people who support you rather than knowing what your "competitor" is doing. The other thing that I think is really important is to act with integrity. I think that feeds into the "Your vibe attracts your tribe" piece, because I just feel like morals and integrity are extremely important, especially for somebody who's holding space and community for other people. And so, if we live our lives guided by morals, then the right people and the right opportunities and the right things will present themselves the way that they're supposed to.

San José's Blistered Hands and Overworked Fingerprints

By

Mariana

Benitez

Arreola

[illegible]

Looking up at the sky, there were layers and layers of posters, banners and flags. Reciting together,

“¡si se puede!”
and
“¡el pueblo unido jamás será vencido!”

For a small moment in time, students kicked up dirt off the floor and news stations captured it. Everyone lifted their hands in unison to the sky, letting everyone know who's hands actually built this city.

History repeated itself, San Jose's most hardworking faces were being used as a scapegoat for crime yet again.

Unfortunately, like a virus, Trump evolved. Not only was he blowing dirt on top of us but he was also using the very tech companies we keep afloat against us. Musk thought he was slick until we all started setting his Teslas on fire and storming his buildings.

It doesn't matter who Trump gets on his team, without us, he is nothing.

Time and time again, corrupt businessmen will try to exploit and take credit for blistered up fingers. San Jose is not San Jose without immigrants. Even though the government has systematically deported innocent souls, their fingerprints remain underneath the dirt.

Fingerprints can never be erased, only covered.



Meet the Artist — Mariana Benitez A r r e o l a

Interview conducted by Mimi Nguyen

Tell me a little bit about yourself — I heard that you grew up in East Side San José?

I went to UCSB and I double-majored in Sociology and Latin American and Iberian Studies while minoring in Professional Writing. It was really cool to see everyone in action, especially coming back. It's been a long time since I have been in Eastside SJ, so seeing everyone coming — mobilizing — together just to voice their opinions [for issues that are] actively affecting and inspiring our community is really beautiful.

How do you think being in (East Side) San José has influenced the way you write and what you think about?

There's a certain warmth to certain people — [when I was at UCSB], I was in a college town around people my own age, but I missed being around the old ladies in the stores, I missed the community that was there [for me in San José]. I think [that community in San José] is rooted in hard work and I'm really proud of being from here.

Your submission was beautiful—why did you write that piece specifically as an interpretation of Portraits of San José?

When people think of San José, they often think of big tech companies like Microsoft or Apple or Google—but we often don't highlight the other people who are also helping these companies

get started or run themselves. Who are the janitors? Who are the construction workers who put in the work to create these buildings to house all these employees? I feel like no one has really been highlighting those stories and I think it's important to showcase that aspect of San José. A lot of these companies wouldn't be able to establish themselves without immigrant power or hard work. Considering the current administration, there's been a lot of backlash in regards to immigrants' rights to be here—and considering that we're in the Silicon Valley and Tesla is such a big name within the Bay Area and San José, it's [even more necessary than ever] to highlight these stories. [We have to remember that] these tech companies aren't just run by engineers: they're also run by the janitors and chefs that work in these companies. We need to remember that immigrant hands also built these tech companies within the Bay Area and that [immigrants] are a really important part of San José as a whole.

Do you have any advice you want to share for people just getting into writing or getting back to their creative side?

Just write whatever you feel and let it out. Sometimes you try to limit the things you want to say, but when you have a pencil and paper, you should say whatever you have to say. Writing lets you express yourself the way you want—when you're speaking or you're around people, it's easy to fear judgement, but your relationship to your pen and pencil should be free of judgement. You should be in a good flow state when you're writing and trust yourself during the process.

Meet the Portrait — Brian Oden

Interview

conducted

by

Marie

Aquino

Brian Oden, cinematographer and founder of Plus Light Media, aims to capture the life of Northern California. Oden calls himself a product of San José, having been raised in South San Jose and gone to school in the area. Passionate about Black culture, the lack of African American culture and credit to African Americans drives them to do work. They want to bring attention to how a lot of the culture comes from African Americans and represent Black culture, becoming a voice and visual of what San José is to them and the African American community.

"If you watch old hip hop documentaries, it's kids from the ghetto who had nothing, trying to put all this stuff together. Kind of like, similar to soul food on the plantation. African American slaves got scraps. So with the scraps, what they did was they took the scraps, and they made these meals and it came from the soul. It came from the heart and it turned into soul food. And that's what I represent, taking nothing and making it into something, having less and providing more."

Oden is also the host of the Overnight Celebrity Show, a variety show where they want to bring different cultures and genres to showcase the culture and music scene of San José and the Bay Area. It was originally created sixteen years ago, but due to a traumatic event, it was put on the back burner until two and a half years ago. A few of their colleagues had asked them for a show and that encouraged Oden to bring their show back.

Oden is grateful that they are able to get their work and vision out to people without having to be in Hollywood to create anything. Their dream is to create a film with the skills they've developed over the years, crafting a story that gets viewers invested and want to be a part of the story. Oden believes that his power hasn't been tapped out yet and it's slowly reaching its full potential.



Meet the Portrait — Yonex Jones

Interview

conducted

by

Elizabeth

Briese

“‘**TANKSHIT**’ is San José shit,” explains Jones, who grew up using the phrase daily. Extremely proud of his San José roots, he identifies it as a way to acknowledge and represent San José culture through a phrase inspired by the city’s iconic arena, the Shark Tank.

“I was born into the Sharks being San José’s identity,” says Jones.

As a natural creative, Yonex Jones started making music in 2012, but didn’t start selling music out of his trunk until 2016. It’s likely you’d see him on Alma Ave or Midtown. But when the trunk was too small for both mixtapes, merch, and even snacks, he knew he had to be strategic.

“I needed a table to set everything up. But the table didn’t fit in the trunk either—and I’ve got kids—so it was clear I needed something bigger. I’d been thinking about opening a store for a cool minute and checked out lease prices. Then I came across the idea of a box truck. Instead of paying rent every month, I could own something with just a few months’ worth of rent money. Way smarter. Way doper. But then even the truck started feeling too small, and we thought about opening a shop again.”

In 2021, while selling goods with his friends who also had their own version of box trucks (Box Truck Mafia) in a parking lot near San Carlos, a man who turned out to own a local coffee shop noticed him and offered him a chance to run a month-long pop-up. That opportunity led to a second temporary location downtown. There, they collaborated with a startup using delivery robots, running a donation station and building community connections.

Eventually, Jones opened a shop on 33rd, hosted events like open mics, and shifted the focus from retail to community-building. However, due to issues with the landlord, he had to shut it down. He stepped back, returned to the box truck-based model, and continues to grow his network and bring his community events around in a new way, expanding TANKSHIT to the rest of the Bay Area.

“We’re doing an open mic tour right now with the World Famous Hot Boys, who originally started their business in Oakland. They have locations in Hayward, Walnut Creek, Sacramento and Novato, and also Indiana. So random. They’re the homies. Through us hanging out and just kicking it, we ended up putting together an open mic tour due to the fact that we had an open mic that we don’t have the shop anymore. We’ve done a couple over a few weeks. And then First Friday Oakland was a couple days ago, that was popping! I actually didn’t even get a chance to perform, it was just too late. One thing I’ve learned through



putting together events is I don't always need to be the guy on the mic."

Jones travels all over the Bay Area with his truck, also known as the "TANKSHITBOXTRUCK." It's easily recognizable with a painting of Jones himself on the side, dreads blowing in the wind with his gold tooth shining, paired with the iconic phrase "Tank Shit" (Art by Writers Bench in San José). Once Jones opens the truck with the door featuring the large San José Sharks logo, you see a colorful array of international chips and sodas, vintage vinyls, and as always, Jones' mixtapes and merch. The truck is decorated with Bay Area memorabilia like San José stickers and 49ers hats. Not only is Jones providing for the community through open mics and the Box Truck, he's able to bring it anywhere he wants!

"As far as finding out what I'm working on, I need more participants who want to just get behind the movement and explain it to the world. You know, more press, more eyes, more professionalism. Like, I got it figured out as far as what I'm doing. But if

anybody sees anywhere I could improve, or where they could help, yeah, I'm looking for all that."

For those who want to learn more about Tank Shit: you can hit up @tankshitboxtruck on Instagram, or Tankshit.com.



Is there anyone in mind specifically that kind of makes San Jose, San Jose for you?

"I say all my friends really, like everybody that's tank shit for sure. Box Truck mafia popped up in my head. And the Writers Bench. They're the homies that help facilitate all the dope art throughout the city. So like the murals and, all the dope shit like that, and it's all self funded. Everything we're doing is, like, real underground, like, we don't get no help from, like, the government at all."

mysonyonex

by Becca Ruis

Dear Yonex,

Thank you so much for showing your old mama around this beautiful city of San José! Through you, I've come to know amazing taquerías, Jamaican restaurants, the best sushi places, and wonderful chicken and waffles food trucks! You introduce me to rappers and tamale ladies, street artists and muralists, all sorts of folks young and old who make this such a diverse city. You make everyone you meet feel welcome and worthy, treating all with respect and joy, and every single day, you work on giving back to the community, creating positivity and being true to yourself. Thank you for being you!

*I love you,
Mama:)*

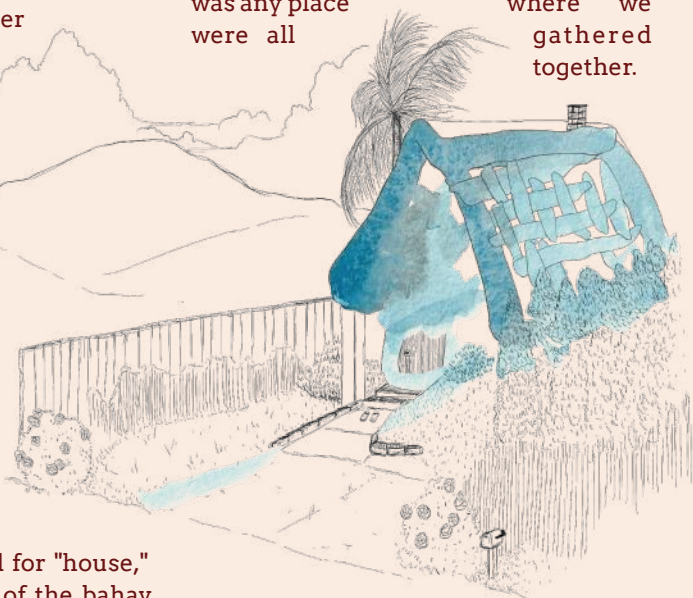


Bahay, San José

By Kenneth Tan

The Lola x Kenneth Collaboration is a project by my grandmother Crescenciana Tan and me. When I moved back home to San José, she and I started working together. Lola ("Grandma" in Tagalog) made watercolor paintings, and I drew her stories and memories on top of them. When she passed, she left behind her paintings, and I decided to finish everything she started. I promised.

where Mom and Lola raised me in San José. I say it was our house, but it was also our home. In Lola's lexicon, a house was somewhere we lived, but a home was any place where we were all gathered together.



Bahay is the Tagalog word for "house," and this is an illustration of the bahay

Meet the Artist — Kenneth Tan

Interview conducted by Mimi Nguyen

Can you tell me more about the Lola and Kenneth collaboration?

My mom called and said she was getting knee surgery for both of her knees, and I said "Ok, I guess I'm coming home." So I left my job, I moved back here to San José to be with my mom and my Lola. And when I got back, me and Lola just started Netflixing really hard. We were marathoning Netflix every day, morning to night. We had our TV routine: we always ended with *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, that's how you knew it was the end of the day. And then one day, while Lola and I were at the kitchen table—we always had breakfast together—I asked

her "Lola what do you want to do today?" I expected her to say "Netflix." We were watching *Merlin* at the time—I was thinking she'd ask to watch some TV.

Instead, she said, "I want to do something for a purpose." And I said "Okay"—I read in the Mercury News about seniors having art classes and thought maybe that was something we could do. We couldn't go to the [art classes], but I asked her "Do you want to try painting at home?"

I had supplies from when I was a kid, so I brought them out and Lola would start

painting. Around that time, while having breakfast with her, I was learning a lot about her. I was thinking that I could draw what she was telling me about on top of her paintings. So that's how it started.

The Lola X Kenneth collaboration is that my Lola makes paintings and I promise to finish everything she starts—that's us.

So as you know, our current issue is called "Portraits of San José," which is how we want to celebrate the people in San José—why did you specifically choose your piece Bahay as a part of your portrait of San José?

I chose that piece specifically because it's San José and in terms of portraits—this is a snapshot of my family, of our lives together in San José. Home for my Lola is not necessarily a place. I overheard her on the phone once with family and she said "I'm homesick for you", that's how she would use the word homesick. To her, homesickness wasn't looking for a house or a place: it was anywhere where we were all together.

But along with that, our house in San José is our home, that's where we gather and spend our lives together. I think this piece is a snapshot of San José, zooming in. You know how when you're on a plane, you see all those boxes? This is what you get when you zoom in on those

boxes to get a portrait of our family in San José, our little corner of it.

For you and your Lola, is the idea of "home" the people around you or is there more to the idea of a "home" than the people in your life?

You know what I've noticed? For my family, home travels with us. For example: my sister lives in SoCal. If all of us are in SoCal, home is when we're out and we say "Let's go home." Home means where everyone else is. Or growing up, if we took a family roadtrip and were staying somewhere else overnight, home meant going back to the hotel, the place we all gather.



"One day, when it's safe, when there's no downside to calling a thing what it is, when it's too late to hold anyone accountable, everyone will have always been against this."

— Omar El Akkad



M.riot (they/she) has been creating zines since 2005. They co-ran the Redwood City Zine Library from 2022-2025, and is now focusing on their personal art and perzine projects. M.riot is a Bay Area queer zinester, artist, photographer, and arts educator. M.riot lives with their partner and cat in the SF Bay Area.

Up
(San

M.riot

The
Jose

Punx
/

Santa

2005-2009
Cruz)

@m.emeute

Portrait of poet observing her f a t h e r

after Gene Luen Yang

By Keana Aguila Labra

This boy does not speak. Even now, he keeps his back to us. So we imagine. Once, this boy ran barefoot alongside his dogs. He thought nothing of being brown, of being Cebuano. A boy just being. There was a monkey, a mountain, and the legend. All arms and legs, this boy watches his brother. The crackle and pop of kulit and punishment, all so fast, as he chases their lolo's chickens. His sister is a baby. His life encompasses now. Then this boy becomes American. Learns cold.

Learns basketball. Learns hip-hop. Learns how to cut his hair and wear his hats. Becomes Bay Area. Becomes father. Becomes father before the right age. What is the right age? This boy, now man, created stories for his boy. Sings of Superman and his adventures. How could he have known that Superman once too stared at his face in the mirror in confusion. In horror. He, too, blinked and wondered where he was no matter the time, the era. How does the ground feel on Krypton? Metropolis? Muntinlupa? The boy looks at these memories and deems them rock. Remnants. He paints them green, locks it in a cage. His boy asks him what's beyond the steel. The boy's boy. The boy who is now man, now father, looks at his son. The son who knows no green. He closes his eyes and shuts it tighter.

Meet the Artist — Keana Aguila L a b r a

Interview conducted by Vinson Suarez-Thai

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

I was born in San José, moved away in 3rd grade (shout out to Dorsa Elementary School!) to the Central Valley, hopped around Modesto, Salida, and Tracy, came back to the South Bay and lived in Milpitas, before finally coming back to San José.

How long have you been doing creative writing? What inspired you to start doing it?

I started writing very young, but much like my journey away and to San José, there was a time I didn't write. I tended to other creative pursuits, such as drawing and painting, before coming back to creative writing seriously.

Do you have any advice you want to share?

My advice to anyone considering publication or performance of their creative writing—do it. There is a community waiting to support you, and we can't wait to hear your words.



All American

By Julia Halprin Jackson

You were born three months into a global pandemic, six days after George Floyd was killed.

You arrived a few days premature, the day after my birthday, and with each contraction I felt promise and potential: Your birth signaled progress. Our world was small that year, our cells on fire with anxiety.

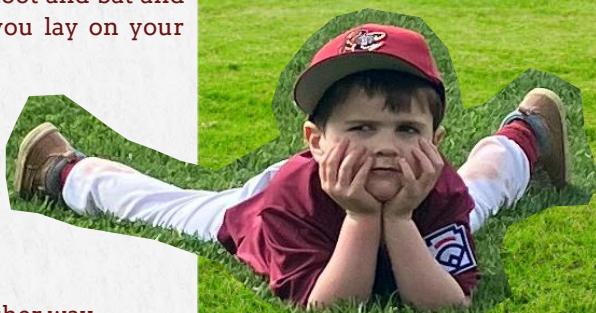
Anything could happen: angry white men could storm the capitol, viruses could close schools, stores. But here's what happened in our home: You grew. Your sister grew.

We zoomed and pushed your stroller past quiet neighborhoods full of flowers and birds. Five years later, your dad and I spent weeks convincing the school district to place you in the appropriate grade.

Sometimes when the world is loud you put your hands over your ears, and I understand the impulse. Sign him up for t-ball, someone said.

When the other boys hoot and bat and scramble for the ball you lay on your belly in the grass, head in your hands, and that's when I know it's undeniable:

You're mine, and
always will be.
I wouldn't have it any other way



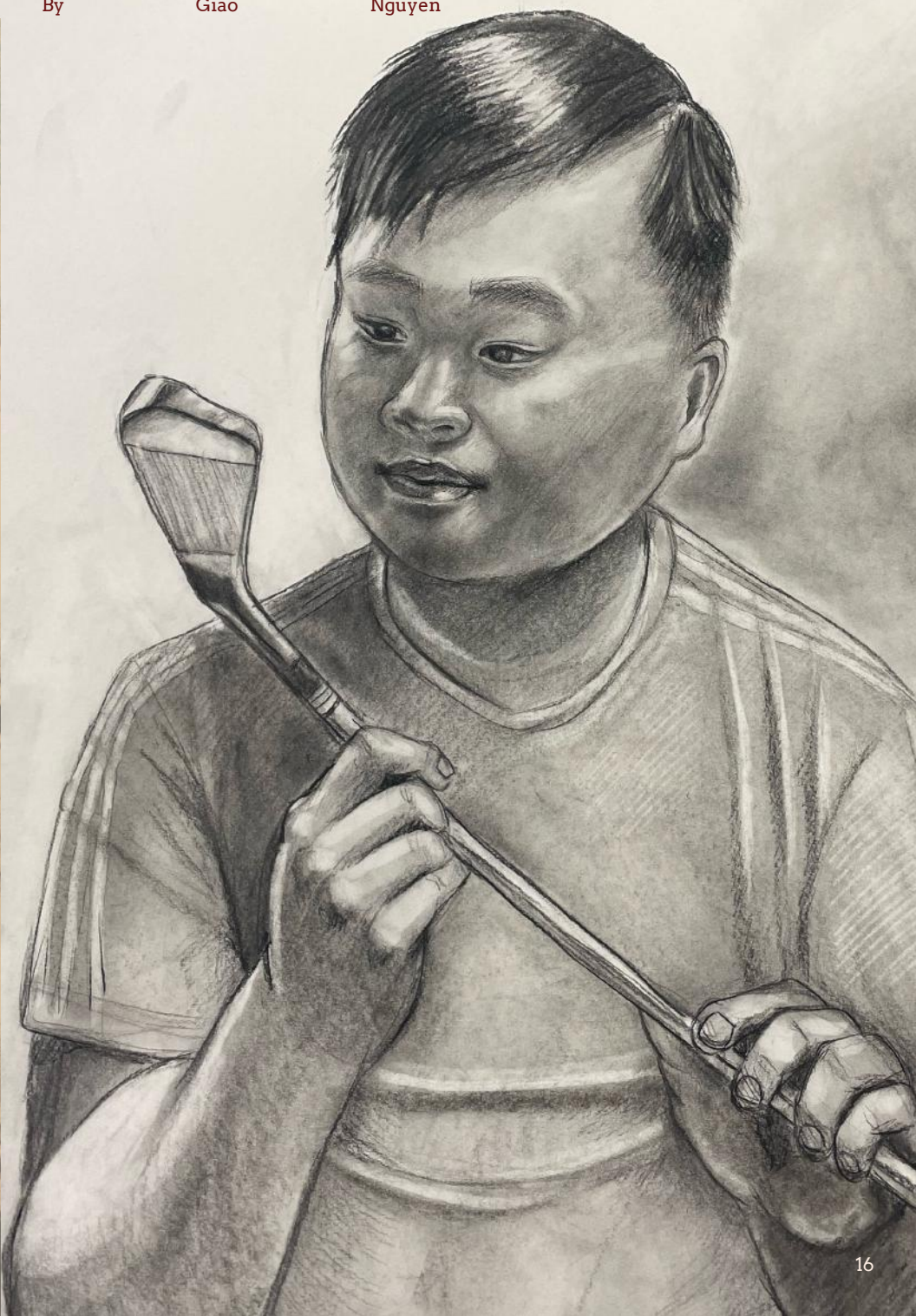
Nhật

By

Bình

Giao

Nguyen



Meet the Portrait — Barbara Peddy: San José High School Heritage Room

Interview

conducted

by

Vivian

Ha

At San José High, in the back of the library, there is a room filled from toe-to-ceiling in San José High memorabilia. The table in the center of the room has yearbooks from different decades, and the walls. Covered in photos of the original SJHS buildings along with diplomas from generations. The Heritage Room is a space filled with over 1,000+ San José High-related items that belonged to students from nearly as early as its founding in 1863.

Mark Briggs started the heritage room from a single table at San José State, the former location of the high school, and it has since moved to where the current high school currently stands. It has only kept expanding with Barbara Peddy caring for the Heritage Room since 2011. What started as a small table with photos and yearbooks has now expanded to a room filled with the history of generations of San José High Alumni. There spans class photos as far back as 1898 to as recent as 2010, cherishing the memories students had achieved during their time at the high school. The Heritage Room also celebrates the accomplishments after graduating from San José High showcasing notable alumni and their work. Mark Briggs, an educator and artist, passed in 2019 but his work continues on through the preservation of San José High history that is the heritage room.



The oldest photo of a graduating class in 1899.

The Heritage Room continues to serve past and present students with Barbara Peddy welcoming everyone to learn more about the history of San José High. Barbara and her husband, Tim, are both heavily involved in historical societies such as the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County, an organization that aims to preserve and celebrate the history of Santa Clara County and the heritage of its past generations.



The Heritage Room in 2011 versus now.



HERITAGE ROOM

What is the Heritage Room and how did it get started?

Barbara: It was because of Mark Briggs. I'd come and help with [the room]. It just progressed from there: he would have a desk right outside, and I was in [the room]. The room has gotten more and more stuff as time has gone on. A lot of the people who first went [to San José High] are no longer with us. That's how you get things, like [this] scrapbook. What's sad is a lot of people don't know about [the Heritage Room], and so I'm hoping people will learn a little more about the Heritage Room and the history of SJHS, because it's the oldest school in San José.

Tim: One of the interesting things is that in the early years of California, students wanted to go to school. There weren't many high schools around at that time so they would live [in San José]. Students would move here and board with other families, or in one of the commercial places, and attend [San José] high school.



Tim and Barbara in the Heritage Room.

Meet the Portrait — Rick Aning: San José High, Bulldog Foundation

Interview

conducted

by

Vivian

Ha

Rick Aning was born Rick Enrique Lorenzo Aning and is currently on the board of the San José High Bulldog Foundation. The foundation is a school-connected organization with the mission to support the school, the staff, and the students in funding programs that otherwise are not funded by the school district. His family has a long history in San José and the locality of growing and living in the Japantown neighborhood.

“All of my siblings and I went to the local schools and we worked, you know, locally as well. All of my brothers and sisters were San José High School Bulldog alumni, which is a nice thing to have for the whole family to be a part of. All of my jobs have been local; I didn't have to travel too far to go to work.

I grew up and was raised in Japantown and I've been living there for almost 60 years now. I've seen a lot of changes, although the memories from the past still live very clearly in my mind. What used to be here were families and stores, but when a family moves out they're no longer around — a new family moves in. That's part of the recycling of the neighborhood; it is disheartening to see a family move out and a new family move in, total strangers. I like to always hold on to those memories, but yet embrace a little bit of the new technology, the new neighboring people.”



Students during the SJHS 150th anniversary parade. Photo provided by SJHS Heritage Room



Can you tell us more about the Bulldog Foundation at San José High, and how you got involved?

The Bulldog Foundation was established

in 1983, shortly after I graduated high school. There was a time in the early 2000s that it had gone dormant due to lack of participation. In 2010, the principal was able to bring the foundation back; and that's when I came in, along with Barbara from the Heritage Room, and we sat on that committee. Our mission statement is to support the school, the staff and the students in funding, otherwise not funded by the school district.

I've been a part of Bulldog foundation since 2010 and became a board member with voting rights. San José High School, which is the third oldest high school in California and the oldest high school in San José, celebrated our 150th anniversary in 2013. Each one of our committee members became event chairs and I chose to do the parade, which had never, ever been done for the school. What inspired me to do the parade was I knew Ed Batista, who was in charge of the San José holiday parade downtown. That inspiration transpired for me to do it for the school. I had zero budget, so I had to look to the alumni—I knew a couple people with deep pockets, so I was able to generate \$900 for the

parade. This would fund for supplies, city permits, the city application and together, between the students, faculty, and community members, we are able to do this. Getting the floats together was a big, long process. One nice feature of the parade was the development of the Bulldog alumni band. My friend Virginia, who is class of '72, was able to find some of her classmates and other people she knew to come back and use their instruments that they probably haven't played in a long time to play for the parade.

This was a whole school effort. I wanted to engage the students, so they took part too. "Do you have any ideas for a float? Would you? Would you get your club together to build a float?" They were part of the parade as well, and to see their smiles and their enjoyment the day of the parade—it was priceless.





Nothing Real Can Be Threatened

Interview conducted by Elizabeth Briesse

Art is my way of grounding myself. So, selfishly, I was making art to cope for myself.

Every time I go to an SJ Made event, it's like reuniting with a family. I've noticed I've been able to create and nurture a safe space for AAPI, queer, BIPOC, and neurodivergent communities.

I understand myself better through others. When they explain or share their experiences, I'm like, wow, I can relate. So it has been a cathartic and healing process for me to connect with my community in San José.

I'd like to build more interactive spaces where people can have a creative outlet.

To my San José community—

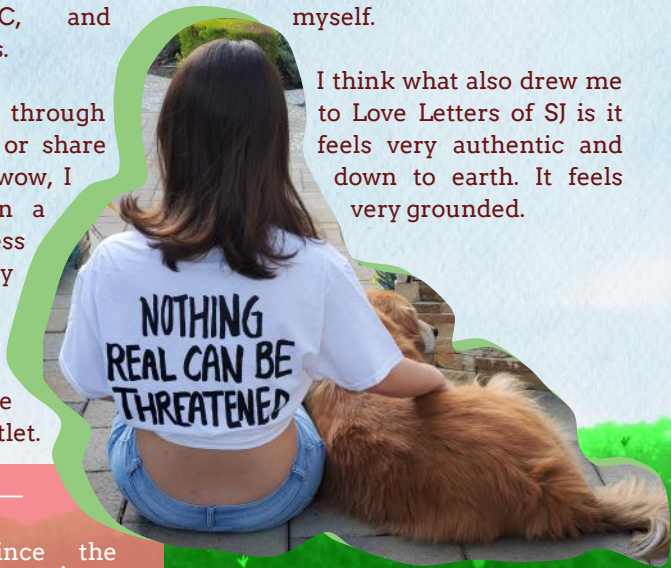
You've been there since the beginning, when I was just starting out with Ruby dog. We would vend at art shows together and she would be my inspiration for my dumpy doodles. She is everything to me.

With her sudden passing in 2023...I will never recover, I don't have the words right now, I'm choking up as I type... But coming back to San José and reuniting with my community here, has rekindled her memory and her loving squishy spirit. Thank you for being here for our journey. Buppydogs is dedicated to Ruby-love.

None of my work is digital, everything is traditional. When it's created, the only process that would be digital is scanning and sending it to my printer.

My submission piece is about how grieving is trying to normalize passing and death, loss of relationships, breakups, and abandonment. So my work is an attempt to try to soothe myself.

I think what also drew me to Love Letters of SJ is it feels very authentic and down to earth. It feels very grounded.



@buppydogs



Meet the Portrait — No Friends Club

Interview conducted by Mimi Nguyen



Tell me a little bit about No Friends — the general spiel you give to people.

We all started in our freshman year of high school for the most part because our friend's brother ran the [film] club. We just had nothing else to do at that time, as fresh 14/15-year-olds. So, why not just make silly videos? We did that for all four years of high school. And you know, halfway through, you realize: "Oh! This... this is kind of like a fun thing to do."



What compelled you to keep going? Was it hard to get funding materials accrued for whatever you're filming at the time?

Filming was just starting to get very accessible those days. We were all self-taught. We didn't read any books or take any classes—a lot of the resources we found were on YouTube. We were able to get at least one camera and we kind of just stuck with it for 5-6 years before we finally started getting nicer [equipment] and jobs based off our work. It was pretty rough. I think as a creative, we just had to work with what we had and that that definitely did push us to be better. Having our friends/No Friends definitely made it a lot easier.

We definitely feel like we've grown a lot. Especially through additional experience. When you're younger, you're definitely a little bit more all over the place because you have so many big ideas. You don't really have a direction, but as you get older and you experience things together, it becomes so much easier.

What do you guys hope to see in the future for yourselves? Or if everything aligns, what do you want to see in the future?

We're working on another short film this summer. We're going back to our comedy routes, but we're also trying going to tackle a little bit of horror for this one. A little spooky, hopefully. But we also have big goals. Daryl wants to do a feature film, which is a pretty tall ask because all the films we've been doing have been 5 to 10 minutes long. So a whole 60 minute film is going to take like a lot more time, a lot more writing creativity, but also budget. Getting all the resources for each day of shooting as well. I love that we've been dabbling into different genres and expanding our network of actors too. Even expanding our writing styles. I think it just adds more excitement to our [growth] and our ideas.



Love Letter to Donald

By

Marissa

McPeak

Dear Donnie,

Thank you for helping me rediscover the inner love within myself so that I can also reflect that true love to you. Thank you for always being down for assisting me on my creative dreams and going on fun adventures.

You have helped me overcome some really dark days and transform my pain



into something beautiful. You truly see me and bring out the best in me.

You are my soulmate and I am so excited about the life we are building together.

I love you!!!

Love,

Marissa

My partner, Donald, is, in my opinion, a semi-unknown San José legend. As one of the co-owners of Chromatic Coffee, Donald has been providing some of the best coffee in San José.

Not only that, Donald truly cares about community and doing selfless acts for others. I have seen countless times Donald offer to assist strangers and go out of his way to say or do something kind. He leaps at any opportunity to be supportive of others.

Donald, you are an amazing person and I know there are many others who agree with me.

@marissamcpeak



Meet The Author — M a r i s s a

Interview conducted by Elizabeth Briesie

I'm from San José, born and raised. I love San José, and it feels like sometimes it's rare to be from here. It's just such a unique place full of so much diversity and culture.

I graduated from San José State University with a BFA, majored in photography. So I've been in the photography industry for probably about half my life at this point.

It's been cool having a career in photography. But as a small business, I feel like I'm ready to start making that step back into that world of owning my own work and being more present in the community.

Over the past few years, I've been involved in some of the San José photo walks, and I realized that wasn't really

a good space for me, or maybe some femme presenting people. So that inspired me to host my own photo walks in San José that were femme centered. That totally influenced me to start making my own community events that were created to have rules and integrity, so that if anyone feels unsafe, we're going to address it and create a safe space that I felt like was lacking in some of the San José photo community.

Donnie was helping me with San José Day. We have just a big love for San José, and we wanted to give back in a way that people can feel beautiful.

I wanted to write a love letter to him and the things that he does in San José that maybe people don't know who he is beyond his coffee.

He's someone in San José that means a lot to me, and he made me a better person.

Raised by



the Music

By Nicole "Coco" Morales

Meet the Portrait — Nico Fletcher: Nico the Space T o r p e d o

Interview conducted by Marie Aquino

Nico Fletcher, also known as Nico the Space Torpedo, is a community leader in the San Jose area. With his brand P.E.P (Promote, Encourage, Positivity) in

your step, Fletcher aims to
use his

knowledge and resources on the community with his work. He co-founded Raise Your Limits Outreach Group with his partner, Darius Austin, who had the initial dream and vision. Due to his parents already conducting multi-million dollar non-profits, they inspired him to start his own journey in the industry. His mother, who he watched struggle as her business was getting off the ground, was one of the people who had a substantial impact on his life.

Fletcher is also a coach and board member for Coyote Creek Youth Sports (CCYS) and the director of marketing for Silicon Valley National Junior Basketball (SVNJB). He expresses gratitude to the company, especially to the section director, Andre Hunt. The group hopes to create a “mecca of sports for the youth in San Jose,” with Fletcher and Hunt leading the project to help build the facility.

How do you develop all these programs and all these resources for the community?

Where do I get my ideas? From the kids. They give me great ideas. I’m tuned in with them. I’m on live with kids talking about my life. So, staying near the ground and in the same breath, I’m learning and developing from all the OGs who have done this for years and years and made millions of all this. So I think there’s alignment of the vision, knowing what the people can actually provide [...] and then we meet the middle ground and there’s success with it, because you’re listening to your audience and your audience is youth.





Do what you love and love what you do, I believe we are all passionate about something, some times it takes longer to figure that out, to have a purpose on this Earth, I create what everyone told me not to do, follow your dreams.



The of Enjoyment Life

By

Anonymous

D a w n

By China Martin

I joined a yarn crafts forum this year and saw that people were making “aura blankets” for their loved ones. Some people did their loved one’s favorite colors, while others like myself chose to go with a more abstract vision.

Although a beauty too great to capture through any medium, this is my attempt to depict my best friend through crochet. The orange represents her undying ambition and ability to uplift those in her life. These golden hues also embody her warmth and the value she brings to everyone around her. The blue symbolizes the calmness she exudes as well as her emotional side. I like the contrast of blue and orange and decided to intertwine the two because it looks like the sun rays and shows how multidimensional Emma is.

She is hard working, but has fun; she is strong, but emotional. She is brilliantly witty and fierce.

The white border is there to represent clouds, which typically changes due to how quickly their shape can transform. I hope Emma’s life transforms and changes around her, but that she maintains the magical and lively person that so many have fallen in love with.

I chose to name the piece “Dawn” because Emma reminds me of a new day and new beginnings. Her presence feels like the moment I step outside for the first time in the morning. The warmth of the sun on my skin and the cool air entering my lungs grounds me and reminds me that everything will be okay.

Even in the darkest nights, I know I have her to look forward to. Like the morning sun rising, Emma brings beauty and light to the world every day, and for this, I am eternally grateful to have her in my life.





Pinoytown

By Jared Gochuico

This series of work was created as a monument of Filipino-American history and activism of the last 100 years. It includes modern student activism, such as the roots of Pinoytown in San José and how many Filipino-American groups exist today. It also honors the history of undersung Filipino-American farmworkers, such as Larry Itliong, and their organization of labor unions in the 1960s.

I was inspired by my own Filipino-American heritage, my past experiences at SJSU, and the idea that we stand on the shoulders of giants. The theme is stories—or *kwento*, in Tagalog. There are many stories of Filipino-Americans that deserve to be highlighted. And, through many existential crises in the creation of this series, these stories are meaningful to me because I learned about that there was such a place as Pinoytown in San José; that my uncles were farmworkers in the 1920s and knew the labor organizers; that my colleagues are a part of SJSU's new history of AAPI community engagement; and that readers like you are also remaking history by knowing these stories.

Meet the Artist — Jared Gochuico

Interview conducted by Mimi Aquino

Do you think your technical skills as an engineer have informed your art or vice versa?

From engineering, I feel like I learned how to look at my art. I would say the technical side of engineering hasn't been as helpful as much as the mindset of how I can analyze my work to understand who the user would be. So questions like who would feel something from what I'm making. I think my work has developed this sort of design technique and that in actuality, it's the opposite: my design experience has improved my engineering work.

It sounds like when you created the concept for this mural, you learned a lot about your own family history too — tell me about the process you went through in making this piece.

I didn't know much about Filipino American History and had to read up on it [to do this project]. I spoke with a historian at the school library, interviewed my grandpa and my parents and friends. I learned so much [from this experience].

It felt like standing on the shoulders of giants. Like I was uncovering a hidden history.

When I started this project, I didn't set out to make something culturally significant. But since I was given the chance to make something historic, I wanted to do the research. This design wasn't really about me. Ultimately, my design wasn't chosen for the mural, but it's less about whether or not I was

chosen. I think my work pushed forward the overall quality of the submissions and the thought needed to choose a final design.

So I read one of your short comics about impostor syndrome and accessibility and it really resonated with me — do you have any advice for aspiring creatives?

My advice for someone looking to get into creative work? Just do it.

There are so many barriers to opportunities. In getting a degree, there's structural barriers like racism and financial barriers; in doing art, there's time barriers. But accessibility means that you lower the bar for getting into these activities. I think it's important to make opportunities and to make them as accessible as possible. Through art, even if it's just by volunteering or attending a workshop, learning from someone else or talking to other artists, these [simple acts] help people see pathways.

So that's pretty much my advice. It's not life-changing advice, but the idea of it is that if you see other people doing things, you're more likely to try it yourself.

Dichromacy at the Corner of Jackson and McKee

By Mighty Mike McGee

Artist Statement

San José is the greatest love I have returned to again and again.

Just past my dentist's office
the buildings make way to a view of the east hills
A whelm erodes my frustration and pain as
I walk slowly toward my bus stop

Temptation wishes I would stop mid-crosswalk
to stare at the grassy foothills dotted by a few trees
like birthmarks on a body at rest
A horizon resplendent in deep green
—proof they chugged the winter rains

See, our brown hills are ubiquitous

The green, if it ever does arrive
lasts for roughly 3-7 hours
Then spring and summer combine to desiccate
and wither every single blade of grass and weed
desaturating the hills like Technicolor giving up
leaving the ridge covered in khaki

I cannot not look because now I see the green!
So rich, just a couple of miles to my right

I wish I could tan into that verdant shade

A color you can scoop up with both hands
and let it run through your fingers
leaving the ridge covered in khaki

I cannot *not* look because now I see the green!
So rich, just a couple of miles to my right
I wish I could tan into that verdant shade
A color you can scoop up with both hands
and let it run through your fingers
One that makes you forget what the dentist just did
and accept the cost of living in San José



This is why our
brown hills
overstay their
welcome

We're still here

By Analyn Bones

This is our home,

we're
still
here.



Meet the Artist — Analyn Bones

Interview conducted by Elizabeth Brieze

How long have you been an artist, and specifically drawing cars?

I have started drawing since I was 7 years old, about 32 years, and I got into drawing cars when I was a junior in high school. My love both my parents had, especially my dad so I would draw different cars that he had in the past.

How do you think growing up in San José influenced your art?

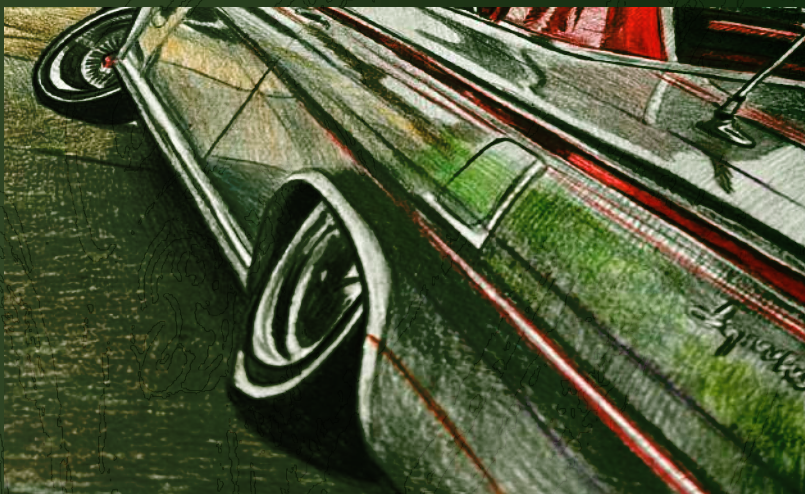
Growing up in San José was not easy. Shortly after my parents divorce when I was 9 years old, we moved to the Northside of San José and it became our home. Art was my diary, and I would draw everyday just to escape the depression growing up. Then after watching the changes in San José, I felt it was trying to erase our story. I used art to be able to tell our lost story of San José, so that others would know and not be forgotten.

What things about San José make it feel like home?

Family and friends I grew up with are still here in San José. The diversity, culture melting pot, rich food to art and of course our history is what makes San José home.

Tell me about the title, "We're still here." What inspired that title and the drawing itself?

The title "We still here" came to the idea when my friend, Ramon, and I had a discussion about the changes that are happening in San José. So many folks have left because of the cost of living, tech, and gentrification. As if they are trying to erase our history and culture. The car in the art piece is Ramon's car. He would say through everything that is happening in San José, people should know "We are still here". That title stuck and it fit. Because at the end of the day, no matter what we are going through with the changes that is happening around us—we are still here.



Meet the Portrait — Samuel Cortez

Interview conducted by Marie Aquino

In your opinion, how has the company impacted the San José community?

I think we have created a safe space—a space where people can come in and feel like they are okay. They will be okay, they belong. So I think those many things besides the obvious, that is connecting culture for people that was born here and never seen Mexico or never understood what Mexican culture is. Through dance, we gave them a little glimpse of what it is, and they start connecting it with connecting that with their food, with their clothing, with the aunt, with the tía that comes from Guerrero Oaxaca with every other thing that happens around us. They start connecting the dots and gives them a sense of belonging, a sense of who they are and who they want to be.”



Los Lupeños de San José, one of the earliest Mexican folk dance companies in California, has been part of San Jose for over fifty years, created by Susan V. Cashion and Ramón Morones Ortiz in 1969. The company is part of the nonprofit arts organization, Cashion Cultural Legacy.

Samuel Cortez has been the artistic director and choreographer for the company, falling in love with the San José community after moving from Chicago, Illinois in 2015. After getting to know the residents, he realized how much of an impact Los Lupeños had on the community and how it gave them pride. Cortez calls San José, “a special city that cares about its community,” having taught in East San José and walking around the Downtown area.

When the company realized that there wasn’t a festival dedicated to folklorico, they decided to create one. Folkloreada brings together Bay Area folklorico groups to showcase their work with the city. This year, it was held on May 4th at the Mexican Heritage Plaza, with six hours of performances, vendors and other fun.



Photos from loslupenos.org

Shaping San José's Young Artists: Teacher Pat's Impact

By Gweneth Moore

Patricia Johnson—affectionately known as Teacher Pat—is a visionary artist, dedicated mentor, and vital member of the San José arts community.

As an instructor at Alameda Artworks, she nurtured creativity in me, my fellow classmates, and all of our families throughout childhood—encouraging exploration across an array of mediums including watercolor, oil-painting, sculpture, mixed media, and performance.

Her unique ability to individually connect with each young artist helped instill creative confidence, artistic passion, and lifelong curiosity



in all of her students. Teacher Pat not only taught me to see the world through an artistic lens but also helped me develop lasting friendships and a deep, enduring connection to my inner creative child. The confidence I have in my self-expression, and the fulfillment I feel from the act of creating are in large part thanks to her.

Teacher Pat nurtured the next generation of artists who will sustain the vibrant creative and cultural landscape here in San José!



Gweneth Moore, 22, is a San José native whose upbringing was steeped in art, dance, nature, and the vibrant Bay Area community. She currently works in human resources while pursuing artistic passions in metalsmithing and sculpture.

Photo 1. Gwen's Art Exhibition in Pat's studio at Alameda Artworks (2008)

Photo 2. Teacher Pat & Gwen at Alameda Artworks Show (2009)

E x t r a o r d i n a r y

By

Zainab

Hussain

"Isn't being extraordinary exhausting?"

I ask my mother,

as I sit there, watching her work hard as ever.

"Well of course!" She replied, pausing for a moment to look into my eyes-

"we were simply destined for greatness,
and it would be a shame to waste these gifts."

We've had this conversation many times;

I know that she didn't choose this life

for herself or for her children, so she lets me complain about my burdens,
even though hers are far heavier to bear.

She says she doesn't, but I'm sure she wonders

what life could have been like,

if my sister and I still had a father-

if she had a partner by her side.

We were raised by a tribe of single mothers,

each more astonishing than the next.

Like family, they took care of each other,

loving and nurturing each other's kids.

They became both mothers and fathers,

not by choice, but nonetheless,

each challenge made them more powerful
than they ever could have imagined.

My mother loved to sew and bake;

her dream was only ever to be a mom,

and even now she makes me pancakes,

to cheer me up when I'm feeling down.

She'll show up whenever needed,

no matter how far away I am,

with hugs and kisses

and more food than I can fit in my fridge.

"I don't need a reason"

is what she always says-

"I just love doing things for you. That's what a mother does."

We were simply destined
for greatness, and it would be a shame to
waste these gifts.

Meet the Artist — Zainab Hussain

Interview

conducted

by

Vinson

Suarez-Thai

**How long have you been a poet?
Why did you start writing poetry in
the first place?**

I've been writing poetry for over 10 years. It started as a way to express my frustration at the propaganda I was exposed to living in the UAE, where I had no freedom of speech or religion. I witnessed the erasure of my culture and history and I refused to idly stand by, so I did the only thing I could- I wrote a poem about it. I didn't realize how powerful poetry could be until I started performing and sharing my work with people- that is why I do this: to empower myself and my community.

**How long have you been a poet?
Why did you start writing poetry in
the first place?**

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Do you think you could have accomplished what you have if you had decided to do it anywhere else?

My experiences shaped me, and if I hadn't lived in a place like San José where art, music, poetry, and cultural celebrations were so prominent, I might not have nurtured my passion

for creative writing. If I didn't have an inspiring and supportive artist community, and friends who are also poets, I might not have published my book.

What inspires you?

The beauty of nature. I have spent many days listening to the leaves flutter in the wind, watching the waves crash onto the shore, driving with the windows rolled down through towering trees, and begging for the sun to set a little bit slower so I could enjoy the view a little bit longer. In the words of Buddha "If we could see the miracle of a single flower clearly, our whole life would change."

What are you most proud of?

I am most proud of my healing journey as a person with mental illness. I have survived a suicide attempt and conquer depression and anxiety every day, never letting the darkness win. I take pride in surviving, and not letting any of my trauma dim my light. I am proud of myself for having hope in a world of hopelessness and despair.



"Boundless"
Spoken Word Poem

Same City New Me

By

Zainab

Hussain

You ruined a lot of things for me
especially this beautiful city
for the longest time
even glimpsing it from afar
triggered the unbearable ache in my heart
it's hard to imagine that a year ago
this was the place that we called home
but I've returned now
with a new perspective
this time
everything will be different because I
knew this city long before I knew you
and life is too short for sitting
around licking old wounds so
today, I'm changing the narrative
I'm flipping the damn script
this story is not about what was
it's about what is
from the very first time I met
you, under the city lights I
knew you were going to be
an important part of my
life and I still believe
now
that it was the work
of destiny I was
just wrong about
why we were fated
to meet we were
never meant to
heal one another

we weren't destined to be partners
you were just a lesson I had to learn
the hard way a tragic yet also useful
mistake

so today it's not about how much you
hurt me
it's about my newfound resiliency
because if you had never broken my
heart
I wouldn't have discovered what I'm
capable of -

If you hadn't abandoned me
when I needed you the most I
advantage of my kindness I
would have kept letting
myself get taken for
granted If you hadn't
messed up as often as you
did I wouldn't have
appreciated my ability to
forgive if you hadn't
forced me to
accept so many
compromises I
wouldn't have
realized the
extent of my patience If
you hadn't become so
dependent on me
I wouldn't have known what a

great partner I can be and that is
where the irony lies
because although you took so much
from me in doing so
you gave me the courage to leave
by showing me that I deserve so much
better than what someone like you
has to offer I would have never have
known that I am capable of being
alone If you hadn't lied and broken
promises

I would have kept believing in those
sweet nothings
if you hadn't stabbed me in the back

I wouldn't have known I was such
an easy target if you hadn't
taken advantage of my
kindness I would have kept
letting myself get taken for
granted If you hadn't messed
up as often as you did I
wouldn't have appreciated
my ability to forgive if
you hadn't forced me to
accept so many
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where the irony lies-
because although you took so much
from me in doing so
you gave me the courage to leave
by showing me that I deserve so much
better than what someone like you
has to offer

I vowed never to walk these streets
that haunted me even in my dreams
all I could think about was revenge
but I stopped myself at every turn
there are so many ways to punish you
but I take comfort in knowing that I
can't stoop so low I still carry my pain
and rage

but the only way I win the game
is if I keep going, and never look
back and I plan to do exactly that



To the Truly Mary-Anne

By

Mia

Rios

To the Truly, Mary-Anne:

Thank you for your
existence. Downtown

San José has been
more than grateful
to have you. Your
mental health
business is more
than just a
business, it is a
space for
customers,
people, and
emotions alike
to feel
welcome upon
entering. ☆

You are
genuine and
attentive, and I
am treasured
by your
affirmations and
blessed to spend
every quality time
catching up
together when life
grants us. From
social worker to social
worker, I appreciate your
work and your presence
wholeheartedly. Everyone, please

continue to support her business through
[@yourstrulymaryanne!](https://www.instagram.com/yourstrulymaryanne/)



To the city that built me

By

Lindsay

Lopez

To the city that built me, I write with love,
Where the East foothills rise and the sky glows above.
Just a little girl from East San José,
Chasing the sun as it faded away.

Summer days, golden and bright,
Evenings wrapped in a soft, warm light.
The streets I knew, the paths I'd roam,
Never knowing they'd lead me back home.
Now, I stand where my roots still grow,

Helping my neighbors' dreams to flow.
Guiding hands, a voice so clear,
Educating my community, making homeownership near.

I give my time, I share my heart,
For the place that shaped my start.
San José, you gave to me—
Now I give back, with pride and glee.

From Story Road

By

Arianna

Dela

Cruz

I still remember

how my family would walk into the Kingdom Hall every Sunday

and be greeted by warm “Kumusta ka na[’s]?”

from the titas and titos, kuyas and ates of the congregation

We would all sing Kingdom Songs as the piano tracks played

and sit in those cushy gray seats as the elders gave their bahagis

Turning the pages of our Bibles to read the scriptures

Familiar faces that I had known for so long

would smile down at me in my obnoxiously colorful dresses and say,

“Ang ganda mo!”

Or pick me up and twirl me around

Even though I would bawl and cry during the meeting

and my dad would have to bring me outside and make me behave.

Saturday mornings were for service

We would ride in other families’ cars and park at the streets we were assigned to

We partnered up:

walking from door to door,

holding our payongs so we wouldn’t get too brown,

tucking trifold tracts into the doorways when people weren’t home

Parties and family nights were brimming with food, performances, and games

The spirit of celebration was not gone (even though we didn’t celebrate the holidays)

Visits to the houses of different families

launched loud conversations that would float through the air

and karaoke sessions that would last for the rest of the night

I played with Tita Jannet’s braille typewriter and felt her bible books

I would get so giddy every time Tita Lillia gave candy to me

I kept the Tagalog flashcards Tita Rosanna tested me on

Life was simple; life was easy

Then Jaeson got disfellowshipped.

I was shocked when I heard about it.

A brother saw his car parked at a girl’s house at night.

I didn’t even know how they knew that.

He denied that he had a girlfriend and that he had sex with her.

His mom said he didn’t understand anything from the meetings

He memorized what he would say in Tagalog when he would go out in service



It was because the truth from the Bible wasn't in his heart
But his mom forced him to talk to the elders over and over again
So they were convinced that he was repentant of his sins
Kuya Jaeson's dad let him live in the back of their house with his girlfriend

Ate Jolene (his little sister) said it was disgusting and started preaching more

Kuya Jaeson went door-to-door to sell shoes he cleaned

Ate Jolene started working at a Footwear store

Kuya Jaeson did drugs

Ate Jolene told on the teenagers in the congregation who were drinking

Kuya Jaeson crashed his car and his parents got mad

Ate Jolene got married to her boyfriend and made her parents happy

As I heard about their family from my mom
I couldn't help but think of my own
Our families are close, our dynamics are similar
Would something like that happen to us too?
Would we still be close together?

It's been years since my family has been a part of the Story Road congregation
But even though it's been so long since we've left
I still keep this story with me and more
There were times when I wanted to be there to support others but I couldn't
I heard about all the drama and conflicts and wanted to help resolve them but I couldn't
And even though those time has passed and it will never be the same again
I miss the times when our hall was full of life and we enjoyed being in each other's company
Because we will never be all together again in that Kingdom Hall, will we?

Here, There is Love

By

Kaiyah

To make a home out of a city

To weave chaos into connection

To always come back

We were strangers before you showed me,

Here, there is love



This place has carried our friendship

In its outstretched arms

We have knitted dreams and lived stories

I have no reason to doubt that

Here, there is love

Time moves slow in solitude

Time is a blur on the train

Time moves at the speed of light

Surrounded by laughter realizing that

Here, there is love

Anastasia, Leo, Ayni, Amir



You all brought San José to life for me

We may make other places home

But here, there is love

And there always will be.





Meet the Team

Thanks for reading our zine, "Portraits of San José." We hope you enjoyed the stories which are from our San José community.



With Love,

Love Letters to San José



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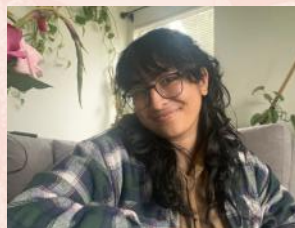
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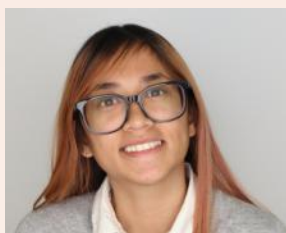
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Love Letters

to SAN JOSÉ

Special thanks to San José Strong