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The Sanctuary City Project

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Where Would You Go Back To? This question came up during a conversation with high school and college students at the Seattle University Vachon Gallery. The question was asked by a young high school student, a young refugee from Northern Africa, and it was directed to the white college students during a Sanctuary City Project workshop.

The Sanctuary City Project is an ongoing research project that uses community engagement and social practice methods to create a dialogue surrounding sanctuary cities and immigration issues. Over the past ten years, I have utilized primary and secondary research methods which have included talking with non-profits and their constituents and civic institutions, as well as periodicals, and think-tanks. Through this process of collecting and researching, I then utilize engagement platforms to share my research and continue collection with the public. Through the combination of research and community engaged platforms, the Sanctuary City Project hopes to educate and engage with participants and institutions, creating inclusive spaces where deeper dialogue surrounding sanctuary cities an immigration policy can take place. In the end, my process is one that allows for continued development of the methods and outcomes surrounding public conversations concerning sanctuary cities and immigration.

I first became interested in the concept of sanctuary cities after a series of raids across the Bay Area and country in 2008. This marked a dramatic federal shift from working towards comprehensive immigration reform to pursuing a policy of aggressive enforcement and criminalization. The project, which began as an art installation, photo book, public projections, and cooking projects, emerged in 2017 as the Sanctuary City Print Shop at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where hundreds of people came to the center and participated in the public events beyond it. From the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exhibition, I created a series of more than 30 original screen print posters developed from the stories of community members to address the complexity of the immigrant experience: ***I Am An Immigrant, The Country Of The Immigrant Is Here, Why Did You Come Here? When Did You Forget You Were An Immigrant? A Sanctuary Is A Quiet Place.*** The resulting posters offer an opportunity for dialogue around the topic of sanctuary cities and immigration.

From its inception the project depended heavily on people's participation. The project takes these stories and turns elements of the oral histories into visual language. The final product becomes a tangible archive. Every quote, every poster, billboard, banner, IG posting, comes from these interactions is with the public. The billboard that accompanies this article, ***A Sanctuary Is A Necessity***, is a quote given to the project by a participant. Every quote speaks to a larger community of people, those who immigrated to this country. In a way this "documentation" and "feedback" is precisely the art work. The project would not have gathered so much attention without people's participation. The archive has its own inertia in the sense that products created through

or during one engagement platform, are used to spark future conversations and dialogue, besides being physically amplified and realized in the form of print and reproductions, the conversations also get dispersed geographically across communities and cities.

I am currently working on a book, entitled, ***When Did You Forget You Were An Immigrant?***, detailing the work, public engagement methodology, and posters of the Sanctuary City Project. The inspiration for the book came from the state of undocumented immigrants since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through my research, I have seen undocumented immigrants become “essential workers,” working in jobs such as in meat-packing plants, agriculture, and construction that put them at high risk for contracting COVID-19. These undocumented workers have seen no support from the federal government during the pandemic, including no access to the direct monetary payments that most of the U.S. residents received from the stimulus packages passed by congress. In the Bay Area, we have seen these concerns and struggles, while simultaneously realizing that this is a time to survive and support our families affected by the crisis.

In fact, the federal government has used this time during the pandemic, to increase the Mexican border wall construction and engage in further deportation and immigration restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic has given our government the opportunity to increase fear, mistrust, and instability towards our undocumented immigrant community. Pedagogically, the content of ***When Did You Forget You Were An Immigrant?*** will accompany various workshops which will focus on the steps needed for participants to create their own poster. The book will act as inspiration for people to dive into contemporary issues surrounding immigration in this country. By linking the book, my research on immigration issues, and our people’s own experiences, I will create a new series of posters that will then become part of the next exhibits at the Palo Alto Art Center, and MCLA Berkshire Resource Cultural Center in 2021, as well as becoming a part of the Sanctuary City Project archive. These new posters will also have life outside in our communities around the Bay Area and beyond, allowing for maximum visibility for the participants messages.

America is entering a new era of divisiveness as evidenced by the imposition of a new travel ban, the radical decrease in refugees, the separation of children from their parents, and even talk of limiting citizenship for legal immigrants. Yes, it is often said that America is a country of immigrants, a place where the American Dream is attainable for all. This collective amnesia and cognitive dissonance spur this project. Our audience is the immigrant community - those whose families immigrated here days, months, years, or generations ago.

Author’s Note: The Sanctuary City Print Shop was first installed at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 2017; Institute of Contemporary Art San Jose, 2018; Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 2018; Minnesota Street Project, 2018; For Freedoms Billboard Project, 2018; San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art, 2018; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2018; Kala Art Institute, 2018; UNTITLED Art Fair, San Francisco 2018;

Vachon Gallery Seattle University, 2019; The Jewish Community Center, 2019. And it has been invited to the Blue Star Contemporary, TX, 2020; the Berkeley Art Center, CA, 2020; the Palo Art Center, 2021; and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts Berkshire Cultural Resource Center, MA, 2021. The Sanctuary Mobile Print Cart has been invited to print in public events between 2017-19 at (De) Appropriation Wall, San Francisco; For-Site Foundation, Fort Mason, Cabrillo College, Santa Cruz; Oakland Museum of California; University of San Francisco; Balboa High School; Mission High School; Montalvo Art Center, Los Gatos; Kala Art Institute, Berkeley; SFMOMA; La Scuola International School, San Francisco; Palo Alto Art Center; La Cocina Annual 2017 San Francisco Street Food Festival; Minnesota Street Project, 2018; Futures Without Violence, 2018; Saint Mary's College of California Museum of Art, 2019.