

Interview with Maribel Martinez by Alexandra Garcia on July 6, 2022 on Zoom. Transcription by Rev.com, proofread by Alexandra Garcia for the Mosaic Atlas Project in collaboration between SJSU, Mosaic America, and Martin Luther King Jr. Library Scholarworks.

Bio:

Interview with Maribel Martinez, Program Manager/Community Artist, conducted as part of the Mosaic Atlas project. Maribel identifies as Mexican American Chicano community being part of the LGBTQ community and being highly connected to indigenous heritage (cultural identity) Topics discussed include Mexican American Chicano community, LGBTQ community, cultural stories. As part of the Mosaic Atlas project, SJSU students and faculty from the Anthropology and Geography Departments interviewed people who support and produce art throughout the Bay Area.

Alexandra Garcia (00:00:03):

Okay, so what is your full name and your job?

Maribel Martinez (00:00:09):

My name is Maribel Martinez and I work as a Program Manager at the County of Santa Clara for the Division of Equity and Social Justice. And I am also a community artist.

Alexandra Garcia (00:00:25):

Great, thank you. And what cultures do you identify with?

Maribel Martinez (00:00:30):

The cultures that I identify with are being a part of the Mexican American Chicano community being part of the LGBTQ community and being highly connected to my indigenous heritage.

Alexandra Garcia (00:00:50):

All right. Thank you. And shifting gears to kind of like your artist's role. Can you tell me a, a little bit more about your art and creative endeavors? Yeah.

Maribel Martinez (00:01:05):

The beginning of my creative endeavors really begin with my grandparents and my parents. My grandfather was taught in the tradition of our, of the Pastorela movement and the Pastorela practice. And so my grandmother was also musician, uh played a mean harmonica. My mom is a singer songwriter, and so I grew up with lots of art activity theater, music oratory in my home. And so as I developed as an artist, I infused elements of writing or performance of storytelling into all the different mediums that I use.

Alexandra Garcia (00:01:54):

And can you tell me a time where you used, you know, kind of your background growing up in your artistic creations?

Maribel Martinez (00:02:04):

One example of using my cultural background is the creation of the Quinceanera project in the Latino, Mexican community. Um it's very common for young girls at the age of 15 to have Quinceanera, which is the kind of coming of age celebration that introduces you to your community. And so I took this concept

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of of the Quinceanera and added a queer element to it. And in the tradition of being introduced to your community, being embraced by your community and sharing your story we created the Queerceanera project that really brought forward diverse storytelling of folks from the Latino, LGBTQ community.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:02:55](#)):

Great, thank you. And so what motivates you to create your artistic endeavors?

Maribel Martinez ([00:03:04](#)):

There are a lot of things that motivate me to create my artistic endeavor. One part of that is to really bring to light stories that connect with people. I think oftentimes being a person of color being a queer person of color there are, there are incidences that happened or incidences that have happened to me where I have felt very alone. And it's been in the sharing of those instances that we, that I actually learned that I wasn't alone, that this is a shared experience and that through the sharing of that there was also connection and healing. And so that's one of the big motivating factors. I think the other is to bring visibility to our stories when we think about the landscape of media or you know, the publishing industry theater in general, you know, it's been dominated by certain certain stories. And so for us to be able to better inform audiences in general, we need to be able to create content that speaks to diverse experiences. And so when I create content, I try to share as authentically I, as I can about my own experience, that I understand it to be dynamic and complex in this place. And by that specificity, it also adds a certain level of universality of the human experience.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:04:43](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And so what aspect of your cultures or culture that you advocate for influence you the most?

Maribel Martinez ([00:04:54](#)):

I think it's the combination of all those influences or all those combination of all of my identities that influence my art. Really focusing on intersectionality really focusing on the complexity of our lived experience. So in my pieces it is quite often pieces that include either bilingual pieces or that infuse Spanglish that address my identities as a queer person, queer person of color as a fem presenting person as a gender expansive person as a person of a child of immigrants of first generation college students and as a professional person of color in an industry like local government or like community activism that has the ability to reach a wide audience.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:05:57](#)):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Thank you. And how would you describe your role as a cultural advocate? Can you tell me a little bit more about your role?

Maribel Martinez ([00:06:10](#)):

Yeah, my role as an, as a cultural advocate is really about bridging communities. It's about raising visibility and creating space for my story and other stories like mine and different from mine. And so I have both created projects that allow people to showcase their own talent and also in creating my own original works. I enter the conversation of larger works. The latest example is a play that I wrote called becoming Mar that is a, a theater for young audiences noticing that there was a lot of the story of, of me

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as a young child of things that I wanted to express wanted to find the community of affirmation about being gender expansive. And so I wanted to share that story on stage mm-hmm <affirmative> while also being a creative that's creating stories for young audiences around gender expression around queerness and around you know, being Chicana. And there aren't lots, there aren't a lot of pieces that infuse all of those identities and are crafted for young audiences.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:07:47](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And how would you describe your role as an artist, producing artistic creations?

Maribel Martinez ([00:07:57](#)):

Yeah, my role as an artist you know, really resonates with the frameworks of Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga that it's in the production, it's in the creativity, it's in the unearthing of our own stories that we provide healing for ourselves and for our communities. And so as an artist the more authentic my voice is, the more, I am honest about my own story. I create space for others to be authentic and honest about theirs.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:08:33](#)):

Great, thank you. And then, are there any roadblocks you faced as an artist?

Maribel Martinez ([00:08:40](#)):

There are lots of roadblocks that you face as an artist. I think the biggest one for me is to accept the title and the role of artist mm-hmm <affirmative>. Because I have, you know, a, a, a career path in public policy and education, I often saw those two sides of myself, very disconnected mm-hmm <affirmative> this is my nine to five, and this is my working career, and this is my creative side, and this is what I do as a hobby or as a as a pastime, my creative energy. And over the time, what I've seen is they both feed into the creative process and the creative process exists in both of these spaces. And so that's been, the biggest hurdle for me is to be able to where the title of artists and, and give it my own meaning and my own representation and feel like I am doing justice to that title by creating new works. I think the other challenge or barrier is that as a, you know, queer person of color, our stories aren't as visible. And there is perhaps a point in my life where I felt like, you know, my story then must not be important. And it was that struggle to find my voice find the courage to share it and really say, you know, my voice is important. There is a place for this story, and there's actually an urgency for not just me, but for everyone to have an outlet and a space to share theirs.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:10:26](#)):

Great. Thank you. And how would you describe your responsibilities as a cultural advocate?

Maribel Martinez ([00:10:35](#)):

My responsibilities as a cultural advocate is to be radically honest about the complexities. I think that we are in a very interesting place in our world where we're confronted by our contradictions mm-hmm <affirmative> both individually, but as institutions where we can say, you know, we live in the United States and it's a place of freedom. And yet every day we have examples of those freedoms being taken away of those freedoms being infringed. And so my role as an artist is to highlight those contradictions,

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bring those narratives and present as an opportunity for conversation for deeper learning and reflection about ourselves.

Alexandra Garcia (00:11:28):

Okay, great. Thank you. And could you give me an example of how a specific work spoke to your cultural identity that you advocate for? Is that, yeah.

Maribel Martinez (00:11:46):

Trying to think of one example there's a lot, cause there's lots of examples cuz that that's what my work center is on, is the ability to take culture and, or take cultural elements and and share them back to the community. So one example is the work that I did with Somos Mayfair mm-hmm <affirmative> where we would do a yearly Pastuerella, which is the a nativity story. And we we infused it with contemporary narratives around navigating systems or a pilgrimage and you know, on a particular year it might be infusing narratives around voters rights or healthy eating. And so we use cultural stories as a vehicle to then bring contemporary topics. And in that, and then those productions, I was a, a I was an actor portraying certain characters. You know, I've been a long time and see for the multicultural artist Guild.

Maribel Martinez (00:12:55):

Ofrenda Dia De Los Muertos, I, so there help bridge and, and present the story in the importance of Dia De Los Muertos, in honoring our indigenous roots that are, that have merged with other cultures to honor the dead and to celebrate life. And so my work is really about being visible in the community as a proud Chicana, Chicana person. And, and acknowledging that, that story that experience is very universal in some ways of struggle and very specific in those ways that we are seen in the world and experience the world around us.

Alexandra Garcia (00:13:49):

Great. Thank you. And how does your work contribute to educating, sharing and preserving cultural knowledge?

Maribel Martinez (00:14:01):

Hold on one second. Sorry, can you repeat the question?

Alexandra Garcia (00:14:26):

Yeah. so how does your work contribute to educating, sharing and preserving cultural knowledge?

Maribel Martinez (00:14:44):

My work contributes to sharing and representing cultural knowledge by infusing different teachings into the work. So in the example of this last theatrical piece I really wanted to infuse indigenous knowledge and indigenous and epistemologies into kind of our everyday actions. And so in that piece, the character is introduced to her ancestors in the stream world and her ancestors give her these tools to how to navigate struggles and stress in the world, in the real world.

Alexandra Garcia (00:15:32):

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Mm-Hmm <affirmative> great. Thank you. And let's see, so we'll go to part two. So part two is kind of place and community mm-hmm <affirmative>. Uis there a specific place that you go to, to practice your art?

Maribel Martinez ([00:15:48](#)):

For a long time, I didn't feel comfortable practicing my artistic pieces in San Jose. So I spent a lot of time in San Francisco and in Berkeley and did a lot of that work there. I think over the last couple of years, I've been a bit more comfortable coming back and sharing it locally. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> and really looking at how we can expand our arts collective, our arts community here in the south bay.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:16:28](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And there, are there specific places that you would go in San Francisco or Berkeley to go, can you tell me those.

Maribel Martinez ([00:16:37](#)):

Most mm-hmm <affirmative> yeah, most of the spaces that I was in when I was in San Francisco and the east bay were Latino focused arts organizations, like Galleria de La Raz like Latina Cultural Center in Berkeley mission cultural center and then different popups from organizations or small collectives that people would would reproduce networks of artists and was also really connected with people who were affiliated or trained by Teatro Campesino mm-hmm <affirmative> and that's kind of in San that's in San Juan Bautista. And then as I kind of returned and began to refocus the arts in this area, you know, I became connected with school of arts and culture, Mexican heritage Plaza MACLA, Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana with Molly, the multicultural artists leadership Institute and folks that were, you know, really reinfusing that energy here in the south bay.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:17:53](#)):

And when did you start kind of moving towards kind of down the south bay to San Jose?

Maribel Martinez ([00:18:00](#)):

Yeah, it was in well, the first kind of production of the Quinceanera project was, I wanna say in 2013 we received a grant from horizons foundation and that's an LGBTQ focused foundation that gives kind of small organizational grants. So we had that. And then from there have continued to do either writing pieces or through through Molly and through MACLA and then even collaborating with more Mas Mari which is what I see like a growing and rising younger generation of folks doing culturally based or culturally relevant art.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:18:56](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. So in your art what influence does your culture have on what you do? And then can you tell me a specific time your culture shaped the way you do your art? Like any traditions, symbols, celebrations?

Maribel Martinez ([00:19:13](#)):

Yeah. Culture is central to the art that I do. There is no way of removing culture, you know, it's deeply embedded in the work that I do. It's often what spurs, what I do. You know, the, the earlier art pieces or

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the earlier theater pieces were deeply influenced by Chicana theater and the use of Actos in that, in that production. I often infuse songs folk songs, traditional songs deeply cultural songs songs from, you know, the golden era of, of Mexico. I make references to other artistic forms in the work that I do from from Polaris and Corridos to the depiction of of experiences of of Latinos in the United States the immigrant experience or the witnessing of the immigrant experience as a child of immigrants. And so all of those elements are deeply interwoven in the way in which we celebrate, you know, key events mm-hmm <affirmative> that sometimes are inside of the church sometimes are affiliated with a religious ceremony. But in the end have more of a cultural milestone or of a cultural symbolism, like like Quinceaneras like Bautizos like Noche Bueno, which is our Christmas Eve. And so all of those kind of cultural cues find their way and our central to the work that I do.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:21:29](#)):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Okay, great. Thank you. And can you tell me a little bit about the work you've done with Somos Mayfair?

Maribel Martinez ([00:21:37](#)):

Yeah, so the work I did with Somos Mayfair was almost a decade back and it was the use of forum theater to bring out different perspectives on topics. The way that theater can be used as a starting point for a conversation and bridge discussion. And the biggest piece was doing that the, the annual Pastuerella in which I worked with community leaders to portray a story that you know, used the nativity story as a vehicle, but infused current events into that retelling.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:22:28](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And who is your biggest artistic influences? Anyone you look up to any.

Maribel Martinez ([00:22:39](#)):

There are so many <laugh> you know, I think of course my earlier my earliest teachers are the ones that have the most influence. And so those would be my grandparents and my parents in the way that they did storytelling. And I often think about, you know some of the times when I write, you know, is this language or these topics that, that would be able, that I would be able to share with like my grandmother or somebody of that generation, or even the conversations that I have with my mother around queerness, where language in Spanish hasn't been as accessible. And so really wanting to make bridges there. I think there's a lot of, you know, literary influences that I have from folks like Gloria Anzaldua like Cherrie Moraga that really like that really bring to me inspiration and deep inquiry about who I am, how I show up in the world, the places that I navigate and to say it so honestly, and at the same time poetically in the way that they express themselves you know, I think Cherrie is one of those people that has a literary, you know, content of work, but also has a has a practice of, of, you know, a storytelling on, on the stage.

Maribel Martinez ([00:24:17](#)):

And so her works like the new fire have really influenced me in the way that we infuse ceremonia and indigenous teachings into ways to describe the world around us. I think of the work of Alina Anthony in really talking about our queerness and our storytelling I think about the, the solo works of like John Leguizamo that really talks about like, how do we tell history, how do we hold complexity and sometimes problematic characters in the same space. And there's a lot of contemporary artists that I'm

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just, you know, really excited to see the way that they push narratives, lots of bay area, amazing talent. Obviously the work of Luis Valdez in that, in that narrative and the folks that have been trained by him specifically his theater of the sphere you know, really looking at the way in which arts can be central to the way that communities and cities build.

Maribel Martinez ([00:25:33](#)):

And so, I mean, I could go on and on because <laugh>, I really feel like I'm influenced by so many different people. I, I, this last piece I was really moved and inspired by the work of Maya Christina Gonzalez, which is a, she's a, an illustrator and a children's book author. And she really, you know, gave an urgent call to folks of color queer folks of color to create and bring forward our stories. And she talks about, you know, books being a radical act and reading, being an, a radical act in the production of content, being a radical art and an act because so much of our stories if we don't tell them someone else will and they'll get it wrong and they often do mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so when you look at, you know, what's being created, you know, very little of the content is about folks of color or about queer folks of color. And unfortunately those that do exist, some of them are not written from a lived experience perspective. And so it's that much more important for for us to tell our stories and to tell them right.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:26:59](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. And what things do you do to share this cultural knowledge with your community?

Maribel Martinez ([00:27:11](#)):

I've been doing more of that now. I think the pandemic in some ways has presented opportunities to do things virtually give access. Whereas before, you know, it required people traveling or being in a particular place mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I've been doing some, either talks or performances via zoom or virtual platform super honor to have had the last play be produced by Teatro Vision. And that was an amazing experience to work with that organization that took my idea to a finalized script and then did the casting and, and the full production of that work. And so you know, that presented a big opportunity to share the story with lots of audiences with a diverse audience in person, and then through a virtual online streaming was super grateful for create TV to then take that online content and then stream it on their platforms for two months and giving even more access to people in their homes to watch this story.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:28:34](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And how do other cultures, maybe not the ones that you identify with, but influence your work if they do?

Maribel Martinez ([00:28:45](#)):

Yeah, I definitely they do you know, I think from the work and the network that I'm involved with with the with Molly, with multicultural artists leadership Institute, I get to hear of amazing projects that the people are from mosaic that does a lot of like multicultural and bridging work. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> you know, we've had organizations that do African drumming and have their storytelling tradition. Also from, from literature, you know around different experiences. I feel super fortunate to be in San Jose area to be in the bay area because we have lots of cultural diversity. And so I hear, you know, we have a strong representation artistically from, you know, the Vietnamese community from the Latino

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community, from black and African ancestry community. And so I get to learn from the way that they share stories from the themes that are the same and different. And so that all, you know, influences the way I think, and how I react to certain things and it's that, that reaction, but then allows me to, to create and inform my work.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:30:22](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And what do you want the next generation of people to take away from your art, your work?

Maribel Martinez ([00:30:33](#)):

I think right now, the work that I'm doing both in my writing with that's poetry or fiction or great non-fiction, and the works that I'm doing for the stage is a deep remembering of our sacredness. And so I would want current and future generations to remember that they are loved that they are powerful and that they're valued and that there is a place for us here mm-hmm <affirmative> and, and at times where it seems challenging to be, and to feel valued here. It's exactly the moments that we need to, you know deep reach deeply into our roots and create those spaces for ourselves and for the community around us.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:31:24](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. And if people were to see your work on the interactive cultural Atlas what would you like them to know about it?

Maribel Martinez ([00:31:38](#)):

That's a great question. I would like them to know that the attempt, whether it's poetic or painful or playful is really an attempt of capturing the complexity of the human experience. And and for them to feel, in some way, either connected to the work or have some sort of reaction to the work. If you tell that if you tell a story, well, if you tell it powerfully that there will be some sort of, emotive or visceral reaction to that, because at the end, you know, it's really about connecting to each other human to human.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:32:30](#)):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Okay, great. And so now I think we're winding down the questions. So now that you've answered the questions and have a better sense of like the interview is there anyone else you think that we should talk to?

Maribel Martinez ([00:32:47](#)):

I don't know if you've already talked to, but definitely talking to the folks from Teatro Vision Alica Maria Alvarado, Rodrigo Garcia and Rodrigo for two elements. He's, he's the artistic director, Teatro Vision, but then he's also the co-founder of Teatro Alebrijes, which is an LGBTQ focused theater. Hugo Bado is an amazing playwright and he's taken a, the tradition of the Pastuerella but infuses a queer narrative to it, and it's absolutely hilarious. Uand it's in Spanish, and it's been amazing to see the production over the last 10 years, every, every year he writes a new piece <laugh>, which is like amazing. Uand so this last piece, you know, it was this, woman, who is having like this COVID induced dream fantasy land of a Telenovela, and, and folks are dressed in drag and they have these elaborate,



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you know, costuming and, and so I think that there's like really interesting things that are happening, all over the bay area, really interesting things happening here in San Jose in ways that, are really innovative, that, you know, like, you know, the example of this Pastuerella, where you have generations in the same room, laughing at the same joke, mm-hmm <affirmative> for different reasons.

Maribel Martinez ([00:34:36](#)):

You have, you know, little kids at the front laughing because of the physical comedy aspects of it. Folks maybe in their twenties, thirties, and forties, that like, get that humor of like now and novelas and technology, and then like the older generation and laughing because it is or remembering of, you know perhaps traditional pieces that they connect to. So I think that, like, those are folks that I think of that are doing really fun things. The, you know, and that, that actually one of the first seeds for that theater company was a performance at the first Corceana that then people kind of sprouted out and did like full productions of things. Same for the a Grupo Folclorico Colibri that does LGBT Folclorico. And so they're retelling this very traditional, these very traditional stories through dance, but through a queer lens. And the first time they showcased same sex couples doing traditional Mexican folk dance was at a Quinceanera presentation. So, so I think like stories like that are super awesome. I'm sure you've talked to Rosana Alvarez or maybe Omar who are the founders of east side magazine. That's definitely presenting a vehicle for people to tell stories, to share poetry and photography and art. It's a free publication focusing on stories of the east side

Alexandra Garcia ([00:36:38](#)):

In San Jose?

Maribel Martinez ([00:36:39](#)):

Mm-Hmm

Alexandra Garcia ([00:36:39](#)):

<Affirmative>. Oh, I did not know that. Yeah.

Maribel Martinez ([00:36:42](#)):

Oh, they're doing super amazing things. Demo Carter is an MC that's been doing a lot of the work. And I think about even folks from before like in the eighties and nineties, they're still around like Ico who's one of the kind of original B girls in the area did, did break dancing. She's still in San Jose still in, still connected to hip hop community. So I think when we explore the history of San Jose, I think that there, there often elements about it's artistic history. It's artistic roots that mm-hmm <affirmative> are visible only to the people who have been part of the arts community. Yeah. And so I hope that with this project, you can shed light on like the richness and of, of the tradition and practice here in San Jose that extend many, many, many generations. And at the same time are producing, you know, really innovative dynamic works right now. And it's, they find out so inspiring, right. That while our world seems like it's burning down sometimes the role of artists is to create and give hope and sometimes create space for, to, to grieve and to feel. And so that's definitely happening in the area.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:38:18](#)):

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And that's a great responsibility too. Yeah, so that's what we hope to do with the map. And I'm like from San Jose, I'm from the east side of San Jose. And like now, knowing like all these things and talking to you and talking from different people, especially like in Mayfair, like, I think it's true. You said that you don't really know about it unless like someone brings it forth to you, which is unfortunate because again, like I've been here like all my life, and I did not know about all these different organizations. And I also being like first generation myself. Like I never really had like a place where I can go and learn about like my culture. Like I, I, so, like, those are the type of things where it's like, I, I don't feel as connected to my culture, but now I do now learning about these different organizations that are making an effort to be like, you can come here and you can express yourself, or we can teach you about, you know, the culture. So I think like learning about this now, and hopefully like with the interactive map, we're able to give other people, like, hope that, you know, you can find places, you can find organizations like these that give you a chance, you know, to express yourself and the chance to learn.

Maribel Martinez ([00:39:28](#)):

So that's the hope, a huge champion of that work. I don't think any of these spaces would've been possible without the work that Tamara Alvarado has done. She was one of the, the, she was the first executive director for the school of arts and culture. And so they took this, they took the Mexican heritage Plaza. That's owned by the city of San Jose. And at that time was being heavily underutilized, very inaccessible, almost becoming irrelevant to the community, spearhead and effort with the city, with arts organizations to revitalize the use of that space. And it's amazing now to see on any given day, right, there might be classes taking place or multiple ages, whether that's Folclorico or guitar or mariachi or theater. There are people who are using the spaces for weddings, quinceaneras um and for, and it's, I mean, it's also accessible to emerging artists or established artists to present new works, whether that's in the main theater, in the large Plaza in the in one of the galleries one of my most favorite events, and I hope you get to talk to folks from this is Sonido Clash used to do a, a, a festival labor day weekend.

Maribel Martinez ([00:41:05](#)):

I think they had it running for like a couple of years mm-hmm <affirmative> and why that was so impactful and so distinctive is that we were used to a shared outdoor festival experience in San Jose that focused on you know, R and B hip hop and oldies you know, or mariachi <laugh> as a, as a, as a, as a kind of, you know, main features. And what Sonido clash did with their, with their festival is that they created a one day festival that spoke to my emo alternative Chicana, like music lover scene, and brought, you know, electronic cumbia, alternative punk into the spaces that, you know didn't exist. Like those spaces didn't exist and to see, you know, vendors and artists and musicians in those spaces to be like, oh my gosh, we do have a community here. There is a scene for that here. And I don't have to travel, you know, to LA or anywhere else to, to find it. And so hopefully you talk to those folks too.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:42:29](#)):

Okay, great. Thank you. So do you, is there anyone else that you think that we should talk to?

Alexandra Garcia ([00:42:44](#)):

You can always email me the information.

Maribel Martinez ([00:42:47](#)):

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There's like, like there's so many cool folks. Yeah.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:42:50](#)):

That's so cool. I did not see, like, those are the things like, I just didn't know. And it's upsetting cuz it's like, I've been here, you know, like for so long.

Maribel Martinez ([00:42:58](#)):

Tell me, tell me Aguilar universal grammar. They did a lot of like production of shows and broad artists. Yeah. Carlos Velasquez he, he and his wife, Alqua. They have they're, they're in the rose garden area, San Jose. And they had to they do their event through art boutique. Art boutique is a cool place. But they have they have once a month, they have a drink and draw. And so really you just like, come hang out, they have coloring pages, you listen to people, spin records. And they have like guests like chulita vinyl club. So they're also super awesome to interview. But you know, and they also that also host a radio show that plays different music. So yeah, there's, you know, like I said, there's like pockets here and there and there's like really cool things happening, but unless you know where to look or who to ask. Yeah. It's sometimes hard to find.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:44:07](#)):

Yeah. So we're hoping with this map, like people have like a one place to just explore on their own. So like this map will be like, oh, specifically for Mayfair. So people are able to look around and find these organizations that they normally wouldn't know about. So hopefully this interactive map is able to kind of just educate the broader audience. So we did one for Japan town and then for my own project, I'm doing one on Muwekma Ohlone tribe. So I'm highlighting specific cultural sites. So one of them is like the mural along the Guadalupe river. I don't know if you've seen it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so I interviewed actually the artists Alfonso Salazar, so that was really cool. So with these interactive cultural maps, we're just hoping to broaden the audience. We're hoping to educate the audience. We're hoping to just broaden the reach of these different organizations, individuals, and artists. So that's the hope so hopefully. So for my last question is there anything that you would like to tell me about your work, your art, your life, that I haven't asked you about that you think that we should know?

Maribel Martinez ([00:45:24](#)):

Hmm. What did I not already tell you? No yeah, you know, I think the more I think about it it's been that that the arts have been a deep central point in my, in my life. It's what I've gone go back to all the time and to process something, to feel deeply about something, whether it's, you know, a, an emotion like sadness or hope or but really it's it's yeah. It's about finding joy in that work. I think sometimes a lot of our work is heavy. It's about tell retelling about painful painful moment mm-hmm <affirmative> and the areas in which I'd like to focus on now is to really, how do we cultivate joy? How do we write for joy? How do we write about joy? Because so much of the narrative for people of color and queer people of color has centered around struggle and survival, mm-hmm <affirmative> to really think of a futurity of hope, futurity of joy and, and, and to even have that infuse into our present.

Maribel Martinez ([00:47:00](#)):

So the ways in which we we find those moments of, of release escape, whether that's, you know, dancing or singing or telling a joke, but ways that we, that we remember are joy in our laughter and, and can center her there. So I think that's kind of the big piece of where I'm going with my work. Mm-Hmm

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<affirmative> and yeah, I think the other piece that I thought one of the, the highlights of this last year you know, has been this last production with, on becoming mad and, you know, to have an organization believe in the work, even before it was finished, all cuz all they had seen was a first draft, like an early draft unfinished draft. And they were like, we wanna produce this, finish it <laugh>. And so it was like, OK, I'll finish it.

Maribel Martinez ([00:47:58](#)):

And they, they helped with some focus groups and, you know, gave notes and then had this beautiful production. Lee Henderson did it, the, all this, the sets that were absolutely breathtaking. And so to walk into this theater that I've known all my life, that's centered in Mayfair, as I tell a story about Mayfair and I look at the stage and what's on the backdrop, is this like digital backdrop. I see the Lick observatory, which for folks on the east side, like that's how we find home or like there's the observatory, that's the east side mm-hmm <affirmative> because it's steep up in the foothills um the east foothills. And to see that be kind of the centering view of the stage in Mayfair, I think was just yeah, a wonderful gift for me.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:48:56](#)):

Oh wow. Is it the Mount Hamilton mm-hmm observatory?

Maribel Martinez ([00:49:00](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:49:00](#)):

Yeah. and how did that feel? I think kind of just like, like the first showing of the play, like how did that feel to you? Like seeing it on stage. Or.

Maribel Martinez ([00:49:15](#)):

Yeah, it's still, it's still surreal. I think the first for so many different reasons, I mean the fact that it was a story that I wrote about this place and for mm-hmm <affirmative> for me to be from here. And then to be told by young people, so it was their youth production. So it was like young people telling the story about young people. And we did our first complete run through you know, we were in the, in the gallery room not even on stage yet the gallery at, at Mexican heritage and the kids finished and then everybody just started crying, like we got through it and we didn't. And and so that was great. And then to see it with costumes and lights and set designs it was just like somebody built this whole world from this idea that I had on a piece of paper.

Maribel Martinez ([00:50:23](#)):

So that, that was great. And I was a little nervous because I was, you know, I'm coming, sharing this story about this gender expansive kiddo and being very forward about queerness being, being very explicit about certain things and infusing a creation story mm-hmm <affirmative> and you know, being very explicit about indigenous teachings in this queer lens. And so I was like, I'm ready for somebody to come and tell me off and tell me, like, why are you taking, you know, mm-hmm, <affirmative> our history because I've been in ceremonial spaces where I've had elders, you know, say homophobic things. Oh. And so I was like, ready to be like somebody gonna say, you know, I'm corrupting anything or I'm

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influencing kids in a wrong way or whatever mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I was ready for that and, and it never came, it never came.

Maribel Martinez ([00:51:46](#)):

And I had, you know elders who were like, thank you for sharing, you know, those indigenous teachings. I had people in their, you know twenties, thirties, and forties and say, this is what my inner child needed. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And then I had kiddos around that same age and I asked them, you know, like, did you like it? What you like about it? And my favorite comment from a kiddo who identifies as gender expansive themselves, was like I liked it. And my best part was basically everything <laugh>. So, so I was like, yay, this is the audience that I wanted to read. <Laugh>. Yeah. and so, you know, if they strung together more than two words, I was like, yes, happy to answer the question, cuz at that age, sometimes they're just like, I don't say anything. So the fact that they were, that they were smiling and they were like two thumbs up.

Maribel Martinez ([00:52:45](#)):

I loved everything was, was great. And so and hadn't, you know, had an elder that I had made an assumption about cuz they came up and, you know had the long, you know male presenting, long hair and a ponytail, like, you know, handled bar mustache. I was like, oh no beard comes. He's gonna tell me that he did wrong. And he was like, it was great. I, you know it was great to remember this place in that way. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> and so I was like, OK, you did right. <Laugh> you did right by them. So,

Alexandra Garcia ([00:53:26](#)):

Oh,

Maribel Martinez ([00:53:26](#)):

That was awesome. That was so cool to tell a story about me, but about us and about here. So

Alexandra Garcia ([00:53:33](#)):

Yeah, I think that's the type of representation that like, I would've wanted to see growing up, but now seeing it, like being able to see it now, I think it's like, like healing, my inner child and healing, like, you know, like the child are like seeing it, especially like since it is from east San Jose and I'm like, I am from east San Jose. Like it was cool. I don't know. It's just cool to see that representation being like happening.

Maribel Martinez ([00:53:58](#)):

If you wanna watch it, let me know. I have the link to the recording.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:54:01](#)):

No, yeah. Ask you. If there was like, do you have a link? So I, cause I've only heard about it. I wasn't able, like I didn't have a chance to like see it, but I know like a lot of the faculty went to go see it. And so I was like, oh, I wanna go see it. But,

Maribel Martinez ([00:54:13](#)):

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I know AJ was there and I was like, Oh AJ came.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:54:18](#)):

Yeah. That's why I was like, yes. Like he told me like I went. And I was like, oh my gosh. Like, that sounds so cool. So I like, I mean, if you have a link, I would love to watch it. So I know

Maribel Martinez ([00:54:29](#)):

I do it's I don't know what I'm coming to, but I'm glad I did <laugh>

Alexandra Garcia ([00:54:34](#)):

Well, I think just the way that you describe it to me is just like, I don't know. It's just like, it's a representation that I've just never seen before. Like, and I don't know, it's just like my, like my parents, like they immigrated here, you know? Like, and, but again, like I just feel like I never really grew up, like in a Mexican, Mexican household, it was kind of just like really Americanized. So I mean, I'm like I speak, I think the only like really thing, like, I mean, I speak Spanish. Like I, like that's pretty much the only thing. Like, so like things like this, like I've never really been exposed to them. So I think being able to like slowly, like learn about it or like being exposed to it, I think is like what I needed which I didn't know I needed.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:55:22](#)):

And I kind of just gave me like, like an identity, like wa call cuz like I don't personally, like, I don't know. I just like, people are like, do, are you Mexican? Like they look at me and they're like, are you Mexican? I'm like, no, I'm Mexican. Like I'm full, you know, like my parents are from Mexico. So I like growing up. I just always felt like, I don't know, like identity crisis. So I think seeing like that type of representation, like, and especially like learning about like, you know, you and like different like artists that are still, you know, fighting for that representation for like the younger generation I think is exactly like what I like needed and I like still need, so it's on like, and the work that you're doing is amazing. Like if any, like I look up to you, <laugh> like with like everything. So thank you so much for like talking to me, like I really appreciate it.

Maribel Martinez ([00:56:13](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And, and I mean, you might think that like you grew up very white, but I think if you begin to pull some of those later, you're like, oh, actually that is very Mexican. Like I felt like I didn't, like, I felt like my parents were so Mexican that they, in some ways didn't connect to our indigenous teachings, but then when I began to learn more about indigenous teachings and I was like, oh my mom and my grandma always had like a go-to tea. And so they were, you know, like, oh, okay. Like the different <inaudible> and the, you know, and the teas and like, you know the way in which like we talk about dreams and like jot down and explore like that is a teaching. And so I think maybe there's some stuff in your own experience that you're like, oh, well actually that is a very Mexican thing of us or like a tradition or like a music or history, or maybe it's a great opportunity to ask your parents about, you know, decisions.

Maribel Martinez ([00:57:18](#)):

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I know a lot of friends that, you know, their parents made decisions of like wanting to not carry on certain things because they wanted an easier transition for the kids and they didn't want them to feel othered. And so I think even those opportunities to engage in dialogue with their parents around decisions that they made and maybe how they'd like to reengage in traditions is super powerful. So I think through that conversation, like now my mom and I do on the, our Altar de Muertos that we, I didn't grow up making. But now as adults, you know, we're like, oh yeah, we wanna bring back the tradition. We wanna mm-hmm <affirmative> remember. And so I think part of the role as artists and especially community artists that are multidisciplinary, we don't have one particular discipline is how do we use all the tools of cultural art forms for us to do this powerful remembering of who we are, who we've been and who we wanna be in the future as community.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:58:33](#)):

Yeah. I think, I think with my family, cuz my parents own a Lonchera, so they've been doing that for like years, I think. Like

Maribel Martinez ([00:58:41](#)):

How much more Mexican can you get?

Alexandra Garcia ([00:58:44](#)):

I know, I know now I'm like, I think like as a family we really connect with like food. I think like that's like the main thing that we

Maribel Martinez ([00:58:52](#)):

Okay. What kind of lunch do you guys have? What do you have on your menu?

Alexandra Garcia ([00:58:55](#)):

Oh, that's I think that's a question for my mom. Like my, I don't know, like, I don't know. My mom makes like a Birria like linguathat, all this other stuff.

Maribel Martinez ([00:59:10](#)):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative> if you want a side project or an amazing after graduation project, what are all the stories that get shared at Lonchera?

Alexandra Garcia ([00:59:21](#)):

Oh my gosh. I, you know, I've witnessed firsthand cause like I've gone to my par like my like moms, like, and dads were like loncheras like cuz I used to help 'em out and like, I don't know. I mean I GU yeah. So like, I don't know, just hearing people's like, like how like they work or like, you know, their stories or like where they come from. Cuz I'm just like, I'm a curious person. So like I'll ask everyone I'm like, where are you from? And like, I think like just like speaking.

Maribel Martinez ([00:59:46](#)):

Can I go observe your parents?

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Alexandra Garcia ([00:59:48](#)):

Go ahead.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:59:49](#)):

That would be a fascinating stage play of like all centered around the lonchera.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:59:55](#)):

Oh my gosh. My dad would love that. Yeah.

Maribel Martinez ([00:59:57](#)):

That would be so cool.

Alexandra Garcia ([00:59:59](#)):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. Oh my God. My dad will love that. My God. I'm gonna throw my, if you're really interested.

Maribel Martinez ([01:00:05](#)):

Yeah. I am.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:00:06](#)):

Let me throw I'm like my dad will tell you stories cuz it's like loncheras like I, we, I think me and my siblings, like we tr that's my phone number. We try to help them as much as we can, but it's just hard work, you know? Like, like yeah. Having make sure

Maribel Martinez ([01:00:24](#)):

We wanted to, they were like, we don't want you to do this. You should.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:00:27](#)):

Yeah. Let's, that's exactly how it was. Cuz like they were like, we don't want you to like work in the like, like this, you know, cuz it's, it's hard work, you know, it's very like grueling work and they're like, the best that we can do is give you an education and kind of like a pathway to college, you know? Like, so like do it as much as you can. And I think like everything that I do I do for my parents, like, cuz like they're the ones that are kind of like, you know, put me like I like at the end of the day, I just wanna make them proud. So like that's the thing.

Maribel Martinez ([01:00:59](#)):

They already are. They already, you were born. They already are.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:01:03](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah. So like everything I do, like I tell every like everything I do, like at the end of the day is just to make my parents proud. Like that's, that's like my goal. So I'm but like, yeah, like, and that's the thing is like I've seen them work. Like when I was like little, like everything, like it was just work, you know? So like, but now like we're kind of like reconnecting like as a family, I think now it's like kind of



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slowed down. So I think like, but like, yeah, at the end of the day, like, everything I do is for my parents cuz they gave me like opportunity to like do all this stuff. But yeah, I think like seeing them like work in lonchera and like it's just hard work, you know? It's just like, but in, but seeing them like still doing it, it's just like, I don't know.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:01:45](#)):

It's I don't know. It's just like, it's the, it's hard to see, but it's like, it gives me like, like let me work harder. And I think like that's all like our siblings, like I, my brother does it though. My brother does work in the lonchera. My sister, Like she, she like went and she was like, I rather work in an office. Like that was like her first thing. Like I wanna work in an office with AC and like me, like, I'm just like, I don't know. Like I, I found my own pathway and I'm like, hopefully still finding it, but yeah. But if you are interested, I think my dad would be like, like super like interested in that. So yeah. Just let me know.

Maribel Martinez ([01:02:24](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That'd be, that'd be amazing. I don't know if you watched there's an episode. I think it's the first episode of street food USA. It's on Netflix right now. Thanks.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:02:36](#)):

I've we've watched it. I know. There's they used to do, there was like an episode of like Japan. I think I watched that one.

Maribel Martinez ([01:02:42](#)):

Oh yeah. There's an, there's a USA one. And like one of the, one of the stories they feature for LA is is a, is a lonchera, but they do carnitas and I thought like that story was like so beautifully told. And it reminds me of a little bit of what you're saying about, about your family. And I think that I when we do anthropology, when we do the work, right we think about sometimes the work based on the examples that we read. Right. And so we're like, okay, anthropology, you know, or you know, a business. And it's like in these tech companies or in these, but it's like, there's actually this other economy in these other stories, you know, that I think like Loncheras street vendors that is often untold. And, and I think that that's a, that's a fascinating place that we actually need lots of work. And so maybe my invitation to you as you continue to do your own work is like, how can you, how can you bring light to the stories that you have touched you so deeply, but other people may not have been exposed to and like being a kid from parents who own a lonchera. I think that's like by far the most Mexican thing I've <laugh> so when you say that you're not, I'm like I gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna challenge that.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:04:19](#)):

That's I never like saw it like that, but now I'm saying that like, maybe that is like the most Mexican thing. <Laugh> probably in my time.

Maribel Martinez ([01:04:26](#)):

Like the hustle to be like, I I'm gonna come here and I'm gonna create my own work. Yeah. By giving people the most sacred thing in our community, which is food.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:04:42](#)):

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Yeah.

Maribel Martinez ([01:04:43](#)):

In like this like comfort way you're taking like birria, lengua to other people who are also in the hustle. Yeah. For like multiple jobs. And like for the 30 minutes or 15 minutes that they have a break, they get to connect to community, to culture, to comfort through this cycle, through this burrito, through this, like <laugh>

Alexandra Garcia ([01:05:14](#)):

Yeah. Like firsthand, like witnessing it, cuz like they do like sites. So like construction <laugh> so like construction, like workers like have like 30 minutes and they need to be in and out. So like being like on the, like it gives me anxiety. So like I props to my mom and dad for being able to do it. Cuz like that 30 minute, like lunch rush, like it gets so hot in there and it's like experiencing it firsthand. Like my mom, like trying to get all the orders done, you know, before like those 30 minutes are up and it's

Maribel Martinez ([01:05:43](#)):

In a space this big.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:05:44](#)):

I know it's like so tiny. I'm like, I need to get out of here, but I don't know how my mom does it. I don't know how she's done it for so many years, but she is, she's done it. She's still there. But like witnessing it firsthand, I think like food. Yeah. It's just has such a connection with like every single person. So,

Maribel Martinez ([01:05:59](#)):

And I'm sure they have their regulars.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:06:02](#)):

Yeah. They do.

Maribel Martinez ([01:06:02](#)):

Check in with and yeah. And then, you know, learning about people. I think even now, like after, after COVID learning about people that used to be their regulars that aren't around anymore. Cuz construction sites were, you know, hotspots and yeah. All these essential workers were the most impacted. So like, oh yeah. I wanna talk to your dad. I wanna talk to <laugh> I wanna do something.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:06:28](#)):

They'll be no, like if you're really like yeah. My parents would be so down. I know my, my dad, just, my dad just loves to talk. So like any person, like if, yeah, if you ever want to just, just send me a text.

Maribel Martinez ([01:06:42](#)):

He made you a very good anthropologist cuz if he likes to talk then where you're good at listening.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:06:47](#)):

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Oh <laugh> Yeah. So I know when I like first start I'm like, dad, I'm gonna be like an anthropologist. And I think like, they're like, what if it makes you money?

Maribel Martinez ([01:06:55](#)):

What is that?

Alexandra Garcia ([01:06:56](#)):

Yeah. What is that? And like does it make you money? I was like, I can find a way <laugh> but I'm like, I, I think like now, like just like talking to them about like what I do, who I talk to. I think they're now like open to the idea of like me kind of not doing the traditional, like tech work. I think. So I think now they're like very interested in what I do and they're very interested in like what I'm making or what I'm creating or like, you know, the things that I'm working on. So I think it's like, I feel, I mean it feels, makes me feel better that I have that support, you know, from my parents. Definitely.

Maribel Martinez ([01:07:31](#)):

Yeah.

Alexandra Garcia ([01:07:32](#)):

But yeah, so I won't take up too much more of your time. But again, I appreciate it.