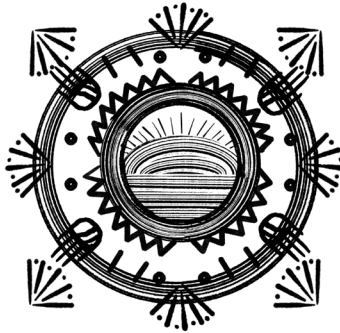


## Rituals Of Resilience



A King Artist Residency project by Latinx mixed media artist Rayos Magos and commissioned by the Palo Alto Public Art Program

### **Overall Project Goals**

I wanted to focus on the Latinx and BIPOC communities living and/or working in Palo Alto. The project goals were as follows:

1. Gather and document Latinx/BIPOC stories
2. Connect with local mental health non-profits
3. Facilitate community workshops
4. Find and interview Latinx/BIPOC community members and service providers
5. Create interactive art to gather more community responses
6. Create a site-specific artwork informed by community input around subjects of equity and belonging in Palo Alto.

### **Community Engagement**

For community engagement, I decided to run community art workshops for youth and adults. Originally, the project was looking to work with multiple non-profit mental health organization, however, offering the workshops in each organization's space required more logistics than previously anticipated.

Therefore, I pivoted to holding the community art workshops at the King Artist Residency studio located at the Cubberley Community Center, which offered plenty of space for community members to feel safe. Each workshop was capped to 10 participants per workshop.

### **Workshops Approach and Outreach**

For each workshop the mental health non-profits were invited to share the flyers with their respective community members.

Workshops were also advertised through Eventbrite, passing out stickers with info about the workshops, social media, and word of mouth.

Initially, I wanted to offer workshops to youth and monolingual Spanish speakers but due to low turnout, I slated the workshops for adults 18 and up. I chose this demographic as this population seemed to be the most enthusiastic population that was showing up to the workshops.

## **Timeline of Workshops**

Since February, I ran a series of 4 different types of workshops that included collage, mask making, printmaking, and watercolor. The goal of the workshops was to offer community members the opportunity to learn some new rituals (coping skills/tools) for managing their stress and finding ways to express emotions as well as serving as a community outlet to talk about the impact of the pandemic via the art modality.

As each workshop progressed one of the emergent themes was that adults were hungry for the arts. At times the workshops would fill up instantly with new and returning participants. Each workshop had the underlying goal to gather themes and stories around ritual and resiliency during the pandemic.

## **Emergent themes**

Oftentimes there would be a warm up exercise to get participants thinking and reflecting about their experiences during the pandemic. These prompts included questions of reflection focused on: obstacles, ritual practices/coping skills, benefits/effects of ritual practices, connection to self and community, and sharing advice.

This exercise was used as a prompt to then facilitate art making during the workshop. Most people were able to settle into the space with instrumental music curated by me. Participants worked mindfully in silence while working with materials and imagery. At the end of the workshop, each participant was encouraged to share about their process by talking about the challenges, takeaways and the overall experience of making art.

Overall, the types of art created and responses can be broken down into four categories: ***Emotions, Objects/Places, Activities, and People/Relationships.***

In regard to ***Emotions***, participants talked about a wide range of emotions ranging from grief, sadness, loss, fear, anger, confusion, helplessness to joy, peace, comfort, compassion, gratitude, care, love, and pride.

Participants also talked about ***Objects/places*** in their artwork such as being in nature, staying at home, going to parks, walking in the neighborhood and various other spaces as well as comfort foods.

Participants made artwork that talked about ***Activities*** such as art making, dancing, singing, reading, writing, hiking, walking dogs, caring for others to grieving for others, having zoom chats and online game nights.

Lastly, participants made artwork that spoke to the importance of their ***People/Relationships.*** Themes of connection, disconnection, separation, closeness, ambiguity were apparent in the relationships that participants had spoken about verbally or through their imagery.

## **LATINX and BIPOC INTERVIEWS**

Another branch of the project was to interview Latinx and BIPOC community members who lived and/or worked in Palo Alto. I found interviewees through workshops, reaching out via email to mental health non-profits, word of mouth, and meeting people in the community. Interviewees totaled 13 adults, 18 years old and older, predominantly female identifying, Latinx, living and/or working in Palo Alto. Interviewees were all essential workers; some were community mental health providers while others worked in a variety of fields.

Interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom. Interviewees were asked a series of 7 questions relating to the pandemic. The questions were as follows:

- 1) What were some challenges/obstacles you experienced during the pandemic?
- 2) What were some of the **rituals, coping skills, or strengths** that helped you overcome those obstacles?
- 3) What were the **benefits/effects** of these **rituals, coping skills, or strengths**?
- 4) How did you find/maintain a **connection to self**?
- 5) How did you find/maintain **connection to others in your community**?
- 6) What **advice would you give others** during this time?
- 7) What's **your experience like as a self-identified Latinx/BIPOC person** living and/or working in Palo Alto?

Interviews mostly ranged from 20-30minutes, with a few interviews that went over time due to interviewees responses and level of engagement. Each interviewee gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded. Most participants asked that their names be anonymous to protect identity and privacy as community mental health service providers and essential workers.

### **EMERGENT THEMES:**

I later listened to each interview and created an aesthetic response or drawing of imagery based on interviewees words, phrases, statements that were key to the overall project. This gave me a visual representation of the overall themes of the project.

As stated above themes were broken into four categories ***Emotions, Objects/Places, Activities, and People/Relationships.***

Example:

Interviewee, Latinx male, mid 20s, essential worker.

**Emotions:** (pride, optimism, self-esteem) “The Pandemic was good to me as a Latinx person. I continued to work and go to school online. I feel it was harder for me prior to the pandemic as a Latinx person.”

**Objects/Places:** (home, tv)

“When there was the first stay at home order, we listened, and we stayed home in our social bubble. We watched Netflix and spent time together.”

**Activities:** (sleeping increased, commuting decreased, family time increased, drinking increased)

“I slept more due to commuting less, spent time with my family and my best friend. I probably coped with drinking more due to having more time on my hands.”

**People/Relationships:** (importance of family, staying safe, respecting others space)

“It was hard when we couldn't visit our family members, especially when they were sick and in the hospital. In my immediate family we found salvation amongst ourselves.”

Overall, interviewees talked about the pros and cons of the pandemic. Some spoke about the lack of resources that their Latinx community members experienced, while others spoke about the positives that the pandemic offered them as essential workers.

Interviewees spoke about **Emotions** that ranged from pride, positive self-esteem, compassion, and gratitude to fear, uncertainty, anger, and frustration amongst other feelings. Interviewees talked about **Objects/Places** such as working from home, working in the office, losing work, and big transitions like moving to a new environment. Interviewees revealed the types of **Activities** that supported them through the pandemic ranging from walking, connecting via Zoom, talking on the phone, sending letters, artmaking, hiking in nature, supporting others, exercising, yoga and meditation, to trying new activities like surfing or taking music lessons.

Lastly, interviewees touched on the importance of **People/Relationships** in their lives. Interviewees spoke of their intentional relationships with scheduled calls, Zoom nights, online game nights, walking with their loved ones, writing letters to family, and teaching family how to use Zoom while socially distancing through a window or doorway. Some interviewees spoke about caring for their clients, customers, and coworkers, while others spoke intimately about their partner and family relationships. Some interviewees broke up with their significant other while some interviewees moved in or got married. Some interviewees bought, brought, and/or delivered food to family or community members. Some interviewees served as cultural bridges between monolingual Spanish and English speakers when there was miscommunication or issues at work. of the focus on valuable and meaningful relationships seemed to hold true for all interviewees.

## **FIVE BOXES PROJECT**

The interactive art piece that I created were 5 boxes that I hand constructed and painted, each with a theme around the larger project. The themes painted on each box were **Hope, Healing,**

**Growth, Connection, and Resiliency.** Each box had a question and asked for an anonymous response. Each response was slipped into the locked box, which was later opened to reveal the themes.

Each box was placed at one of **five Palo Alto public libraries** for about **1.5 months** starting in mid-April to mid-June. About halfway through the 5 Boxes Project the boxes were moved to a new library location in order to give participants other prompts to respond to.

After 1.5 months I collected the 5 boxes, which were each full of responses, some more than others. For each box I sifted through responses that ranged from drawings, words, and statements. I then broke down the responses into emergent themes. The themes that I found were categorized into: Emotions, Object/Places, Activities, and People/Relationships.

For example, in the **Hope box**:

**Emotions:** "I hope for world peace and love. I hope Covid-19 will end."

**Objects/places:** "Libraries give me hope, because they are spaces where all are welcome, and dreams can take flight!"

**Activities:** "Seeing my daughter be alive"

**People/Relationships:** "In my work, we work with youth grades 3-12. THEY give me HOPE. Their openness, acceptance, willingness to see another point of view."

(SEE MORE DETAILED RESPONSES BELOW for each BOX)

## **EMERGENT THEMES**

Most respondents talked about **Emotions** such as kindness, love, and joy they experienced in their community. Respondents also talked about **Objects/places** such as outdoors, nature, walking, hiking, and various other safe spaces in the community that provided them sanctuary from the pandemic.

Respondents talked about **Activities** such as hiking, volunteering, meditation, exercise, artmaking and various other activities to support them through the pandemic. Lastly, respondents talked about the importance of **People/Relationships** which ranged from pets, stuffed animals, family members and friends.

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**HOPE:** What gives you HOPE?

**Emotions:** "I hope for world peace and love. I hope Covid-19 will end", meeting others, kindness, self-improvement, love, love, love, faith, love, love, hope

**Objects/places:** going to library, library, libraries are fun, Sushi (food), basketball, dog, Minecraft (video games), the world, sunshine, laughter, cuddles, music, life, faith in religion, giraffes,

“I hope that we can still go to this library and READ!”

“Libraries give me hope, because they are spaces where all are welcome, and dreams can take flight!”

“The library being able to get books gives me hope.”

“The natural beauty of the world hiding in plain sight.”

“I have hope for the future because the world has gone through times like this now many times before, and has come out ok—not perfect—but ok.”

*Activities:* self-improvement, reading, cuddles, seeing clouds change in the sky, basketball, Minecraft (video games), music, seeing children play, hugging my mom.

“Seeing my daughter be alive.”

*People/Relationships:* my kids, youth, Friends and family, my family and friends, my family, my brother, my best friends, mom, my family, my sister, mom and dad, friends, my family, family and friends, grandma and grandpa, family, friends, me, my sister and my mom, friends and family, friends and family,

“In my work, we work with youth grades 3-12. THEY give me HOPE. Their openness, acceptance, willingness to see another point of view.”

“What gives me hope is when I’m with my mom because the I feel like I can do anything I wish. Another one is also my stuffed animals ‘Poley’ it is a polar bear.”

“My parents give me hope when I struggle with math, especially papa”

“My mom gives me hope”

“You give me hope”

“The love I feel within my family gives me hope.”

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**CONNECTION:** What makes us feel connected?

*Emotions:* Love, Joy, Happiness,

*Objects/places:* flowers, nature, stuffed animal, my phone

*Activities:* walking, making art, going to library, playing sports, volunteering, seeing signs of support, daily interactions with others

*People/Relationships:* mother, brother, amigos, talking with family and friends, nice people, family, caring for others, friends, mom, having lots of friends, being together, family

“My family helps me feel safe.”

“Saying hi to neighbors.”

“Being with family including pets and friends.”

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**HEALING:** What helps you heal?

*Emotions:* kindness

*Objects/places:* food, bacon, nature, eating comfort food, library, music, nature, rescue animals

*Activities:* self-care, resting, crying, being alone, yoga, meditation, yoga, and pranayama, meditation exercise, work, eating comfort food, watching my favorite shows, coming to the library, music, painting, being in nature, spending time with friends, making things, talking with a therapist, talking with loved ones, music

“Some medicines. A good game of golf. Quiet times reading a good book. Having friends.”

“Grounding my feet in the dirt. Running my hands in water. Laughing as often as I can. Deep breaths will get you there always!”

“Music and painting are healing for me! Also nature.”

“A rewarding and satisfying job”

“Resting, crying, and time to be alone”

“Mantenerme en descanso y solo dejarme consentir” (Maintain myself with rest and indulgence”)

*People/Relationships:* friends, loved ones

“Spending time with my friends and making things”

“Que alguien te ama” (Knowing that somebody loves you)

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**GROWTH**: What helps you grow?

*Emotions*: love, respect,

*Objects/places*: flowers, nature, animals

*People/Relationships*: family

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**RESILIENCE**: What makes you resilient?

*Emotions*: *gratitude, crying*

“Having a strong heart”

“Que me hace resiliente? Es caerme y levantarme fuerte, sana y con ganas de salir. Victoriosa para ayudar a los demás. Con arte si se puede. (What makes me resilient? Is the ability to fall and get back up strong, healthy, with the vigor to go out. Victorious to help others. With art you can do it!)

*Objects/places*: gardening, doggies, my dogs, seeing nature, forests, trees, my pets

*Activities*: seeing nature, chatting on zoom, crying and making art, walking and biking in the woods, hiking, road trips, biking, music, reading, being in nature, music, drinking wine and lively conversations, walking everyday and exploring my neighborhood, reconnecting with old friends, being in novel environments, getting outside and being in the sunshine,

“My child’s art is what makes me resilient...[for example] ‘people running from a cat’.”

“Learning from watching the resiliency of my 5-year-old niece. She lives and loves bravely!”

“I play ‘the opposite game’ and consider an option that is worse than what I’m dealing with. What’s the opposite of getting old? Being dead!”

“Being outside! Watching bees fly from plant to plant! Seeing bees makes time slow down for me.”

“I try to calm down”

*People/Relationships*:

My dad, my family, my friends, myself, new friends, close friends.