

ArtEscuela, Somos Esperanza

In the past year, San Antonio city politics has read like a script of a well written telenovela - drama, scandal, deceit and power. All the statistics prove that San Antonio truly is a colonial city - 5 military bases, the 2nd highest policy brutality rate in the nation, 22,000 homeless people. All the while, our city "leaders" offer corporate giveaways for land owners offering low wage jobs, endanger our only source of water and tear down landmarks of our people's history.



This summer the Esperanza offered 5 internships to the students of Artescuela, a summer school for activists. Claudia Ahumada, Mika De León, Valerie De León, Spiral and Alonzo Avila underwent an eight-week intensive leadership training, including workshops in history, culture, facilitation, art, fundraising, media, dismantling oppression, and public speaking. They set up for Esperanza events, attended Arte es Vida meetings, participated in the PGA struggle and organized a video archive. Valerie and Mika created a workshop on art and politics that they later presented at a Youth Action conference in Denver, and all of the interns went to Kingsville, Texas, to participate in the Xochiquetzal Borderlands Art Project with Chicana artist Santa Barraza. In addition, students participated in the protests against the killings in Juárez, Mexico. Valerie's video-taped reaction to Señorita Extraviada by Lourdes Portillo aired nationally in August and will air locally on public access television (KLRN) September 13 at 10pm after the film.

Through the internship, we hoped to provide a framework so that jóvenes can begin to understand, name and fight against all forms of oppression. We hope the interns will help develop youth centered programs at the Esperanza and help in the outreach, planning and facilitation of Artescuela. If we really want to have a say in defining the future of San Antonio, if we really want the city to belong to the people who live here, we are going to have to fight for it. What follows in this article are their own words reflecting what they've learned. -Virginia Grise, ArtEscuela Coordinator

Quienes somos?

Quien es nuestra gente? Nuestro pueblo? Que es nuestra historia? Que es ser buena gente? Are your people the ones caminando en la calle, esperando que el bus llegue? Es tu pueblo aquel que está dividido en partes? Es tu historia aquella que comenta acerca de como vivía cierto grupo de gente antes que llegaron los Europeos?

Shame.

Nowadays, some people are ashamed to speak Spanish in public - el mismo español que hablaban antes de aprender el ingles... I remember being embarrassed of my Spanish, afraid of being made fun of because of the way I speak. I even got into trouble for speaking the language I grew up with - like the time in 4th grade when I got sent to the



principal's office for refusing to call my hermanas "sisters." Y ahora every time I roll my R's I find the beauty in my culture.

Speaking with a voice of power.

I'm proud that I speak Spanish, proud of quien soy. Soy una Chicana, often questioned because I don't eat Mexican food. Sharing a bed with five family members, wearing hand me down clothing, Sunday Bar-B-Ques, 'prendiendo velas y rezando a Dios y a la Virgen María por el mundo - siendo Chicana es siempre siendo buena gente. Standing up for my barrio, where I still walk the streets bare footed to the corner to get Chinese candy and sal con limón.

Breaking barriers.

Picking myself up after the many times I've been pushed down, sometimes feeling like one of those blow up punching bags. Una vez Vicki nos dijo, "Don't let anyone tell you 'you can't,'" after a little incident we had at the airport on our trip to Chicago for the Women Against

ArtEscuela is Esperanza's year-round cultural arts/social justice program for youth 14 to 22. Fall session begins SEPTEMBER 13, 2002 and continues every Saturday 11am-3pm. Call 228-0201 to register.



Violence Conference. When we got in line to board the plane, the ticket man told us that we couldn't get on the plane because we were late. Everyone just looked at each other like, "Well

what do we do now?" Our tickets were nonrefundable. Vicki looked at us with a very determined look and told us that we could make it. "Get your stuff and run!" Going through security, it seemed like hours. We finally got through and we got on the plane. Out of breath, Vicki shared her words of wisdom with us, "Don't let anyone tell you 'you can't.'"

Learning about what is going on in my surroundings.

I have learned about certain "systems" (like racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia) and that we must not be a part of these systems if we want to make this world a better place. We should always treat each other with respect. A few weeks ago, I was completely oblivious about urban sprawl and in fact I never bothered to know. I took an economic tour with María Berriozábal. The more north we went, the more we discovered a new city growing from above and 17 white men who control everything. The most growth you see in the West, East or South side is either a military base or a new company



offering low wage jobs, no signs of opportunities. The fire in me burned with anger. Why?

Finding out all the más shady things in San Anto the city never mentions.

We came together to protect our water from the PGA Village to ensure better health in our communities for years to come. The PGA issue stirred up so much controversy. So many people had faith in Mayor Ed Garza. I can't believe he is trying to go forward with the building of the PGA resort over our sole source of water despite all of our work. Everyday we were out in the hot sun collecting signatures, speaking at city council, going to press conferences, going to court hearings and waiting for the latest "new deal." We helped make change

together through the Esperanza. We fought. For now the deal is stopped (on hold at least).

I was glad to support justified causes but sometimes even if we pushed and pushed, we were not always successful. La Gloria, a historical landmark on my city's west side, was torn down. The people were affected by the loss and now many people in our community are taking action by trying to recall Councilman David García. Sometimes I feel like the city is trying to hide us, trying to hide my people. I think it is important to be aware of local issues because everyday is a struggle and if we don't fight for justice who will fight for us?

Arte es Vida.

We had a taste of freedom during our week-long trip to Kingsville. It was great to study under the Chicana artist Santa Barraza and her two assistants Brenda Canizales and Janie. Together they taught me techniques on how to create great art and how to use art instruments to create some of the best art I've done in a long time.



Before we could have our time away from home though we had to plan out how to get some monies. We took time out to learn how to do press releases, public speaking, and we did a fund-raising workshop. We got together at our board member's house, Dee Murff, to make decisions, watch movies and eat food. We gave each other good ideas, planned well and did a First Friday sale of food, aguas and buttons we designed. It was a big success. We made the money we needed.

Waking up like zombies the next morning after the First Friday fundraiser we went to the Arte es Vida meeting. That Saturday morning we exchanged stories from the elders as well as the youth - finding a connection from the past as well as the present and soon to be future, hearing the struggles of mis gentes, cries of happiness, sorrow and esperanza.

Socializing at the many events the Esperanza has to offer, we had the opportunity to meet as well as contribute our time in setting up events for such artists as Lourdes Pérez and Liliana Wilson Grez. I was happy knowing that I helped my people, people of my skin to send an artistic message to my community. I have met so many wonderful people through the internship that

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yleyva@utep.edu or write to her at The Department of History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas 79968.

¹ Although Silko uses the word "stories," I take it to mean "histories" as well. Although western scholars differentiated between the two words in the late 19th century as they began to professionalize the field, there is a much longer history of the two concepts overlapping. In Spanish, the word for history (historia) is the same as the word for story (historia), reflecting this interconnection.

² In recent years, the subject of historical trauma (sometimes labeled intergenerational or postcolonial trauma) has been the subject of study by scholars, particularly in psychology and literature. Historical trauma first became widely acknowledged with the work on the Nazi Holocaust survivors and their children.

³ Bonnie Duran, Eduardo Duran, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, "Native Americans and the Trauma of History," in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. by Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 62.

⁴ Duran, Duran, Brave Heart, 64.

⁵ By postcolonial I mean a history that arises not only in response to colonialism, but in resistance to it. Postcolonial histories center the colonized rather than the colonizer. These histories are fully self-aware of the political/power implications explicit in the production, teaching, and remembrance of history.

⁶ Jodi Rave Lee, "Past Pain Surfaces in Present" *Montana Forum*, November 27, 2001, accessed at <http://www.montanaforum.com/rednews/2001/11/17/buid/tribal/suice4.php:nmn=3>.

⁷ See also, Robert Desjarlait, "Into the Crucible: Sexual and Physical Abuse in Indian Country," *The Circle Native American News and Arts*, vol. 22, issue 9 (September 2001).

⁸ See Ruth Sanchez-Way and Sandie Johnson, "Cultural Practices in American Indian Prevention Programs," in *Juvenile Justice Journal*, vol. VII, no. 2, for a survey of such practices in substance abuse programs.

⁹ Maria Braveheart-Jordan and Lemyra DeBruyn, "So She May Walk in Balance: Integrating the Impact of Historical Trauma in the Treatment of Native American Indian Women," in *Racism in the Lives of Women: Testimony, Theory, and Guides to Antiracist Practice* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1995), ed. by Jeanne Adleman and Gloria M. Enguidanos, 364.

¹⁰ "Freedman's Cemetery Memorial: A Place of Healing," directed by Joe Norman, KERA Productions, 2001.

¹¹ Duran, Duran, and Brave Heart, 72.

¹² See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) for a history of the professionalization of history.

¹³ Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica Mexicáyotl*, quoted in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of México* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 117.

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER

BY LETRAS SIN FRONTERAS

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER
TUGS AT MY SKIN, STRETCHING THE WORN SCARS
IMPRISONED BORDERLESS WITH FEET SOAKED IN A BLOOD WOUND, DIVIDING
WALKING BETWEEN THE WORLDS OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING
I HAVE SEEN TWO COUNTRIES UNITE AND FIGHT
THE CONSTANT DIVIDER BETWEEN US(A) AND THEM
WE ON THE BORDER ALWAYS PAYING FOR THE PAST, AND ALWAYS FIGHTING
FOR THE FUTURE
I HEAR THE CRIES OF THOSE WHOM HISTORY HAS WOUNDED
Y VEO EL SUFRIMIENTO EN LOS OJOS DE LOS RECIÉN LLEGADOS
WHILE THE RIVER FLOWS WITH THE BLOOD AND TEARS
OF THE CONQUERED AND THE CONQUEROR

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER
CAN BE CRUEL AND SAD
CONFUSING, EXCITING, OPPRESSIVE
I WAS MADE FUN OF POR NO HABLAR EL ESPAÑOL NI EL INGLÉS BIEN
BUT MY WORDS FLOW WITH THE SMOOTHNESS OF RIVER STONES
SPANISH ENGLISH CALÓ-
SHADES OF SKIN PRESUMING AND ASSUMING
ALL I KNOW IS THAT I AM MY TONGUE, LANGUAGES WOVEN INTO HISTORICAL
TAPESTRIES
MY MOTHER LANGUAGE IDENTIFIES MY BEING

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER I REMEMBER
THE SOFT GLOW OF THE THUNDERBIRD EMERGING FROM THE
MOUNTAIN, THE RED CLAY, THE SUN BAKING NOPAL
THE EXPRESSIVE RED AND ORANGES OF THE WESTERN SUNSETS
THE BEAUTIFUL SOUNDS OF LAUGHTER, GRITOS, CARCAJADAS
THE SMELLS AND AROMAS OF BURNING MESQUITE, CARNE ASADA Y CERVEZA
THE DESERT AFTER A SUMMER RAINFALL-CLEAN, COOL, REFRESHING
THE STRONG WINDS BLOWING SAND IN MY EYES
THE FRESH, SOFT GRASS BETWEEN MY TOES,
LYING UNDERNEATH A BLANKET OF STARS

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER IS
LIKE MOVING BETWEEN WORLDS, CROSSING LINES
NOTHING IS WHAT IT APPEARS TO BE
IN SOME WAYS BLIND TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE,
IN OTHERS, UNDERSTANDING ALL TOO WELL
TO THE NORTH SIDE OF THE BRIDGE I AM TOO "MEXICAN,"
AND TO THE SOUTH SIDE, I AM NEVER ENOUGH
NEVER BELONGING TO A "MEXICAN" OR "AMERICAN" CULTURE
ALWAYS THE SAME YET ALWAYS DIFFERENT
LIKE A SCHIZOPHRENIC STRUGGLING BETWEEN TWO IMAGES OF SELF
WHO AM I, WHERE DO I FIT?
ALWAYS EXPLAINING, DEFENDING AND JUSTIFYING MY ROOTS TO BOTH LANDS
I FIT EVERYWHERE, I AM FLEXIBLE

GROWING UP ON THE BORDER I REMEMBER
HOT BRIGHT SUNNY DAYS, LATE NIGHTS, COOL BREEZE, PEOPLE EVERYWHERE
I CAN STILL HEAR THE VOICES OF THE LONG PAST WITH EVERY BLOWING WIND
GOING TO VISIT MY ABUELOS AND PLAYING IN THEIR YARD WITH MY PRIMOS
LOS CARIÑOS Y LAS CARICIAS DE NUESTRAS MADRECITAS
THE CLEAN, CRISP SMELL OF JABÓN ZOTE WITH THE MORNING SUN AS ABUELITA
AND I HANG THE SAVANAS
THE WHISPER OF BISABUELA, LIKE WIND, CARESSING THE TIPS OF MY HAIR
THE WARMTH OF THE SUN'S RAYS HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE SOUL
THE RIVER WATER WASHING AWAY THE PAIN OF HISTORY
THE PARCHED LAND REMINDING US OF THE STRUGGLES
THAT CONSTRUCT THE VERY CORE OF OUR SOULS

LETRAS SIN FRONTERAS IS A QUEER CHICAN@ COLLECTIVE WRITING GROUP BASED IN EL PASO, TEJAS. WE BELIEVE IN WRITING AS A WAY TO HEAL FROM THE EVERYDAY OPPRESSIVE FORCES THAT AFFLICT THE QUEER CHICAN@ COMMUNITY. THROUGH LETRAS SIN FRONTERAS WE ARE CREATING AND CLAIMING OUR SPACES. TO CONTACT US, EMAIL LETRAS_SINFRONTERAS@HOTMAIL.COM

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have helped me to become a better artist and have helped me to see the world in a better perspective.

Connecting from all parts of the city.

As interns we bonded as a group as well as a family. Eight weeks spent together laughing about things as well as letting out anger, after a bad day from work/classes. We learned each other's weaknesses as well as strengths.

Thanks to this strong group and all the people who made this possible. Together we can make a change. Together

we can make our voices heard. I was glad to be involved these past eight weeks. I have spent time with the best people that the world has to offer. I have become a more confident person, more understanding of others, as well as myself. Meeting new people, artists and everlasting friends, which is rare because life ain't always candy canes, hugs and kisses...

I heart you all, the 2002 Interns c/s, Alonzo, La Ghetto Writer Valerie, Claudia, La Artista Spiral and Mika

PS - Special thanks to all our facilitators and people that helped us along the way. You know who you are.



Congratulations to ¡La Bárbara!

Bárbara Renaud Gonzáles, San Antonio journalist and writer, is a recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation Writing Fellowship. Bárbara is currently completing her first novel, *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me? –A Texas Story*. An internationally recognized journalist whose columns appear locally in the San Antonio Express-News on occasion, Bárbara is a frequent contributor to La Voz.

¡Te aventaste!

Dr. Arturo Madrid

esteemed elder and professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, was honored with the 2002 Thomas Rivera Lifetime Achievement Award. The award recognizes those who have made significant contributions to the Latino community. Dr. Madrid is the founding president of the National Chicano Council for Higher Education. Lo felicitamos con gran cariño y respeto.

¡Felicidades!

¡Felicidades, Josie!

Written by our very own boardmember, Dr. Josie Méndez-Negrete, *Las Hijas de Juan, Daughters Betrayed* promises to be a nationwide blockbuster. Dr. Méndez-Negrete's first book is being published by Chusma Publications and will be out soon. Plan to attend a reading of Hijas at the Esperanza on October 12th. Ask your local bookstores to stock it! Californians are already lining up to buy it!

**The American Indian Resource Center presents
Indigenous Writer's Conference,
Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers Gathering**

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3:00 pm - 10:30 pm
St. Mary's Learning & Leadership Development Center
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This conference is part of the AIRC's 3rd Annual Fall Festival, which also includes the Health Fair, and Traditional Powwow.

