

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

### *Veme Queering Phoenix: Queer Identity* in Metropolitan Phoenix

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*Veme: Queering Phoenix* is a multidisciplinary photographic project designed to shed light and bring awareness to the experiences of queer youth of color in Phoenix, Arizona. Through the power of stories and portraits, the project explored the myriad ways race and queerness interact with one another, influencing the experiences of those who live at their intersection. Often times excluded from the mainstream culture, *Veme: Queering Phoenix* focused on these queer youth of color and the complex ways their multiple identities interact to create their individual modes of self-expression and personal understanding. *Veme* stands in opposition and in protest to the predominantly white and heteronormative image media representations that have popularized queer youth of color.

My relationship to Phoenix has never been a simple one, and though at times I have struggled to fully understand my experience, the city's influence on my identity as a queer Mexicana is undeniable. Phoenix is where I was able to fully embrace myself as queer, where I built a community of jot@s around myself, and where I would eventually discover my passion for working with LGBTQ+ youth. The experiences and incredibly diverse individuals I came to meet were the central inspiration for *Veme: Queering Phoenix*. I wanted to record the beautiful lives and stories I had heard, I wanted those faces that inspired me everyday to be recorded, and I wanted others to see what the brilliance and strength that is often left out when queer narratives are excluded. So, I turned on a recorder and bought myself a camera.

I could have never imagined this would be as successful as it was. Upon retrospect, there are two elements that I believe helped *Veme* gain the following it did and that allowed for its success: the first being community support, and the second, the evident need for this kind of work. The Phoenix community embraced the idea of this project and came together to support its success, allowing me to see the gap this project filled. So many individuals approached me throughout the year I dedicated to *Veme: Queering Phoenix* simply to express how this sort of work never existed when they were young, and how thankful they were to see it in their home city of Phoenix. *Veme: Queering Phoenix* was a success because it demanded a respect for queer identities, spaces and experience while also saying, “We’re already here.”

In the end, *Veme: Queering Phoenix* was one of the most difficult yet rewarding experiences I have ever had. So many times what was around the corner was unpredictable, but I’ve learned that often times I thrive in unpredictability. As a young immigrant, I have learned that I am able to thrive where I’m not supposed to because I can find comfort in the discomfort. When you don’t have much to lose, risking it all doesn’t seem like such a bad idea.

These photographs and stories are a celebration of all of us who have had to find comfort, or a way to navigate discomfort and adversity. It’s a celebration of our resilience, our home, and our courage. This is our desire to do more than simply survive.