Interview Transcriptions:

The Q Sides

So VERO pretty much knows like why I’m here but you know when I went to the event, I was really moved by it and I had originally intended on doing my year long research project on women and the role of women, and the use of women on lowriders. But then I went to your event, and I just fell in love with it and I have a lot of QPOC friends, and as an ally I find that visibility for queer Latinos and also for people who low ride is really important to me, and then the fact that you guys put them together in one thing was so incredible and mindblowing to me, so I really wanted to use you guys as an avenue to find the population and kind of work with this community and give visibility and highlight the voices and the lives of queer lowriders and people who identify with all these identifications so thank you for allowing me to interview you. I do have this consent form.

VERO sure It just had my contact information and my research advisors contact information [break down for pseudonym]

VERO If you were to…mention our names not just my name when you give credit. That is the only thing I would say. The Q Sides is KARI, DJ BROWN AMY, and myself. [chatter]

So I guess we can start at kind of the three of your creative process in creating this project. I know you told me about the grant that Galería had and that process and how you came together as a team to do The Q Sides. Can you start there?

VERO How we came together? Yeah how you came together. Where did the inspiration come from for this project? We’ve been talking about it for like what 2 years?

DJ BROWN AMY What do you mean? Before we started it?

VERO Yeah

DJ BROWN AMY Yeah. Prolly about that? Maybe like 2 years? We ran into each other on 24th street, VERO and I, and we had an idea. We both collected The Q Sides records, or I mean [laughter] East Side Story Records. Uhm, and kind of just both thought “hey that would be really cool to like recreate these records with queer Latino people. I am someone who isn’t typically like…I have ideas but I am not very good a doing things sometimes. Like “Oh lets do this!” But I never do it. So that was really kind of bad. Are you really good at that?

VERO Uhmmm…I think….

KARI You make things.

VERO I make things. I like practicing having a vision and manifesting it. But I think with The Q Sides, it was the first time that collectively it wouldn’t have happened. It would have just been a vision that I would be talking at a bar with Amy for the next 20 years or something. So I think
collectively, is the reason it came through because our strengths that we all bring into it and also just our love for the music and the culture of it

[DJ BROWN AMY Yeah!]

I think I am good at having ideas, but collectively is the reason that it came through and also being able to get funds. You wanna say something? [To KARI]

KARI Oh yeah, well I fell like, well I just had a thought. We recorded the artist talk so I think that would be

Yeah she told me you have that I would love to have that.

KARI anyways: I feel like there is a lot of overlap with that. I have been with VERO for, well shit, what the last 12 years. So a lot of my introduction, I had heard some of the music but it was really the cultural introductions through her and so throughout that whole time I learned so much about her growing up listening to that music and what her desires were as someone who was closeted within the lowrider community here in SF. So it felt like it was already apart of what I could imagine, but I do feel like that it was something that really took all 3 of us to make happen.

Yeah I mean I can see how, just talking to each of you how each person gave to the project.

VERO Yeah cuz I think individually maybe we could have done it but I think it would have been different and looked different. I think that…these are the ingredients…it took these three ingredients to make The Q Sides happen.

KARI And I also think that when you do something over time and like involve more people then it does kind of broaden it’s reach because we could have reused a bunch of the models and knocked it out and been done with it but it was just our schedules and stuff like that but I felt like the benefit of taking that time and involving so many people gave it this much broader reach and involved more of the community so I feel like that was a really strong byproduct of the process.

So I guess breaking it down into two separate things The Q Sides into the QPOC experience and then also the lowrider experience and bringing them together through the project. So can you talk about your experiences as QPOC and also why is it important to highlight these lives and give visibility especially in the Latino community and even maybe talk about it in the community of the mission, particularly? (Addressing KARI) And if you have anything you want to add to that.

KARI sure

DJ BROWN AMY Uhm, so asking what the important of bringing the two communities?

Yeah so focusing on why is it important that The Q Sides used queer people?

DJ BROWN AMY oh I see. Honestly for me, you know growing up as a queer person in Chicano culture, just knowing, that well when I was younger, thinking that didn’t exist. I always thought that I was the only one really. Uhm, but then as getting older realizing that that
have always been there [laughter] whether they’re closeted or not, they have always been in Chicano and lowrider communities. So I think that it is important to talk about that and bring light to those people that have existed that maybe have been closeted or have not, you know? Specifically in the Latino community because it tends to be a little more you know kind of traditionally male centered and male/masculine centered. Not always, but you know, we all know that right? [Laughter] am I wrong?

That is what I have been having such a hard time doing and writing down is like, I know, intrinsically that the Latino community is very male dominated.

DJ BROWN AMY but you have to even think about it. I think about going to my family’s house for Xmas or whatever and the men are always sitting around the table, the women cook, they serve the men, and then they’re like eating their food cold off their laps, its just stuff like that. When I was younger I didn’t even notice that but it’s like, as I get older, just thinking about that community. You know, Chicano culture has, lowrider, being a lowrider is just a part of it. Like I don’t say that I am a lowrider because I don’t have a lowrider. But I am definitely, it’s been around me, and I am a Chicana. It’s been around me my whole life.

VERO right

DJ BROWN AMY so I guess like saying that highlighting the fact that we do exist within these communities is important because it is.

VERO no you’re right

Yeah it makes sense.

VERO For me, I just feel when, as an artist, my two passions are queer. You know as being young, one of the things I always knew for sure was being queer. I didn’t have the word for it, but I knew I had to be cool about it. I always knew the first thing I had to be DL (down low) about was being queer, even though that it was the only thing I had known and was sure about my whole life. And then also my attraction to lowrider culture. I mean lowrider culture cruising up and down and the girls. I think that as an artist why its important to me is because that’s where I draw from and you draw from what you know to make are with. And I think that is where I always go, is there. You know I remember, this is another story, but I was in a foster home when I was like maybe 11 or 12 and I wanted to get he fuck outta there and there was the 10oclock news and Mayor Feinstein was the mayor and she was 24th st and there’s like hella lowriders going by and like all these guys doing the big “eme” (Big M sign for The Mission) behind her and I was like I gotta outta here, I gotta get down there, and then she says, ‘Its 10 o’clock, do you know where your children are at?” And I’m like I’m leaving and I found a way to bust out of the foster home and went down to 24th street and I know that the culture is so homophobic, but it is also the place I wanted to be at. And then I would meet up with the home girls that I shouldn’t be hanging around with, they were a lot older that I was crushed out on. And when they would get drunk, I would be making out with them. So it’s this weird place that brought me that I escaped to you know? But I also knew that I couldn’t be exactly what I wanted to be in it you know? So it’s this weird double thing. Like its one of my first loves. You know?
Women and especially women from the hood. I think that why, number one, why its important I think its because its my first loves, women and the culture. Love is where you draw from to make are and I think a lot that’s why its important. On a political level even where the q sides went and the mural, its just because were here mother fuckers, were here. Like cuz I don’t think we came at it as a political statement, you know? We came at it with a love for both and were here.

DJ BROWN AMY and its like representation

VERO yeah, represent, were here like it wasn’t even...cuz I think q sides is a reflection of love right? It’s not like a reaction to anything. Its because we are coming from a place of passion, both things that we love are our queer homies and the culture. Does that make sense?

Yeah that makes sense

KARI yeah well I think...just as you’re saying that, I've been in SF for 2 years and its not my culture that’s in the mission but I do feel like it is something that is disappearing in SF, and even, so that’s one layer of it and then there is this whole other layer of like people not even claiming the other reality of that history so its like, it actually is like without telling the stories it could actually disappear from this like this particular neighborhood you know? So stories of people growing up in lowrider culture with their desires and their truth and their reality and I think that the experience of you know all the backlash that happened with the mural I mean its kind of like I don’t know if I just saw creed but it is like Rocky, like its it is heroic, it is, you don’t have to persevere to tell that story and I feel like it is not necessarily may be what we were thinking of with the show but its like, it did have to come out, you know my relationship to it is through my relationship, but its also like just of somebody being in SF, and seeing, its not the narrative. This isn’t something that anybody fighting for the Mission is going to talk about without somebody making a really concerted effort to like say it. And I say that because also, and then I'll shut up, but just as like an added context of SF, is that after TQS came out, I was doing a separate project where my studio is on Geneva and Mission and its like all the same people who are feeling threatened and its a history of SF you know and all the car clubs and car shows and people up in the excelsior. And it’s like a really important culture to preserve and remember and document, but its everything they’re saying, it’s so male and macho and homophobic. And I didn’t even want to say that I was apart of this project like with some of the people that I didn’t know because I felt like people are so extracrised about the mural and everything that is represented to them, but I fell like it is all the more reason it has to be out there. And yeah, coming from a place of like you know positivity not just like "fuck you!" Its like there is a lot of really beautiful parts of this.

VERO Yeah and I feel that its also for The Q Sides its also for the changes in SF its like a tag. You know saying, "yo I was here" Like were here and were making sure were included in SF history but its like you know I was here. I remember growing up and I saw this tag and it said, "Gomez was here" everywhere and I was like "he was everywhere" and I feel that with the work, with TQS, its saying "were here" its changing so much.
That’s really powerful. Can you, so something else that I am interested about is the process in approaching the car owners and car clubs to use the cars for the photo-shoots. How was that? Was there any backlash? Or did they not want to do it? You know as we said Chicano lowriders are like super male and homophobic, how was that interaction? Did it go as you expected? Were there things that you absolutely did not expect from them or?

VERO Uhm I think, my brother's homeboy has a car club and they’re like cousins and uhm, I think at first, we first did Amy and Sarah, [laughter] and like they’re like so beautiful and they’re like "OHHH girls" [yeah that was funny] They’re its cool, they’re girls, its too girls together, you know? And uhm

KARI we were like "I don’t think they get it..."

[Laughter]

VERO they just saw girls and then the word was "oh yeah VERO's gonna call you about this thing that they’re doing and this cool man. "I heard they’re were two hot girls there" and were like "OK"

DJ BROWN AMY I was like in a suit {laughter} but I think it was more Sarah

VERO for me I really struggled with do I say.... I wanted the cars no matter what....

DJ BROWN AMY I mean its a crucial part of the record. There is just one volume that doesn’t have a car. So we had to have them

VERO We had to have the cars...but I struggled do I say...I think.

DJ BROWN AMY you were really honest about it VERO

VERO But I don’t even know that I struggled. Do I say it? Do I not say it? I mean I just wanted the fucking cars. I mean, I can deal with their homophobia and then I’m just like "YO ITS HELLA GAY."

DJ BROWN AMY YEAH

VERO we offered to pay for the cars but uhm, I think I said its hella gay its cool if you’re not down with it and uhm but people with their lowriders their such peacocks, its like yeah they want their ride up there. And east side story, they all they know, they all responded to that. But for the most part everybody was cool during the shoot. We only had one person say "I just don’t want no naked bodies on my car" and I’m like "okay"

KARI and she was the only female car owner.

DJ BROWN AMY that’s a good call though!
VERO I was like "why do you think were always naked??"

[Laughter]

VERO so that was it. But I do...what ended up happening was after the mural and people saying stuff on IG. I don’t know if you looked up on instagram. There were all kinds of social media, all kinds of stuff from TQS so...

DJ BROWN AMY yeah we got a lot of backlash from it

VERO look up barrio2barrio.

KARI you have to go back to like

DJ BROWN AMY like way back, we shouldn’t put his name in the interview

VERO yeah don’t give no publicity. But so camilo, my brother's friends, camilo is tripping because it was getting a lot of media

KARI because it was their club that supplied most of the cars

DJ BROWN AMY and we gave them a lot of props too, like we were like

VERO they were mentioned all the time

DJ BROWN AMY like every time we did an interview

VERO and then camilo was like "yo wassup, everybody is saying you're apart of that" and like hiding to what’s the word I can use to take care of this ego and also take care of the project. I didn’t want to go into and be like well you know what you signed up for and you know?

KARI and you know you’re a man

VERO so I told him "hey you know, I told you straight up what it was about and I just want to tell you that one way that I would describe you is that you’re very comfortable in your manhood. You know exactly who you are. [Laughter from Amy] and you know exactly who you’re not. I go, "that’s just how I’ve known you." he’s all "uhh yeah ok VERO uh"

[Laughter from Amy and KARI]

DJ BROWN AMY its true though

VERO but I had to. I was working at, I really had to take care of his ego and I had to...that’s what I said to him
DJ BROWN AMY there was like this person that is like...he’s kind of like Instagram...he is a troll and he was just like really going off on the project. Just basically [V he instigated] said "you’re all being burnt"

All: yeah

DJ BROWN AMY he was kind of the front runner to all of that like and he...we even tried to talk to him and he wouldn’t talk too anybody you know what I mean? cuz he thought we were just like some people that were you know...cuz you know its like trendy...cholo or chola culture has gotten really trendy and it has been for a while I guess.

VERO he said we were appropriating

KARI and then when the mural came in the artists were from LA so he was like "people are coming from outside" and its like..you know... VERO was born and raised on that street. It’s not like...and that’s why we specifically did it at galeria

VERO that was like from the beginning. we wanted it in that spot. It’s really important that it happened at galeria. During the shoots, there is something really....[k oh yeah when were done we'll show you the video from one of them] when we were doing the shoots, there was nothing. it was just a shoot you know? there was nobody naked or like

DJ BROWN AMY and it also wasn’t like super scandalous, it was just really loving. you know what I mean? It was like that picture, we weren’t making out or whatever were just you know...that’s how all of them were like...

VERO yeah cuz I think that and another one are just as much affection in it

DJ BROWN AMY and that’s why we chose that photo specifically to be the picture because we wanted it to be very visibly queer. and we knew that photo was a visibly queer photo

VERO mhm yeah so in the process of the shoot there was never no drama. they would just hang out talking about music. we brought oldies out, they brought the lawn chairs and just hung out. that moment there wasn’t anything on the personal moment but when it got big and it started pulling in some of them, but camilo was the only one who called.

KARI but he is the only one you have a relationship with.

VERO true and they were like, when they showed up at the opening I mean everyone that was lovely I’m glad they showed up cuz they were part of it . man it was so great you heard the sound that they do. it was so beautiful

yeah the sirens

DJ BROWN AMY right when it opened they all rolled up and we had a street closure right on the street of galeria.
VERO  so yeah at the moment there wasn’t any drama but I think I had to massage his ego. its what I had to do and thinking about how women have to take care of men in Latino culture I think that is where I pulled my strength from. If you think about it you know like "no papas, you’re a man" you know? and I knew what I was doing, but it was what I had to do for the project too. If we talk about what Amy was saying about what its like, that’s kind of what I had to do, like no you’re a man.

DJ BROWN AMY  that’s a really good point

VERO you know what I mean? its just like "its ok baby" [chuckle] I mean I couldn’t actually get into like "no actually its homophobia what’s happening" but I couldn’t get into that discussion. Because no body wants to listen to that.

Of course not

KARI  and just on the tip about after the mural burned there was a gathering. A really wonderful gathering. I don’t know if you have any of the articles and there are some clips online I dont know if you have seen them from the news and they might be on Facebook. But anyway one of the, I mean he’s a great advocate but, some were saying...

VERO  he was born and raised in the mission.

KARI  He was saying you know, "we were cool back in the day, you know the gay people" "we were cool" but its like they were all in the closet, that is such a...

VERO  he said "we didn’t care if you were gay or whatever because we were all about brotherhood" and I’m like really?? who is he talking about? like that’s not true.

KARI  its just because they weren’t out

VERO  so yeah uhm there were a couple of people looking around like "who is he talking about?"

So just kind of more on the vandalizing of the mural...so the mural was not apart of the q sides right?

VERO  no the mural came up a week after and we were so excited

So did you know that was happening?

DJ BROWN AMY  yeah

KARI  well no

VERO  it happened toward the end. Ani didn’t really communicate with us though
KARI no she told us that. she was like and then the mural is gonna come.

VERO kind of like late notice

KARI well we had been planning for so long that it felt closer to the end

VERO but uhm I was excited about it when we went to see the image I was like "that is beautiful" again, there is nothing in the image...I mean they’re just embracing, I mean BARELY embracing. you know? It wasn’t part of it but I was excited about it

DJ BROWN AMY but it all goes back to what about....what I was saying earlier about machismo male centered [V sensitivity.] yeahhhh. you know the reason why the mural got burned because men felt threatened.

VERO they didn’t even do the women

DJ BROWN AMY no! They didn’t. The trans they didn’t even fucking know what it was

VERO until someone told them

DJ BROWN AMY and then they went back! but first it was the mean, you know what I mean? so its like... it just all goes back to the fact that you know culturally why it is so important to have the project because of exactly the back lash we got you know what I mean its like of course there’s gay people in our community...its like OF COURSE THERE ARE. there were gay people before we could even fucking remember. you know what I mean? its like we've always been around. always. in every community. I also think coming from a Latin family avoidance is a big thing. not talking about it. being closeted is what you do because you don’t even talk about issues that you have as a family. its like everything is like...I mean like you know that too I’m sure? and it’s something that I’ve noticed more as I’ve gotten older. its something I have to work on is avoidance because that’s really easy for me because it’s cultural, it’s what my family.

VERO its like "ignore it mija, just ignore it" and I’m just like what??

DJ BROWN AMY and now that all has to play into homophobia within the Latino community because people are like just be closeted. don’t come out, lets not come out

VERO and then even Latino queers in the community have been saying that should have talked to the community before that was out there. you see, we were just getting all the drama on social media. but it flipped when the mural happened. but I think we probably would have had some other type of violence inside because everything happened outside.

DJ BROWN AMY well I mean tell her about when you had to go and be a mediator. that was directly towards The Q Sides
VERO so Ani calls me and she’s like "yo VERO can you come? there’s a bunch of kids out here. dressed in red. probably nortenos. who just been cruising around blocking the front of the door. and she’s like can you come down?" so I’m going down there and I’m not sure what I’m going to do so I went down there and they’re like.... they just kept going around and stuff. This young kid is like "these motherfuckers aint even from here. they’re taking our neighborhood away. and I said oh what’s your name? I was born and raised here too" and he’s doing [pose] and he goes my mom was born and raised here. and I’m like oh yeah? what school did she go to? I prolly went to school with your mom so there was something common but then they were hanging around. but its like gang injunction areas so were like.. we were really like "its kind of threatening and you’re blocking the door" and they said "man we can be here if we want" and they had this couple making out who was pressing against the glass just making out as protest and were like "right on!"

DJ BROWN AMY I was like that’s hot!

VERO so we can Sandra this other organizer who works with kids. and she said yo the police are going to notice you, you gotta get outta here! and they’re like "fuck that! we belong here" its way beyond the mural, you're gonna go to jail for being here. So we called some lady from Precita eyes that work to mediate with gangs. And it was wonderful to work with the other organizations to like try to talk to them. and then the police came and had them against the wall. Meanwhile were trying to protect them, and say no everything is fine. and at the end everyone shook hands but it was still kind if like scary you know?

DJ BROWN AMY I mean you know the thing is like no body, no one in the project whether it’s the mural or TQS no one wants those kids to go to jail

VERO yeah

DJ BROWN AMY you know what I’m saying? you know its like that’s not what we believe in the prison system so its like

VERO that’s what I was saying. like yo there’s enough brothers locked up and that’s what we were trying to tell them on IG. don’t tell your homebody to go fuck up something because it’s a hate crime! you know? and then also that what really broke my heart was that all these queer Latino kids who are here in SF, were out there on the streets marching when someone gets shot, a lot of us are social workers making sure your mom can afford to stay here. Were out there fighting to make sure you don’t get stopped and get, become part of the gang injunction. To me, that is really what upset me more. Like dude, I got your fucking back all the way, knowing you don’t even want us around. But I still got your back because I’m down like that for the hood. You know, that was really what broke my heart. It’s just that, I got your back man, and like you know most people in social services, a lot of them are queer folks

DJ BROWN AMY hell yea

VERO I think for me, I’ve been thinking about it, that’s what broke my heart, was that. Its just so crazy everything happening, and I’m just now thinking about it, and it kind of broke my heart.
KARI well its brown against brown violence. Its so unnecessary

VERO and then you got all these heads where I work at. I work at a homeless drop in center and these homies who are like my age who are like down and out, and they come in and they’re happy to see me because they know who I am because I’m gonna hook you up in here. And that’s heart breaking too because I knew you wouldn’t have my back out there as a queer woman, you know? but I have yours regardless of, or we have your back regardless of what you do, think about us. I kinda been thinking about that

DJ BROWN AMY that’s a really good thing to bring up. Its really true and a lot of those folk are POC you know?

VERO yeah broken down, so I kinda been thinking about that a lot. that’s what broke my heart about it

KARI well then I almost feel like, its like, the more people feel threatened that, its like the more they want to feel like they have the right to claim the nostalgia, you know? they are the authority on those memories and the more people feel squeezed the less they have or the less power they have, they are like sticking their claim on those memories. and its like they aren’t the only authority because there are other people there too and I feel like that panic came out with the whole appropriation thing. I mean its responding to something real but its not applicable in this case. and its so threatening to their memories as if they are the only ones who have claim to that.

VERO yeah and from my, a lot of my work is about SF lowrider community, and its pretty much straight. In a way this is for me, I’m out but also coming out through my work with the work you know? you could give up talking about it, like representing you, but you’re not ok if I’m inserting myself or I’m reminding you that yo I’m apart of this. so I think that was kind of interesting too with that piece. And who does nostalgia belong too? I mean everybody coming in with the oldies, queer, not from the mission, its like anybody who responded to the oldies, that’s a certain connection, right? Like the somebodies saying "ohh my mom used to listen to that"

DJ BROWN AMY I mean that’s the thing, ultimately for me too, and I cant forget it. With all the stuff that happened with TQS and the mural and everything, I forget the logistics, like why we even did it, even before all the political stuff. we did it

because of the music you know?

VERO word

DJ BROWN AMY that’s why we did it. These songs hold memories for us you know? that’s what it really comes down too. Because I bought the record.

KARI well and the way that music makes you feel its not just one person in the room

VERO did you say there was just some homie just dancing?
KARI there was a guy who had just gotten out of jail. He came back to 24th st and they had a speaker out on the sidewalk and...

Was this opening night?

KARI no we did a playlist when the gallery was open. I think they took a video of him because I just happened to be meeting someone there at that day and he was just like you know he had his 40

DJ BROWN AMY was that the day?! I think I was working. I remember that guy, he would walk away and buy another tall can and come back.

KARI yeah that’s probably the same guy. Daca was there with him, he was like "this is what the mission looks like"

[laughter]

VERO drunk homie. but yeah you’re right, its the music, its the love of the music and its what brought people together. I mean like when I worked at the gallery, people were like "man my mom used to listen to that" and they would come in and be like "awww shit!"

DJ BROWN AMY and you forget how much its apart of your history you know what I mean? My mom didn’t just listen to that. I grew up listening to it. I remember listening to "I’m your puppet" as a kid its like, its so....its just like the I don’t know, its just such like a richness....memories

VERO and its desire! all those oldies are desires.

DJ BROWN AMY yeah heartbreak

VERO and as a queer kid...that was the way we'd communicate, its through oldies. I’m like all these songs are about desire.

DJ BROWN AMY and it was the safest way to imagine our desires. we couldn’t come out, but we could imagine ourselves with ourselves or whatever. you know like listening to oldies together. you know what I mean? but that was our reality. we couldn’t actually live it. Does that make sense?

VERO yeah like the oldies was the thing that took us there. I mean I’m sure, did your parents listen to oldies?

DJ BROWN AMY do they have the records?

Uhm, I think my dad has some of them.
DJ BROWN AMY  I bet he does!

VERO  I feel like there should be a documentary about your dad.

KARI  and he’s 42?

He's actually younger than my mom

KARI  Oooo

By a year but,,,

DJ BROWN AMY  39?

yeah

DJ BROWN AMY  damn [laughter] whooo!

VERO  what do your parents look like?

What do they look like?

VERO  do they look like you? they would probably be a beautiful tintype

Uhm, my dad actually gets mistaken for the Asian one and my mom gets mistaken for being Mexican.

KARI  but they are both Filipino?

My mom is Filipina. She was born in the PI and moved out here. My dad is from Compton.

DJ BROWN AMY  my family is from Compton.

VERO  wow they’re like young parents....you're family is young

Yeah very young. my brother is 16. and me and my brother have all the songs on our iPods. you know, that’s what I listen to tooo.so to see this come together is cool

VERO  its almost like a subculture soundtrack. its intergenerational. its like I don’t know I feel like uhm. you'll play a jam, you play an oldie and the OG will be like "yeaaaaah" its almost like a chemical reaction to your body and you’re like :that’s the jam

DJ BROWN AMY  its physical to

VERO  everybody is like....I love that about oldies
DJ BROWN AMY and not to mention how it brought black and brown communities together, you know what I mean? in a time where in the 60s you would go...Mary Wells would play and there would be black and brown people and you know white folks when everything is gnarly and segregated. I mean that’s cool too but you don’t think about that stuff until you’re older. Now that I think about it...its like whoa there’s so many layers too it. but when you’re a kid you’re just like "yeah cool whatever oldies"

VERO, which is your soundtrack

DJ BROWN AMY yeah like I didn’t even realize I knew all the oldies until I was like 17 doing coke with my friends one day and we were up to like 6 in the morning singing oldies and I was like "HOW DO I KNOW THIS SONG?!"

[laughter from all]

DJ BROWN AMY don’t put that in there!

VERO I have a friend who came up to me like "you’re such a cholo dude" I’m like what???? all you do is listen to this cholo music and I didn’t event think about it, I thought everybody listened to this music. and we fell in love listening to Brenton wood. I had a girlfriend who was like "why you gotta play that sad ass music?"

DJ BROWN AMY damn that would be a deal breaker

I know

VERO and she’s like I love.....she just fell in love with it, so it kind of brought us together like

DJ BROWN AMY or it didn’t

KARI and she had some oldies in some of her films and that was the first time I met her but it was the music that I responded too.

VERO Brenton wood

Could you guys talk a little bit more about...how like the music kind of was your way of....of coming out in a way that kept you closeted at the same time... it was your way you were able to imagine

DJ BROWN AMY well so I guess it like...you know where I grew up, I grew up in Wollmington. My family immigrated from Mexico to Compton. And so you know its like the neighborhood I grew up in is probably 90% Latino 10% mixed. There were no gay people. it wasn’t like SF. I remember seeing a gay person maybe once

VERO that were out though!
DJ BROWN AMY  ok that’s true, I take that back, there were tons of gay people. but none of my knowledge at that time you know? the first time I remember actually seeing a gay person now that I think as a gay person. my uncle would call him a faggot. I didn’t even know what that mean, I was like five but I knew it was something, something bad. You know what I mean? It just wasn’t safe, it wasn’t a safe environment for me to come out and I think for VERO too, you know I, and I think that, what I meant by that is that oldies kind of allowed me to have that kind of just desire or imagination in my head. you would listen to love songs and you would sit there and think about your queerness and like what that would like look like if you were you know whatever does that make sense?

Mhm

KARI  if things were different

DJ BROWN AMY  yeah if things were different, if it were safe for me to come out at that time

VERO  when did you come out?

DJ BROWN AMY  I came out in my 20s

VERO  when you came to the bay?

DJ BROWN AMY  and I only came out because my parents found a picture of me kissing a girl like I didn’t actually tell "hey mom and dad" like they found a picture and they were like wtf and I was like you guys knew like come on now. and also for me, oldies was like the only thing I could listen to. I was brought up really religious. so my parents couldn’t keep oldies away from us. it was just apart of my environment. it was the only music that wasn’t Christian music that I could listen to

VERO  wow

KARI  and look at you now!

[laughter]

DJ BROWN AMY  now I’m a freak

[laughter]

VERO  yeah I think for oldies for me was uh I would uhm put girls names on the back or on the back of the record but no one knew what it was because we all shared the records and stuff. Also like my first girl friend I was 14? I think? uhm our first song, we were DL about it, I Love You For All Seasons by The Fuzz. And even when I hear that I’m like, it just takes me back to my first love and I even have a tape but I’m afraid to play it. it has her name and the other side is shorty.
DJ BROWN AMY  you’re afraid to play it?!

VERO  I’m afraid to play the tape because I don’t want it to get ruined. so we, you know we make mix tapes for each other, but uhm but that was the jam for us. for me music at a young age is just how I felt. you were able to feel. my first record was Donny Osman and there is this song I think its about Moses - Let My People Go. its pretty funky. I wish I could find it. I loved playing that song

DJ BROWN AMY  ill find it for you.

VERO  I think its because I wanted to leave my house. and I felt like that’s me right there. I wanna leave and uhm I just feel that I’m a top 10-chart kid too. I would go to the music store and be like look at the top 10, and be like I wan that 45 and this 45. I think I was a radio kid but then I played oldies and stuff. So yeah music has always been around. I always say queerness saved my life and I think oldies did too just being able to listen and to be able to put your feelings or desires on there you know? that’s where I’m gonna put it right now because I cant put it anywhere else. you cant put it anywhere else. and I don’t think your conscious about it its just survival you know? I wasn’t thinking about it, but in order to think about it, its a place I was able to put my feelings in. [ DJ BROWN AMY  that’s such a good way to put it] but I don’t think you're, I wasn’t conscious about it you know? I just think in order to think about it, that’s where it went. like even now, I love just putting on my headphones and just be like in it. it could be whatever song. you ever heard of Alabama shakes?

DJ BROWN AMY  I haven’t really listened to her though

VERO  oh my god that shit is like driving me crazy. talk about a vessel of expressing. her mom bought me the vinyl

DJ BROWN AMY  aw that’s sweet

VERO  but yeah I think that’s what you’re saying, you’re able to put your feelings. I mean people do that now. I see people doing it, I mean especially girls and gay boys when they’re singing a song, its apart of expressing you know?

do you think that when TQS...do you guys think that it kind of it did anything culturally? I mean aside from the homophobia that came out and was like burning walls you know? do you think that maybe it made that space for people who are closeted to be able to say "IM HERE and I’m not gonna go anywhere because this is me, I’m from here, this is who I am and I’m not going anywhere" do you think hat the project did that for some people?

VERO  definitely

DJ BROWN AMY  it did more of that than it did hate you know what I mean? we got so much love throughout the project and so many people coming up, you were there! remember the woman who was a teacher talking about one of her students. they were like, VERO, remember?
you were working there and this kid walked in, this queer kid. We got so much of that you know what I mean? and even our opening almost a 1000 people there supporting the project. Not only because it was only a really incredible project but they really felt like wow this is important and this is my opportunity to show support because I know what that is like.

VERO  I had a community organizer, he’s queer, born and raised in SF, Latino, he was like "VERO", him and this other guy, after the after party, "I feel like we made it! were here now" so all these little moments, I feel like the hate took up a lot of media, but I see what you’re saying , the love is so much bigger the young kids that came in from Fresno he was like "I never thought that I could be this “and seeing how macho his father was but he still loved the music and didn’t think that he was included in any of it like that was pretty powerful.

DJ BROWN AMY  even that alone right

VERO  that was just like for me that would be that’s pretty I didn’t even think I could be apart of it and that he saw himself in it.

KARI  or this girl, her mom was gay and so she was kicked out of the house to, when she was found out and then basically ostracized from her family until she married a man again but she’s not happy. But the girl was so, he daughter was so moved that she could have never imagined seeing her mom's story represented, even though its not her moms story, but it is.

DJ BROWN AMY  I mean its really everyone’s story

VERO  yeah I think that people saw different I think you said they saw different stories from their lives in it. Especially for any queer kid coming in, even if your white or Latino or whatever, you be like "ooohhh to include your self in something that says you cannot be apart of" you know? some of us remove ourselves from it you know? so I think that yeah I think that people were, I think its fair to say people were inspired by it. is that what you’re asking?

Yeah kind of, yeah basically, were people inspired? I mean not that you guys would know but maybe do you guys believe that it helped people to come almost to terms with themselves. A lot of times there is that avoidance that "I’m just gonna put it away" and to see it brought out and on display is probably I don’t know I would imagine it would be I mean even for me it was so cool. I could identify with everything that was happening in that room. do you guys I mean I can tell but do you guys believe that it did something more than just like what it started out as?

VERO  I think it was something bigger than we ever imagined. I knew people would come out but I didn’t think that people were gonna come out and I thought people would think it was cool. I mean to be moved, I mean people still come up to me and say whatever "you guys that was the most beautiful thing" "2015 was the most beautiful thing I saw" or the best show, or 2016 maybe we’ll do another one? I mean for me its bigger than I could ever imagine. On an emotional level

DJ BROWN AMY  I mean in this way we did this project because we were like "we wanna represent our experience" and it kind of goes back to when your a kid and when you’re a queer
kid and when you felt like you were the only one. maybe we just felt like we were the only ones but we weren’t obviously. There were so many people.

VERO we have a video of it and every time I see it, people were spilling outside and people left showing me pictures and I’m like "oh my god there was hella people in there" and its not just that it was popular, it was a vibe, it was 2 cultures out there too, like the homies, young queer kids, older OGs and people were like. and the city needed it because people were like "back in the day parties" so it also provided that. we had the setting but we didn’t know that all of that was going to happen. but I do think people were moved by it. I only know from my personal interactions.

DJ BROWN AMY you walked into that opening night and you just like...there was nothing but love and positivity.

VERO I was high from it

DJ BROWN AMY I mean the cars outside. we had a speaker playing music on the sidewalk and on the inside. It was like what I imagine the mission being back in the day like in the 80s or something [long deep breath] it was cool.

VERO and I wanna say like I understand why in a way people react of like fear of losing the mission when people say we're not from the mission, I don’t think I agree with it when you have, when you feel like you have nothing, all you have is reactions sometimes. You know something was happening at my friends church and all these black folks were getting upset with him. and she goes its not really the people are saying that and I go "yo that’s all they have is to react" that’s all people been, you're just gonna react and make it bigger than it really is. and I have some understanding of the burning of the building or whatever but

KARI and I also think that uhm I mean we all are apart of different communities. I think that people often stick with their own communities. I do feel like VERO in particular is like just an unusual bridge between some of those communities. A lot of people that she grew up with aren’t necessarily out of that world and she for many reasons, partly just who she is, but partly because she’s queer, partly because she’s an artist, and partly as an advocate for homeless people where she sees a lot of the people she went to school with and grew up with in hard times. It makes it a really unique bridge. and with her family connection with the car club. I mean we all brought something to it but I feel like if were talking about the past and the mission she is a unique bridge and we all add a lot to that but also it takes on...well I don’t know, I think what I want to say is that there are so many parts of a person you know? obviously queerness is a huge part of a lot of or can be apart of your community and your social life and identity but I feel like to me it points out that there is all these other aspects to your life and your social relations and how you interact in the world and that’s the nuance of what I feel like the event of the opening brought out was that there is all these bridges there and that comes from being a human being and not just being a queer person of color or an artist or whatever. but that is kind of what is bigger as well.
VERO the connection. Yeah I found most of the drama, I kind of knew like there’s gonna be someone tripping out about TQS, and were ready. and I also thought that KARI was not of color. and I know it never came up,

K but its a fact

VERO and I was like "there gonna go off on KARI because she’s the white one" but it never came up, I’m just bringing that up because that actually was one of my things, I was ready for that, but I wasn’t ready for a mural getting burnt.

DJ BROWN AMY I also think that people being upset kind of...I appreciate that. I appreciate, obviously not the violence, but what really made me think about appropriation.

VERO yeah you were really concerned about that you know

DJ BROWN AMY everyone is entitled to their ideas and opinions but...

VERO and you were saying that thing about cultural appropriation like the black oldies

DJ BROWN AMY yeah if you really wanna get that deep with it

VERO and you were saying that they were just posers, but

KARI on the original album covers

DJ BROWN AMY but also no one actually knows the history of the actually pictures. those people might not have been lowriders. we think they’re from SJ

VERO but its kind of cool that we cant get that information

DJ BROWN AMY that’s what makes the albums cool

VERO and the albums are bootleg, they were appropriated too

DJ BROWN AMY and I don’t wanna say it was appropriated but I think its important to talk about appropriation. I think its a thing that happens all the time and it sucks

VERO can someone be possibly appropriating something? because artists appropriate

Yeah like you sample

VERO yeah that’s appropriation

DJ BROWN AMY but I feel like there are different kinds of appropriation are bad. Like a white person wearing a headdress is wearing a headdress its complicated, you know what I mean? its fucked up but its like any one that’s not native. So I’m not a lowrider so can you appropriate?
Am I appropriating lowrider culture because I don’t have a lowrider? Can I appropriate something in my own culture? I don’t know! [laughter]

KARI have you seen the footage from the documentary? with all the lowriders in the mission. not everyone had a car and they were apart of that culture.

DJ BROWN AMY if you wanna think about it too, if you wanna go even deeper than that. its a class thing, people cant afford cars. not everyone could afford cars. I know I sure as hell couldn’t have. My family couldn’t afford it. Its like we can go there too. we can take it deep if we really wanted too.

VERO what do you call that? when you deconstruct?

DJ BROWN AMY but that shit gives me a headache so I don’t even wanna do that

VERO yeah and I think for us were not, we wanted to create and make something, I mean we thought about things, but we didn’t want to take anything away from the original idea.

DJ BROWN AMY there were specific things that were really important to us. Obviously the cars, having cars in all the shoots, having them be all Latino folks in the photos. See that is that would have been weird....never mind don’t even want to talk about that. what was something else? that we were like...I mean obviously queer.

VERO oh we tried to like... transmen.

DJ BROWN AMY we wanted to try and like use the spectrum. But we could’ve used people who weren’t able bodied. we did what we did and it was amazing. We would have done it again, we might do things differently

KARI and I think that uhm, I didn’t want it to be like a fashion shoot. and its hard in a way because you are posing and you’re asking people to give something of themselves and there is a lot of claiming. and its like it s hard to know what they’re even claiming. and I know when we did the shoot with Amy and her girl friend, or well wife, Sarah, I felt like I really and then and that was the first one so there was so much more to think about after that. I really wanted Sarah to be claiming Amy and I was thinking of ways it could be apparent in it. with Juanita More I wanted her to be claiming the city and the cars in the photo

DJ BROWN AMY I feel like you got all of them, but with that one, you really killed it

VERO KARI was also working with the idea when someone said not wanting the queer bodies on their car being naked so you were thinking about

KARI well I feel like that happened in all of the shoots. that is another bridge because they’re all over the cars, and that in itself is a way to make connection and it happened through the shoots.
VERO like Natalie and Steven, the one sitting on the car and she’s like, she was the woman who didn’t want naked bodies on the car, we were so nervous about her and him being on the car

KARI oh yeah and let me...well do you have any more questions?

I actually went through all the topics and questions I wanted to ask, do you have anything else you wanted to share?

KARI well I wanted to share with you

VERO I just want to thank you for this

[conversation about IS]

Well this is just an idea but if I were to get funding would you guys love to come out

[all yes]

KARI of course!

DJ BROWN AMY and talk!

Talk and bring the exhibit with you and have it at the school.

VERO In Ohio?

DJ BROWN AMY damn!

[talk about IS Seminar]

VERO I just want to say thank you because I love when...for one I wanna say thank you to your parents for supporting you in school, and I think this is so important for our project and its academic because its preserved on another level and like I, I just thank you for doing that, and being interested in our project. It means a lot to us.

No thank you, its awesome.

DJ BROWN AMY I feel like we can talk about it forever, its like do you got 2 more hours?

KARI also I mean I feel like I didn’t really have, I have my head up my ass at your age, so I’m impressed.

VERO yeah were very impressed.
Al Lujan

A good place to start is how TQS approached you about participating in the project, how you felt, were you excited? What did it mean to be apart of it?

AL: Ok, so you know Vero Majano approached me and asked me if I wanted to do a photo-shoot. And I didn't have a really strong reaction, until we showed up at the park, and I kind of started visualizing what their idea was. It was kind of fun being out at the park with other people, other queers, and just kind of recreating this diorama at the park in a public place with trans guys with their shirts off, me with my shirt off, you know? All these kinds of body things kind of start popping out. But it was exciting, I still couldn’t really imagine the scope of it. You know you just kind of pose, you don't know what the final outcome is going to be, or what the installation is going to be presented. Between the time we shot and the time it showed, it was quite, almost a year?

VERO Mhm

AL So I pretty much had forgotten about it

And so did you go to the opening?

AL I did

And how was that?

AL Oh my god! It was so emotional. It was beautiful. It was beautiful. You know, walking up 24th St. and from a distance seeing the bombers kind of lined up, all ready....brought me back to...I grew up in East L.A. and I would tag along with my sister, or my mom would make me tag along with her to chaperone, but my older sister and I was a 6 or 7 year old, to Whittier Blvd. to the lowriders going back and forth, not even understanding what the appeal was. Back then, you were just kind of driving back and forth and stopping at the gas station, but you know, you notice people are flirting and all that kind of stuff. So it brought that back immediately. I was just like "Oh wow..." and then the crowd, the crowd was already, I got there early, and it was already like really starting to fill up and you know to go in and then to see every piece and all the different participants, you know, what was really kind of amazing was that I moved from SF back to Oakland, God I think its been over 10 years, so all the people that were my peers, that I hadn't seen in a while, some people moved away, some just kind of lost connection, to see them was kind of emotional too, you could feel it, you could see that they were experiencing it as well. So
yeah, a couple folks would approach me like teary eyed and decked out in their fine threads you know?

Could you talk a little more about the day that you did the shoot? Kind of..you started talking about it a little bit, but kind of kind like just the fact that you were there and your life and your experience was being highlighted within lowrider culture as a QPOC and also being there with other transmen and kind of do the same and saying "I'm here, and I'm not going to leave"

AL Right...Uhm, it was interesting. You know...to participate in this kind of group activity. One, I really love to support artists whenever someone says "I'm doing this or I'm doing that" I'm always down for that. You know, there's times where I feel like I'm really shy and I can't talk to people, but there are times when I'll do whatever you want, you want me naked at a park? Let's go for it! But what is interesting about that part, just setting up that tableau was that...that was...you know, in my youth I was kind of an outsider to that because my brother would not bring me into it. And so he kind of, not because he was trying to protect me, me and my brother had a really kind of rough childhood, we had a rough relationship, so he was really evil, really mean, really really cruel. Like mentally, physically we would always fight. So he would exclude me, he didn’t want me to hang out with his friends. So I did a little bit of that with my sister, but you know girls, you have that little boy tagging a long... So I didn’t really get to participate in that and so kind of coming to this park, to other brown queers, you know, setting up this thing that you would do in your youth with other guys it was kind of nice, kind of very welcoming. So yeah, it was cool, it was early morning, and one guy was drinking beer, he was kind of buzzed, were all just different people, one of the guys I hadn't seen in a long time, kind of just following under the direction of the photographer and Vero and people kind of trying to keep their eye on the set and that it was perfect. It took a while, but it didn't feel like it was taking long. It just kind of went. But then you know, ok put your shirt on, were done, you want instant gratification, you wanted to see the photos, I think I had somebody take a photo, and someone told me "Don’t publish that!" so I got that warning. It was a fun day, and I had never been to that park.

[Vero's phone rings]

AL Oh Vero...Come on.

[Laughter]

Can you elaborate on why you think TQS is important to anything? To the community?

AL Right. I think for anyone who grew up in this culture, with siblings, or even may have been in the closet in this culture, where they didn't feel comfortable to come out or if they were obviously very feminine or very butch, what they had to deal with or how they coped and whether they fled or they stayed or they dug their roots in, for me in high school. I was already not in, not welcomed in it by my brother and his friends, and so I gravitated to being an outsider in another way, and that’s right when punk rock music started coming in and that was very welcoming and was like freaks and outsiders and outcasts and that is what I felt like in East L.A. and I'm a queer and I didn't know any other brown queers you know? There was no internet, no cellphones, you picked up a weekly gay newspaper, I would take the bus to Hollywood, to see
what was going on, but I never really connected with anyone until my first year in high school. So I got bussed from E. L.A. to W. L.A. so that kind of changed things quite a bit, and I lost my train of thought here. What was your question?

Just why you think this project is important?

AL ok, so in coming back and being able to participate in something that may have been uncomfortable or painful, or something that you were excluded from I thought was really empowering and you could just feel it in a lot of the folks and you could just feel that a lot of the folk had a lot of pride. It was really important in that, the owners of the bombers were kind of inter mingling, there were some drag cholas, and you know, everyone was very respectful of each other, everyone was very welcoming. Every little moment you would see someone so excited. And many people I think return back to the gallery to see the show. I know I did. I took different people who didn’t see it that night. I brought a friend, this white girl, she's very young, totally not in her scope and she was kind of amazed, she was really like, moved that there was this tight community. Yeah it was almost like for a night you get to go back and live this life. What's funny is when I was in the navy, I bought an old bomber, 52 Desoto, that I loved and my brother, he was so jealous!! I was just like yes, but it wasn’t practical in LA and I was in the navy, and I’m just driving around, it was my primary transportation, and it would break down on a weekly basis, because I was using it like a Honda, but it was this big old green bomber with a visor with a visor and suicide doors, and I would drive by the cholas and they would be like "yeah" and I would be like "yeah [laughter] I’m back!" Yeah so I think it was important, even for young people that, they’re in their neighborhood and they’re represented. that’s powerful. that’s really powerful. I remember, it was over 10 years ago and I can't remember the artist's name but he had a show at Galleria that got defaced. The window was broken. and it was these glass panels that depicted the pope and Fidel Castro kissing or just homoerotic imagery of well known figures and I remember that getting defaced and that concern that maybe this, this maybe not, this night of the opening it felt safe, but you knew that there was going to be some backlash. It is unfortunate.

The murals right?

AL yeah

Yeah could you talk about that, I guess how it made you feel.

AL you know it is kind of insulting, in SF you know, I don't think anyone doesn't know someone who isn't gay or queer or trans, you know? So it was very surprising. Because we've always been in the Mission, its not something new. I remember walking out on 24th St. near mission and there was like this, I think this was the first time I saw it, this butch dyke just walking around with her shirt off, suspenders, her friend or girl friend maybe, but I was just like holy shit, she was just like I’m a badass dude, and I’m like fuck it yeah, this is your hood, so yeah it was really kind of tragic and the response was great. I they got a lot of press to start that dialogue and then the event. The folks that turned out you know, politicians, writers, artists, I mean they closed off that street to show their support and everyone got a copy of the mural that was really amazing. which was amazing, it was an amazing kind of
gesture for the community, this isn’t going to be up forever, but this is your piece of this moment in time,

Obviously I can tell you're very proud to be apart of the project. I just want to get more of..what does it mean to be a queer person to be included in this conversation, with this culture?

[[Al thinking]]

AL well I think, I just think it is a conversation that has not been had before, and if it has, it had been in a very kind of isolated bubble of, lets say the literary world, where people are coming together with like minds, and this kind of brought it out and made it a little more...you couldn't be in the mission and not know it was there, the mural and the exhibit itself. it brought out good conversations and negative conversations but it was important that a dialogue was started because you know, we've been there. you know some times we were ignored and some times we were outcasts but we were there. I mean I was there that Saturday on Whittier Blvd. you know? Like I said, I was shut out of it by my brother, the one allie I had because he just would not. Mostly because he knew I was gay, at a young age I knew, so he knew. So I think he just didn't want to bring me in. My sister was more interested in boys than her brother so . I think that this culture, hip-hop culture, or low rider culture I don’t think you ever see depictions of anything but straight, the cholas spray-painted on the hoods or the trunks you know? subsequently within the last year I saw a video of like this gay cholo, its like these two guys in a car, its comedy, there is a series, so that I’m sure that kind of stirs up this animosity towards these comedians who are Latino and one of em, if he's not gay, he plays it really well [laughter] and it touches on all those cultural things like the chancla [laughter]

I think I know what you're talking about, its on YouTube, I think

AL yeah.

As much as you feel comfortable, would you mind talking about your relationships...you said your brother knew you were gay without you having to tell him and I guess talk about your relationship with your siblings, do you talk about your queerness with them? How was that growing up?

AL Ok so, [deep breath] you know...so...yeah...I don’t care, uhm so my brother molested me, when we were young, and that was part of him shutting me out. You know his own kind of feelings of whatever that was, so I knew that that, well I didn't know at the time, but as time goes by it was kind of clear, but he was abusive in all ways, my sister would protect me, my mother worked a lot, so she wasn't around. but then my sister started running away and she, this was like my rock, my protector, and she abandoned me for long stretches of time, and she would come back and it would be different, but I think at a certain point, she started noticing too. I would hang out, when I didn’t get to hang out with her and her friends, and I would be like "uh huh" and they would point him out and I would be like "yeah." but I remember this one time, we were at one of her friends house, and they were like "were gonna put chola make up on beto!" and I’m like "no no no" but I’m like *nods head* so they big ol eye brows and you know, so they were pushing me out on the St. so I’m like... at that point my sister was like ohhh he's kind of enjoying
this, where other boys would be fighting, but you know, when I was in high school, early in high school or maybe junior high, I told you I would go to west Hollywood to get the weekly newspaper, gay times, it wasn’t porn, but I would hide it and my sister found it. My sister turned me in. She totally ratted me out. I was really baffled about. and it was really like betrayal, and so right around that time, was when I started getting bussed to the west side, so I was like fuck you guys. on the west side, being gay was already started being talked about not super overtly, but I was out in high school. My first three months in high school in East LA I was not out and there was this one queer really feminine guy who wanted to be my friend and he wore these pink fuzzy sweaters with pearls on them and had orange bleached hair, and I was not ready for it. I couldn’t. I couldn't do it. I’m not ready for all of this. But I knew I was gay, and he knew I was gay, and I would talk about being gay. But it wasn’t until you get into an environment where you feel a little safer and it's not as taboo, not that there wasn't really homophobic, but there probably was and always will be. but I just felt more comfortable and the people I started to associate myself with, in the punk world, before it got all hardcore and macho, it was very like be yourself, you know? wear black lipstick or eyeliner, it was more arty than it was hardcore and I never really, my sister would do this thing where she would bring her friend over and she would be like, oh hear, I have a joint or some angel dust, I would never inhale the dust because I was too fucking scared of angel dust, [V smart] I would see those specials where black guys would go naked and break their handcuffs and go running down the street, so I was like I’m not ready for that. She would bring her friend over and we would smoke some pot, and my sister would disappear, but I think what she was doing was trying to get her friend Angie to seduce me and turn me straight, but Angie was a dust head and she looked like a dust head and was like [laughter] no way man, she already looked like she had chromosome damage. Her eyes looked like she was going kind of cuckoo, and her kids look like cuckoo, [V angel dust babies] so sad, so sad. So my sister knew, but there was no talk, even after she turned me in, there was no dialogue about it. Nothing. It was like we were always in denial. I was very comfortable to not talk about it with her if she didn’t feel...it was hard because we had been so close and I really was, I really did look up to her, I really did. So when she would run away I would feel betrayed and mistreated and not be able to share this new thing in my new life. Like oh look I can go to a disco, a gay disco and dance with guys. I couldn’t share any of that with her. We were kind of strangers again. I graduated from high school and went into the navy, I had my own life. Never had a dialogue with my mom about it which is really kind of sad because there those aspect of your life that you want to share with your parents and you couldn’t do that

VERO you were young when your mom died

AL yeah, I was like 24 or 25. My grandmother and mom died in the same month when I was in the navy. I kind of felt, it was tragic and I was sad about it but I felt kind of free. I’m not hiding anything from anyone anymore. I fell in love, moved to SF and I had no qualms about leaving other family members behind. I have a new life a new partner and I’m going to the city that I really love where you could be yourself and be artist. Even the graffiti was artsy. I felt like....kind of free.

VERO Can I ask a question? Not a question...Just a thought that I had was that it didn’t even come to me when we were shooting your scene, because I was just caught up in what it was going to look like but I thought that image, the original image is so masculine you know?
thinking back that we had these queer identifying men creating that same scene, and it was masculine, it was very masculine the moment we were doing, setting the scene, and I was just thinking about that, you kind of get to step away from the experience, looking back how like some of these images of men is "straight" men is so homoerotic that it was such a masculine homoerotic scene with you and the guys that day. I just thought it was really sexy thinking back to how sexy it was. different young, there was like a butch identified person, or woman, queer boy whatever you call it, I’m just looking back and thinking what a sexy scene it was and that it was very masculine and very queer. I mean one word queer or the other way around, it was really lovely. When you were talking about it I was like "it was kind of hot"

AL it was very hot. And you know, in my whole life, I’ve been attracted to that masculinity with the cholos in my hood, and the punk rock scene is very masculine, and the military, into the leather world. I have always been drawn into that hyper masculinity, those archetypes of masculinity. And you saw that performance. Coming to SF and being able to explore and be an artist and what that means, I was helping this man, a friend of mine said I should volunteer to help. this queer Latino performing arts festival, [V gentevera?] genetevera, {V RIP] and so I was backstage, there was different acts and dancers and poets and stuff and I wasn’t being critical of the other performers during the rehearsal, but I was like I could do this, I have a story to tell, so I went home and I wrote it, and I memorized it, it was about an experience with this guy that my sister knew, named rusty. well they called him rusty because his teeth were kind of rusty. But his name was Indio and he was like red headed but a little dark, he was like totally unique looking, he was amazing. So I did a performance around this experience with him and him being ostracized and me being like what the hell is going on. Later on I wrote another piece called La Lorna that had to do with my relationship with my bro and of being queer. You know when we were young I would pick fights so that we could have the closeness of being head locked. That is what I craved because I didn't have a dad. This was the only male figure in my life, even if he was an abusive kind of relationship, I, and this is common in DV cases, you’re all I got, so I’m going to tolerate this, so I would instigate shit because he looked different that me, he was darker skinned, me and my sister would be like "you’re adopted" and he had a really bad temper so it would just trigger him

VERO yeah I just want to say that AI is one of the first performances I ever saw, and I know I repeat this to you all the time, but I had no idea that you could do that, that your story is art, and also I didn’t even have the language then, like telling your POV as a queer person, I remember being blown away because the performances were good but then I saw that that I could relate to and I’m like yo you can do that? Al is one of the performance artists that I’ve always been inspired by, he was apart of a performance group called Latin hustle, you should look em up. I wanna go back to the poses that you were posing for us, I was just thinking that you weren’t acting or posing, your bodies already knew those poses. Its not people pretending or acting it out, when I think about it, even now, their bodies, they already knew that pose, Kari as the photographer moved it a little for the angles, but it was never like this person isn’t getting it right because they don’t understand it, but because those poses were internal, you’ve been carrying those poses with you, even as, whatever desire, I'm just separate from..you guys have been carrying those like a language, you speak it.
AL if you were to take any of us and say "put em in a garage with other cholos" that stuff comes out inherently, it's natural, your toes come out, your shoulders go back, it's a really good observation.

Even with Mayra, the picture when we were interviewing her.

VERO she knew it too, but we had to move it around because of the angles, her body knew that pose. it's in you. it's like a birth mark or something, we all have it, we all know, and I think that's why. All the models that were in it, were like no its like this, and were like ok

AL you know what’s a real bummer? I could have been in more photos!

VERO which one would you have liked to be in?

AL I dont' know I’m only remembering the one with the guys in drag, but I know I remember feeling man I could have been in that picture too but it was all good, I was very happy to be in any of it

VERO we'll be sending you prints, but you were saying that you see that in all of them

Yeah definitely, you know we talked about...Kari was talking about claiming things. like claiming culture or SF and you can just...you can see it in all of the pictures you know? the confidence radiates out of the photos and everyone in the photos are saying "this is my life, this is my culture, this is my language. this is me, you can't take it away from me" and you can just see it in every single photo. it is really amazing. everyday after an interview I look through the pictures that I can find online. its just so crazy and beautiful

AL yeah and none of it felt like costumed, other than the drag, but that different, everybody looked like...we just stopped and shot a photo.

VERO especially with Kari..I don’t want a fashion shoot. We were really careful about that. And with the queens, they’re queens, its different, but they brought it, they just brought it. Each image...talking about the generosity, people's time, and people's bringing it. you could set up the best scene, but if they’re not giving it to you, collectively, with the guys, they just gave it. It almost produced a smell. like tres flores or pan or something...but for us we were just trying to get it. but the generosity of people showing up on a Sunday, boys were hungover, still drunk, and that was, even that was sweet to have older guys on it and young boy where we had all been at one point in time. he just took off his clothes without pena with his jock strap on him, and we were like wow, this is hot. I love that about it also.

Yeah definitely. Something that is coming up alot is the generational, its not one group of people its young people and older people everyone is just coming together with this commonality and bringing it you know? what did that mean for you?

AL you know if you look...when you think about oldies but goodlies I mean were talking about over half a century, and in that it endures 65 years is not being exaggerated, 65 years to still like
produce these reactions you know? there are times where I will be up late and I'll just go into oldies mode and you just get into that hole of just like...and it really just brings out so many different feelings, pride, sadness, you know? just remembering some cute boy that you associate or getting your heartbroken, and then you see these young kids and part of it is the fashion still and part of it is the way the music has evolved, yeah its kind of amazing.

VERO what is your favorite oldie? if you had to pick one

AL tears on my pillow, sitting in the park, sad girl, because my sister's nickname was sad girl, so when I hear that song, it always puts me over the edge.

VERO I remember when you told me that story, so every time I play that I think of that story

AL yeah so it was really nice that this event and not only was it visual, it was car culture, there were also 45s and that brought you into this place, they could have just popped in a CD but the 45s, you can hear it.

VERO and there were young girls who...they were like 21 and maybe almost 21 and her parents...one of them, she brought her parents from LA or SD and alot of the records were her fathers, and that connection, the parents were taken back, it was passed down and these young girls playing all these oldies, and I was like "whoa what song is that?" and they all played 45s and one of their names was mousie, so that was cute

AL I had a cousin named mousie. [laughter]

My mom was La Giggles

AL aww, that’s funny! but yeah, SD LA and the Bay, they had subtle differences, but its all there,

VERO its all connected, there was a tree of homies that all connected.

I think I got all my questions. We talked about everything that I wanted to touch on.

Last comments: you know we recently lost a friend [v yeah I was gonna bring that up] and I wish that he would have been there that night because he was very instrumental in queer Latino, in academia, kind of like what you’re doing with q side, he made sure our stories, he was the first guy that said your story is important, Horacio Roque, and he was a PhD and I just found his business card yesterday because I was going through stuff, I was just like oh my god, he was a prof at UCSB. but he struggled with alcohol and it took him out.

VERO that’s a big, I haven’t been able to respond on FB, its just heart breaking. It was recent and I think in proyect he was the guy that stories existed about us, he thought it was so important that the mission queer Latino story was there and I think he would have enjoyed q sides because, I think he would have flipped his wig, because as an academic,
AL it would have been a crowning achievement to see that

VERO the people who came together...I think he did his thesis on teresita in campesino, this older transgender woman, she was a beautiful mess who would sing rancheras and he was devoted to her and being included in history. his devotion to the community to be included is such a loss. Were like..were heartbroken. I think there is going to be a memorial in Feb....he was our historian

AL he was the first to bring it into academia.
Mayra

I’m a little nervous

Oh don’t be nervous. Just think of it like a conversation about your experience with TQS. But can I just have your name

My full name is Mayra Guadalupe Lopez

Ok perfect. Yeah so don’t be nervous. it is just a conversation about your experience with TQS and your thoughts on being a QPOC and someone who is in lowrider culture or like knows lowrider culture. So can you start off by telling me about your process of contributing to TQS and how did they approach you, how did you feel when they approached you, kind of just the beginning stages of it.

So I was a model in one of the volumes...I think Vol 7, right?

V I think...

No 4. So I was a model in V. 4 cover and Vero used to work together so we bonded over our love of vinyl and oldies music and I remember her telling me about the show and I thought it was really awesome and yeah, so she approached me to be one of the models and I was really really excited about being apart of the show. I remember the day we were shooting and I woke up and I was so stoked. I never get up early but I got up early for this. Yeah it was just really nice and fun. The shoot was a lot of fun and I feel like I know this is something we can talk about later but something that really like I think about now after the show is how the space where we photographed at is now some like cross-fit studio.

Hmm really??

That garage has been there forever. Like every time you were on the 14 or the 49 and that was the spot you would always turn and see there. So I am really glad we got to capture that last moment with this place, and this place that was like such a historical part of the mission, and many people's visual memories of the mission and yeah the last time I passed by it, its all black and awful. I’m just really glad we got to photograph that and capture that history, and I’m glad I got to be apart of that before it got turned and gentrified.

Yeah were so fortunate we got it because I think a month after the shoot it was gone. It was just out of business

It just happened like that [snap] you literally walk past and its this charcoal black.

And this was being used?

Yeah this was a garage. We, Kari and I approached the guys who worked there and they were so wonderful and generous, and like "yeah!" I guess like, they were gonna do La Mission in there,
but the actual owner wanted too much money for it. They were just really excited about the project, and like a month later,...it was just a perfect spot. It is a visual landmark. Everyone on the muni knew. Also Kari and I really love it because there are moments with the light and it was so gorgeous. It just worked out. Its almost meant for us to do it. But yeah you’re right, it was just gone right after.

I remember we were photographing that day because its at a spot that’s like so there like busses passing, people driving, and some people would see the cars and they would honk or they would slow down and turn so they could check out the car or just see what’s happening. It felt nice. It felt like it was a part of the community too, people were on the bus seeing what was happening. Yeah

That’s awesome. So my next question is why do you think that TQS is important? To you, or to the community, whether its the q community, the QPOC community, or the mission community. Why is this project important?

That’s a good question,,,

yeah break it down as much as you want

I think its important for many reasons. First thinking about the homophobia that we experienced within Latino communities, yeah there is such a fear of people being gay or queer within our communities and that fear would sort of create this way of like hiding a lot of people where I mean, I think about it a lot like everyone has that tia that didn’t get married and everyone knows she’s gay or queer and no one ever says anything about it, Its like this family thing because like she’s like special or something but its like hidden this constant hiding of other people who may be queer, who are queer, and I think that’s part of the reason why this project is important. Having out Latinos who are out and just saying I am queer, I am gay, I am trans and speaking about it is really important so that we start to break down stigmas within our communities where we start to have these conversations more. yeah so I think that’s part of it, there’s so much homophobia and so much fear and in my experience coming out was something really difficult because my mother. I grew up catholic. For her, her first thought she had this weird thing where she was like well your my daughter and I love you no matter what but don’t tell anyone else because she didn’t want to be associated with something that was gay especially her daughter being gay and I that really hurt me. I think that hurt me a lot. I think it hurt me more that she said accepted me but it was conditional. She didn’t want anyone else in the family to know and I always felt like I was being hidden and being turned into that hidden away in the corner like Oh don’t talk about it. And I...I....its taken awhile and she’s getting more open to it, but it has a lot to do with seeing more gay Latinos in mainstream media and me talking about it more. I don’t think a lot of people don’t have that, a lot of people stay in the closet, unfortunately, because they cant come out. And then I think within the lowrider culture its also that like hidden, its the same thing, like you know but you don’t talk about it. I think something in the panel something came up was that there were home girls that were hooking up with each other or home boys hooking up with each other but it wasn't just, it wasn't talked about, it wasn't acknowledged. In my own personal experience I grew up around lowrider culture because my dad used to be a cholo and he grew up in Salinas. So I was always around the music and the cars and all of that when I was a
kid, and also growing up and hearing his personal stories. And a couple of years ago, he confessed to me, when I came out to him, he confessed to me that he had hooked up with or made out with one of his friends, and at that time, it was another thing with the show, but like it did happen and my dad is super macho and Latino man and for him to be like "I once made out with one of my homeboys" that’s pretty big

That’s huge!

Yeah, its this thing that is not spoken about but it is known. So when all the backlash, when all the pushback was happening from the community, especially Latinos in The Mission saying "that’s not true, stop trying to bring your queerness into this community" its ;like no, that has always been there and what you’re doing is you’re actually trying to stigmatize and shame people who are queer and apart of the lowrider culture and that’s not fair, its not ok, because its always been there. They think with the show, they think it is something new but its like no, its never been new, its something that has always been part of the history. I think that is another reason why the show is really important.

Yeah

That’s a beautiful title. You should write that title down

Which one?

Uh, My Dad Made Out With His Homie

[laughter]

Ohh yeah

We can save it for later, but its a lovely title.

How Can I tell my mom and dad.... that a lovely title.

You guys have stuff in common...

Yeah so my dad is from Compton area and he's always, I like grew up with him building cars and with the music too, there’s a lot of over lap, and its really cool.

Its something that I hold so, I think its like the, my father and I are really close and its a thing that I hold closest to me, whatever may happen, I will always have that music and those memories with him are some of my earliest memories. You know riding around in the cars as a kid with the top down, it comforts me to know that no matter what happens, I will always have that with me. When I miss my dad I just put on a record and I think about, and we still do it, every time I go home, he’s like lets go on a ride, lets go cruising, and we play Stevie wonder and we just sit in silence just listening to the music and enjoy the moment together. Yeah its that special part.
Can I ask a question?

Yeah go ahead

What do you remember cruising to? Is there an oldie that you and your dad remember?

Definitely sleep walk. Definitely. And that’s another thing, but all those little things, like La Bamba. And I know this isn’t my only experience, I have friends who have that same connection with their families and films like La Bamba. Sleep walk definitely, this is not an oldie pero uhm sugar hill gangs rapper's delight. Was like...

Oh that’s an oldie now

Yeah but I remember distinctly. I remember the first time I heard it because it was on a cassette and we were in the garage together hanging out and washing one of his lowriders and he was like "oh you have to listen to this" and I remember the beat starting and to this day, every time, I own that vinyl and every time that song comes up I immediately associate it with my father.

Did you tell your friends and family about the project?

Yeah I did

And did, what was their reaction to the project and your participation in the project?

I mean a lot of my friends were at the opening and that was a lot of fun. That was such a fun opening. I wish you...

I know I wish I was there

There was a DJ and everyone was dancing, everyone was just having...and the cars were out front and everyone was posing in front of the cars, it was a really good night and it was a lot of fun. But a lot of my friends were supportive and excited to see me. I’m a photographer too and I’m not usually in front of the camera, so it was fun, and people at the show were like "hey that’s you!" My parents, I told my parents. They didn’t come to the show, but they did know I was in it and I showed them the pictures and they were really excited about it.

Could you....I don’t know if you have anything to say about the community? The Mural burnings? Could you talk about that and how you feel about that?

I mean yeah it was really difficult to see...I don’t know. It was really hard to see within I think with everything that is happening in the mission, there is a feeling of people needing to connect and really support each other to kind of keep that community there. And that is what I have always associated the mission with is community. I always feel at home there because I go into the store and the senoras are like ohm mija que te garra? its always a feeling a family and community there and that’s why so many people who grew up there or who have even lived
there for a long time, want to be there, there is always a community there. So the feeling of people from your own community trying to attack was really awful. It really felt like...the feeling of feeling unsafe. like with the murals. I was there helping put up the second one and I remember as we were putting it up, I remember cars slowing down saying things like "get your faggot shit outta here!" like people feeling at some points like some really feelings of threat and it was just really awful to feel that and it was just awful to feel it because the fact that some people want to deny that queerness is not apart of that culture or community. Within just saying there’s no queer people in lowrider culture well you’re also saying there’s not queer people in Latino community. and there are. and that was part of it too, like feeling attacked from your own people. yeah so it was really difficult and I just... I think about. I don’t know if I should say but, one of the barrio2barrio was one of the .... so its like an IG

Yeah she talked about it the other day. Well the three of them talked about a little bit. His trolling on the internet. Just instigating.

Yeah around the show and the murals. And this is someone who supposedly calls himself a mission activist. like from the mission and all this stuff and its like how dare you call your self a community member and supposedly for the mission community and then you’re creating these toxic attacks to your own community. How hypocritical is that? It was just awful... Yeah and that account is still around I’m always like "ew"

Yeah during the show I was looking at it because I wanted to keep track of what he was talking about.

Yeah and he made actual threats against the show and people.

He instigated. He was like "someone needs to go do that" I mean he was an instigator.

yeah and I mean this is someone who says that they’re apart of our community....

Yeah

Yeah so

That is very frustrating.

Sorry I’m just thinking about everything.

Can you tell me at the opening , what kind of conversations were happening? Were people having conversations around the show and not...and what they saw...and not the artistic part of it but more about their own story...do you think you shared that with people? You know you seeing it and people be like "oh that reminds me..." of like your beautiful story of your dad.

Uhm, I don’t....I’m like trying to remember. That was a while ago, there was drinks involved. I did have conversations with people around "oh cool you’re apart of the show, how did you come to be apart of it? how did the show come to be?" there were people, I did hear people having
conversations around just like the photographs and just admiring, I think the show just brought a lot of nostalgia for a lot of people. I think that is what really...like what I remember a lot about the show is people looking at the pictures and remembering seeing the albums or thinking about the music, and also having the music playing at the same time. I don’t know it felt like everyone was transported to a time where everyone was so happy. And then there was a wall where you could write. What was is?

the dedication wall. Dedicated to the one I love.

yeahhhh and people were going nuts over that. it was so great to see people writing little love notes to each other. It wasn’t just queer people. It was hetero couples, it was people writing love letters to the mission itself, it was just really nice to see the nostalgia being pulled out of people and for people who didn’t know a lot about low rider culture the show coming in and kind of understanding more. And getting more first hand experience. I think there’s like a very interesting phenomenon recently within the last couple of years of like chola culture and lowrider culture being very fetishized. The one that really upsets me a little is the Selena, everyone being like....I had something like that recently. Some one was like "omg do you know Selena?" and I just [SIGH] DO I KNOW HER? [BOTH] but yeah I was like don’t even look at me right now. I don’t think a lot of people have the first hand experience the way that we do, or a lot of people do. Even just the associations of strong feelings with it. And its very interesting to see how its all become very pop. Like I see all these girls on IG.

Its one of the biggest Chicano....there are stories like....

Like that company Bella Dona. and all those girls associated with that...its very like...its so funny to me because my tias are, and I just saw them over Christmas, and they were making fun of me because I walked in with my red lipstick and hoops and they were like "oh look at this chola" and they were very like....they were very Salinas Cholas and its just funny to see them now as just they’re all chola moms and then seeing these girls who are like 20 and very exaggerated, with the lip liner, but for them its an aesthetic, and its this kind of like "oh I’m gonna look really hot in these booty shorts and stuff on the lowrider" but not having the real life experience like my tias did where they....it wasn’t always that pretty. there was a lot more to it, a lot more machismo, and a lot of sometimes violence. The neighborhoods where lowrider culture are not the nice neighborhoods of the city, they were the poorer.

And the girls were not nice to each other. You know they say mean girls, but there is nothing like a mean chola. I think that’s real too, I remember the fights I used to see. And it was mostly with girls

Ruthless

That’s why hoop earring are quick release.

[laughter]
But that’s yeah, that’s something that is so, it is just blowing my mind I guess how its becoming more and more this thing that is being appropriated and how, I don’t know, that’s something that is really special about TQS, the show allowed people to talk about their experience with lowrider culture and being queer in a way that is not appropriative. We're actually just talking and being real about why we love the cars why we love the music and why it's important, that’s why they are apart of us as opposed to just showing up. Like I just didn’t draw my eyebrows on and show up and be like I’m gonna call myself a chola. I came in, I wanted to be apart of the show because....

you just gave it to us

[laughter]

and I liked the way you said it was so nostalgic. when you said that I feel like that night or the show, its like, its not necessarily that were included but when you have memories of this, and when you said nostalgia it made me think of queer lowrider kids, they can include, they can be present in the nostalgia you know what I mean? Since like....something...nostalgic, you could still be an audience participant but with what you said, and I think and we were present, we were in that nostalgia. You know what I mean? Does that make sense? Collectively when you said that like and its so much deeper, the photos and stuff look really great like aesthetically, but if you were to go deeper into the culture, there is so much pain separate from being queer and you are queer in this painful culture. its very painful, I mean there is a lot of violence in it

there is a lot of violence there is a lot of sadness. you know I think for a lot of us, we, I had uncles who were killed due to a gang violence or a drug overdose that were prevalent in the culture and I think those are the things that really kind of upset me about this weird appropriation thing happening because its not acknowledging any of that. You're just taking....Even if its Latinos. You're just like ripping off the make up and putting it on. And throughout the show I talked to a lot of you know, home girls from the mission who were born and raised there, who are older and who are veteranas now. And she was saying it just upsets me because they don’t understand what it used to be like ad they just put their eyebrows on and their lip liner and they think they can call themselves a chola, and that’s not at all how it is. But this show I think did allow for people to talk about their experiences in a way where we could show our visibility and hopefully other queer Latinos can see themselves, you can be, you are a part of this

I’m noticing...the conversation about appropriation and also this conversation about the mission being gentrified. It really comes together in one really, you know? and this project addresses all of that, you as QPOC were being included in this nostalgia and this picture is representative of the gentrification, I mean it turned into a cross fit gym which is like the epitomes of gentrification.

I remember when the kind of backlash or pushback was happening and they were like "but some of them are from LA" pero lowrider culture was....

that’s where it originates
yeah and its like san José or Hayward. it is not just in the mission it was all over CA and so its just that because one of the models is from La doesn’t mean they cant be apart of the show because you don’t know what their connections are and the culture and the communities. You’re jus making an assumption about them

I had someone tell me this, Ray Baporan., he works with a lot of kids with gangs stuff. We've done film stuff together. He said you know you Vero you gotta understand you're working with a very conservative folks, they're....a lot of this community is anti-abortion, very macho. If they weren't homies you would think they’re republicans. How conservative they are about everything. Even like sex. its very particular. Which is very interesting when we said that. I was like ohm very conservative points of views

And thinking about your like you were thinking about what your original project to be...like the machismo in lowrider culture is such....like the objectification....I remember seeing the lowrider magazines. it was hella skinny girls with hips and big boobs,

no chola looking

no! not chola looking

no they weren’t

eyeah I always wanted to do.. I mean this is just a fantasy show. its like the back of the car where the paints are...have that but have Latina trans girls and different sized girls you know just like...I mean that would cost a lot of money. but just to use the...but I don’t know it would just be badass to just get a car you need hella funds but like way down the line when QS gets hella money...to continue the queerness of lowriders but of other ways. but that would be, to have them...because I’ve seen shows where they’re just parts of cars. it would be great to get like dulce de leche

yeah

but she’s a big ol girl too, she’s in one of our images

Yeah its and not just like, now I’m thinking about how important, I don’t know. I just thought about Love and Rockets, the...we were just talking about how the queerness is so apparent between Maggie and Hopie in that series and their genuine love for each other and that's in a fictional part of LA where its very lowrider influenced. Like Speedy is a big part of the story and the locas. The loca series. So its really interesting how some people can embrace queerness in that way but then feel some sort of like anger towards the same thing being shown

and that’s what you want to work on
yeah I actually, in the future, this is like my future, but I want to, I would like to do a show reimagining the entire, certain images of the comic and do a live action. Photographing Hoppie and Maggie with real queer women and queer men.

That would be really cool.

Yeah so that’s my future thing.

So do you feel like TQS gave you more impetus and drive to like continue this conversation of queerness in lowriding. Or was it always something of interest to you?

Yeah well I think TQS also kind of inspired me with this project. I just had reread the Love and Rockets around the time of the opening. I photographed in Jan and I didn’t really see, I saw some of the pictures the day of but I didn’t see it until the when the show was opening. Seeing how you can reimagine these past images in your own way. And bring a different story to them really inspired me with looking at these comics and reading these comics about these really like bad ass women who are just in love with each other, and its com- its so real, they love each other and then they don't and there’s someone else who comes, but they still hold, even towards the end of the series, I just read the last one that came out, but Hoppie always holds a torch for Maggie and Maggie always, even whoever she ends up they always have this connection. Yeah I wanted too....I know the comics are a big part of people, people who are coming out, and people have that sense of familiarity and safeness. I want to reimagine that and I wanna photograph people who felt that connection with the comics and put them in that place and give them that place and give them the opportunity to tell their own stories and share those feelings with those images in the same way that TQS was done.

Whatever help you need, let me know. Especially about grants you know. Start small and build it up. But yeah I think its really special that there is visibility to the queer community anywhere and Latino culture because I think its so needed, and especially more the narratives that are more familiar because I think about who you know that’s gay in Latino culture, but he’s like famous gay man. Which is cool he came out and he’s a father and really open about it. but female wise, the only person I ever really think about is like Chavela Vargas who was very open about her queerness and then like Frida Kahlo so they’re like. We don’t really have that now.

Yeah definitely. I think I got all my questions. Do you have any more questions?

No...lets see...ok yeah, what’s....out of the whole series, ESS, what is one of your favorite songs on that? I know its hard. One that comes to mind.

Oh god.... I don’t even know if I remember all the songs on the series...uhm... Brenton Wood's Oogum Boogum.

I thought you were gonna ask which was my favorite cover.

Oh yeah, out of the originals.
My favorite is the 3. I think Dulce de Leche are the 3 girls in the back of the truck and they’re just owning it and badass. and I have that cover and I have a little altar that I built and I have it on my dresser and I see it every morning and I see these three like bad ass Cholas owning the scene. I love waking up every morning and seeing that on my dresser.

Yeah we talked a lot about what that should look like. We really loved the way it looked, but how can we make it different? so we were like lets bring in the girls.

It was Persia

Dulce de Leche and young boy. and we didn’t even...they brought it. they came dressed like that, they had been up all night and they just gave it to us.

Yeah

Yeah

Have you seen that image?

Yeah, its one of my favorites.

Yeah and I think that was so beautiful bout the project was the exchange what you gave us there. I really do think that was the exchange. We were actually surprised how people were so excited to be in it you know?

You were surprised??

I think we were always surprised. Not surprised. but like the gratitude that we were so grateful but then people were grateful to be in it. And then the way that it was...everybody just said yes to us and I think that it was such a beautiful exchange of gratitude and the way that everybody just brought it. I was surprised...people just would say yes, what time you want me there?

yeah, I live in Oakland, and I had to leave super early and I was so stoked and the morning of I got up and was like yes! and then right after I had brunch with a friend in the mission and I was so excited about it.

One thing that’s important to my project is the experience of...the interaction with family and coming out and living with your family and their reactions to your queerness. can you talk a little bit more about that, as much as you’re comfortable?

oh yeah I’m super comfortable talking about it...my coming out was so interesting because...I told my dad first...no I told my mom first. and I told my mom and its so interesting because I saw this similar narrative in a film and I just balled because I remember....my mom is a hairdresser and she always cut my hair as a kid. so I was home one day and I wanted my hair cut so we were out in my garage and we were sitting right next to one of my dad's...he was this beautiful mustang. Anyways we were sitting next to the car and she was cutting my hair...I had ben
keeping it inside for so long and I was in a relationship with someone that I really loved and I just really wanted to tell my mom I’m in love with someone and yeah she’s a girl but its fine. I’m in a really good relationship and I’m with someone who genuinely loves me, and it was so intimate because she’s like touching my hair and doing something with me that she has always done with me and I’m in this very vulnerable position with my head down and he hands running through my hair. and I just started crying and I just couldn’t stop crying and I was just balling and she stopped and said what’s wrong? and I couldn’t stop crying and I was shaking and finally I told her and she just had this like...Ok? you can stop. and then once I calmed down a bit is when she said you know I love you and I accept you but I don’t want you telling other people. And the first thing I heard was the I love you and accept you so at first it was fine but then there was the conditional thing like don’t tell any one else in the family which of course I didn’t follow. And then for a while she just wouldn’t talk about it. she was told me that’s your life in SF or Oakland. That stays there, and its like the separating...and it took her a long time to finally like come around to like this is who my daughter is and its not changing because she was like its a phase and I was like no its not. and when I told my dad, his response was oh what’s your girlfriend's name? what’s she like? and we just talked about it. and he wanted to know what it was like dating a woman. It was so different. With him there was no lets process our feelings and maybe it has to do with him having a similar experience or having grown up in a different culture than my mom did. She grew up super conservative and super conservative. But this past thanksgiving one of my friends who is trans ended up coming home with me to Salinas for TG and it was in a completely non-romantic sense. but it was still really big because I’ve never ever brought any one home and then I’m bringing my friend who is like very openly trans and I was really scared and I talked to my mom before because we were going with her family who is like super catholic and I was like I don’t want my tios to say anything. if any one says anything about queerness or anything homophobic. and she was like "aye mija you know my family is not like that" and I was just like "][chuckle] mhm I know that they are but I’m just saying" and then the day of I was like really nervous and it was fine. my whole family was super open and wonderful and then they were like just asking, it was Lou, do you know Luciano?

Yeah, no but I know who he is.

They were just asking him all this questions.

He’s very charming too

Oh yeah by the end of it my tias were like were gonna go visit you in Miami. but it was really nice to see how I can bring that into my family and them not, the reaction not be...I think we set more fear in ourselves than is actually there. I was like they’re gonna throw us out. Also keep in mind that were sitting in a living room where there is Jesus on the cross everywhere and pope pictures and were like talking about oh yeah all these things we do in the city but I went to visit them over XMAS and one of my tias was like oye tu amigo Luciano como esta and I’m like oh yeah he’s fine. and she was kind of itching at it, like so you two, and I’m like no were just friends and we started having this conversation about queerness and being and that there are trans Latinos and being gay. she just surprised me with how much she knew. she was like oh yeah por que if you’re gonna transition you have to take hormones right? I was like this is a 60-year-old woman who still doesn’t speak any English and has worked in the fields her entire life
and she’s like up with the knowledge. so I was like how do you know this? but also I was really appreciating that. I think the culture is shifting and that’s in telling these narratives and being more open and putting ourselves out there we are making a difference and we are changing and making these conversations happen in our communities and our families and I think that is important because the younger generations, the people who are coming after us its gonna be easier for them, its gonna be easier for them to come out and its gonna be easier for them to come into a community where families will hopefully be more accepting and be more aware around lingo and pronouns and things like that

Yeah I agree

Yeah that’s a big deal...a 60 year old to be doing that. but it was really wonderful and she was just like. She had so many questions and I was more than willing to answer whatever questions she had.

She sounds like my mom. Last statement just transitioned into my last topic and question which is...I mean you've kind of already answered it in terms of creating...through this project you’re kind of creating the visibility and more accepting communities and queerness and this culture but do you feel like your participation in this and your experience is adding to that? And did TQS help to...despite some of the backlash with the mural, do you feel like it is bringing queer Latinos into a positive light and creating that visibility and acceptance into your lives?

I do think so I would like to think that I’m contributing to this in a positive way but I do think it is bringing visibility and I think despite all the back lash, something good that came out of it, there were community conversations and maybe that wouldn’t have happened without people being vocal about not liking the show, but there were conversations that were had and people who were standing up and speaking about like hey, AL Lujan is, like deep. From the hood, from like deep mission roots and I think that is something...its the way we are going to bring more visibility and acceptance is having these conversations. the are not always easy but I think its important. I work with youth right before the show and that was something that always came up with a lot of the Latino youth, especially with the undocumented queer youth, like feeling like they didn’t see any visibility or feeling like they had any acceptance from their families and having these conversations and kids being able to see their images and reflections in these pictures is really important and hearing the stories and narratives for feeling more accepted. Now I’m like thinking about La Mission and how they did the...I don't know that was like a weird....

La Mission?

Yeah but that ... was more associated with Castro gay culture.

But I remember when I went to see it at the Kabuki and it was like...you know there was hella gente in there and they started making out and they were like "aw shiet! what?!"

[laughter]

but yeah that’s what somebody said, that was la mission, and you’re tripping off this?
yeah there were two dudes making out and that’s pretty...

But we was white right? I think next we gotta take it to brown on brown. its a little cheesy but the whole father son thing is really...and Benjamin Bratt is so lesbian fine. I mean he looked good, we were all like damn!

[laughter]

but I was gonna say that a lot of men stood up from the hood and were saying stuff like on FB...man youre gonna say any shit talk about remove me from your friendship on this, and I think a lot of men did that. Names, names. Who were like...even a couple of people were like "one of the homeboys who was born and raised here did that." it was good to remember that there was that support, like allies

Yeah there was definitely a lot of ally-ship and that was an important part of it

Yeah definitely

Yeah.

Cool do you have anything else you wanna share? Got it all?

I talked a lot

No you were great. and you should make projects about your father or your family

Oh I am actually. I am working on going to Mexico for a couple of months. My dad is from Sinaloa and he has a very interesting life so I’m actually going to take the greyhound from SF all the way to Sinaloa.

Were kind of. Although we like to think were not continuing the cycle, we all have secrets we'll never tell our family. But this narrative of why we keep secrets...like what is a part of keeping secrets that is us protecting ourselves and our family? and what is a apart of it that we keep secrets that become toxic