

AQUÍ IS ANYWHERE WE CHOOSE TO CALL HOME

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
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ABSTRACT

Jacqueline Negreros draws upon her parents' experience as immigrants in *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home* to highlight themes of tradition, immigration, and assimilation conveyed through memories shared by the artist and her family. She uses food as a metaphorical device to probe cultural attitudes of authenticity and otherness through ingredients that remain traditional and those that have grown with her. *Aquí* centers around the communal preparation of *barbacoa de pozo* – from its roots in her parents' village of Zacapala, Puebla, Mexico to its evolution into *barbacoa al vapor*, using a steam pot, adapted from her family's life in the United States.

Through printmaking and sculpture, Negreros explores the duality immigrants contend with after leaving their homeland for a new nation and how customs can evolve across generations. Rice-embossed paper depicts objects fundamental to the preparation of this meal and signifies cultural and familial traditions. Veils sewn from guaje seed pods and arranged carizzo stalks are relics from the landscape of Zacapala. Collected around Corpus Christi and considered invasive, they form a border between belonging and otherness. *El pozo* in the middle of the gallery is the portal by which everything enters or emerges, a point of origin. Comprised of dirt from the Texas-Mexico border and sand from the beach at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, *El pozo* merges physical spaces from the past and present for experiences to coexist. *La Pancita* signifies matriarchal bonds and the importance of ritual.

The installation and preparation of this meal create an intimate view into the artist's use of food to traverse time, and this supporting paper serves as an archive of her family history and this important recipe.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the kids with smelly lunches.

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once a week since I arrived on the island. Thank you for challenging me and helping me embrace the meaning of, “difficult takes a day, impossible takes a week.”¹

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¹ Kanye West. “Diamonds From Sierra Leone (Remix).” Genius. Accessed May 13, 2022. <https://genius.com/Kanye-west-diamonds-from-sierra-leone-remix-lyrics>

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PREFACE

*Añoras lo típico de tu tierra.
Extrañas el alimento que uno no tiene a mano.*

INTRODUCTION

Las obras de arte que he creado para la exhibición giran alrededor de la historia de mi familia, el pueblo de origen de mis padres, y el camino que ambos llevaron para llegar a este país. Yo como la hija mayor e sido testigo de la preparación de este platillo. Y no fue hasta recientemente que me di cuenta que las formas que e seguido en mi trabajo siempre existieron sobre el plato frente de mí. En mi casa, comida se transforma en un lenguaje de amor. Mi papa como el proveedor siempre se esfuerzo para que había suficientes alimentos en la casa, y mi mama como ama de casa se aseguraba que todo se usaba. Pero los días que disfrutaba más como niña eran los días que me levantaba y encontraba una cabeza de rez en el fregadero o una hielera lleno de carne de chivo esperando las manos de mis padres para transformarse en algo rico.

RAICES FAMILIARES

Born in Zacapala, Puebla, Mexico, my parents were raised en el campo. Living in a small community, everyone knew each other. Children played beisbol and canicas. My father likes to say, “No teníamos McDonald's, pero siempre el puesto en la esquina.” They looked forward to the street vendor that would sell tacos, chalupas, tostadas, and papas. At home, they dedicated time to observing happenings in the kitchen. Once you became of age, seven years old, you were old enough to help.

Barbacoa de chivo en pozo is prepared throughout Mexico. Its roots are indigenous in nature and its transference of ancient knowledge has taken place from one generation to the next with numerous regional variations. In Zacapala, in the state of Puebla, Mexico, the matriarch of the family directs the preparation of the meal. A chivo, or young goat is slaughtered for a celebration or life event. A young goat is important because the meat will be more tender, más suavecito y jugoso. Prepared outside, the earth acts as an oven. A hole or pozo is dug with a

shovel then filled with leña to heat the meat, followed by coals and a layer of maguey, then carrizo² stalks and a tina to hold the drippings from the goat. Subsequent layers of carrizo and maguey are layered on top to separate the different cuts of meat. The thickest pieces go on the bottom followed by the tender filets and, sitting at the top is la pancita, a mixture of blood, intestines, and herbs. A final layer of maguey is set on top, sometimes followed by a layer of aluminum foil or thin blue plastic. The mound is covered in dirt and the meal cooks in the earth for hours (Fig. 1).

My father immigrated to the United States in 1978, and he was seventeen years old when he arrived in Houston, Texas. He missed his mother's sazón dearly and sought food like that from his village. As a newlywed in 1990, he opened a restaurant in New Jersey, *Las Locas Fajitas*, to recreate a slice of home. My parents' marriage strengthened their desire to hold on to their sazón. When they moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1992, a small community from Zacapala gathered on weekends to cook dishes that also reminded them of home.

In Chicago³ my father once attempted to prepare this meal for us in the way he had always known it. Unfortunately, it did not take place. Una de mis primeras memorias es el fumo que eructaba de la tierra en plumones grandes. My neighbors saw smoke and called the fire department. Lo que sigue no recuerdo muy bien porque era tan pequeña. En la memoria de mi papá, los bomberos le dijeron que no podía continuar cocinando el chivo en la tierra. "But I live here, this is my home," he said. The firefighters persisted, "You cannot do that here." Ese día no comimos.

² *Arundo Donax* (Carrizo) is a tall perennial cane related to other reed species. Its reed is similar to bamboo. This reed is used to separate the layers of meat when cooking barbacoa de chivo al vapor.

³ My father has always said it was in Chicago. My mother insists this took place in New Jersey.

Rather than assimilate into the dominant culture and give up on his traditions, my father like so many immigrants in this country, adapted. This can be best encapsulated by the evolution of this meal. In Houston he would perfect the dish as *barbacoa al vapor*, the recipe my family continues to use today. Even all these years later my Tío still teases him for his willingness to figure out how to make this dish in a foreign land. Like my mother says, “depiende de como cada persona se adapta hacerlo.”

AL VAPOR

My parents maintain a connection to Zacapala through the preparation of food. In those early years, it was difficult to find ingredients in New Jersey. By the time we moved to Houston in 1995 the city was ready for us. Ingredients essential to Mexican cooking were widespread throughout the city. Mexican immigration to Houston doubled in the 1970’s and the foodways reflected this change.⁴ The Houston Farmers Market sold ingredients essential to the dishes my parents made: quelites, huazontles, and verdolagas.⁵ My family lived off the land in Zacapala; everything grown was consumed. These wild greens imparted flavors that defined their food and availability in Houston was critical to maintaining their sazón. Today, there is an eruption of ingredients at our disposal. By 2010 the percentage of Latinos increased from one fifth of the residents to one third.⁶

⁴Chrystel Pit, “Tortillas to Riches: Ninfa Laurenzo, Houston, and the Business of Food and Culture, 1973-98”, *Food, Culture, & Society* 17, no. 2 (2014): 246.

⁵ *Chenopodium Nuttalliae Safford* (Huazontle), *Portulaca Oleracae L.* (Verdolaga), and *Chenopodium Album L.* (Quelite). These weeds are part of the Mexican diet. The leaves and seeds of these plants are consumed, eaten either raw or partially cooked. José Arias-Rico, Francisco Jesús Macías-León, Ernesto Alanís-García, Nelly Del Socorro Cruz-Cansino, Osmar Antonio Jaramillo-Morales, Rosario Barrera-Gálvez, and Esther Ramírez-Moreno. "Study of Edible Plants: Effects of Boiling on Nutritional, Antioxidant, and Physicochemical Properties." *Foods* 9, no. 5 (2020): 599.

⁶ Michael O. Emerson, Jenifer Bratter, Junia Howell, Wilner Jeanty. "Houston Region Grows More Ethnically Diverse, With Small Declines in Segregation. A Joint Report Analyzing Census Data from 1990, 2000, and 2010." (2012) Rice University Kinder Institute for Urban Research: <https://doi.org/10.25611/bjy0-nr0n>.

After a disappointing barbacoa experience at a Houston restaurant, they began to experiment. Using leftover equipment from my father's restaurant, they repurposed the tamalera, a large three-tiered steaming pot used to cook tamales. The first experiment combined bay leaves, salt, and a cow head, readily available and cheap, wrapped tightly in aluminum. Every successive time they made it, they adjusted. Eventually, the addition of onions, garlic, and herbs to the water bridged the flavor gap. Their experimental, yet disciplined approach led them to the moistest *barbacoa de res* they had eaten stateside. They could not believe how similar the taste was to la barbacoa prepared within the earth. If they could steam a cabeza de rez in a tamalera, what could stop them from cooking chivo?

The tamalera pot, la olla, succeeded el pozo. The steam from the water was a microcosm of the earthen oven. My parents enjoyed the ability to cook under the radar without having to justify a need to dig a hole. La olla became symbolic of the community that nurtured them, its stainless-steel walls circulated a tradition passed down from one generation to the next. Aquí lo aprendimos hacer porque lo imaginábamos. If an ingredient was missing, so be it, they would adjust as needed without forfeiting the essence of the meal.

I have witnessed this preparation, and only recently have I realized the formal and conceptual aims I craved as an artist existed on the plate sitting before me. In my house, food is a love language. My father as the provider always made sure there was enough to eat and my mother ensured nothing went to waste. The days I enjoyed the most as a child were waking up to find a cow head in the sink or a cooler full of goat meat waiting for my parents' hands to transform it into something delicious.

What I present in this exhibition does not adequately define the vast diversity of Mexican food, rather, this signature dish so integral to my identity is stripped down to its essence and

reformed as a visual homage. I choose to utilize materials that are not traditional or precious in creative practice. I draw with rice, sculpt with seed pods and grass. I gather materials from the landscape of my memory and imagine new ways to give them purpose and meaning. Food is something we experience every day, but the ingredients of this dish are not. In the past these were reserved for special occasions, a celebration, or to mark a big life event. So too, my interpretation of this meal creates an intimate space to share the most interior parts of my life with the public to experience and enjoy.

Aquí is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home presents a body of work inspired by my parents' cooking as a symbol of adaptation, resilience, and affirmation. It weaves together a personal history to redefine multiple visualities of identity through food. No one taught my parents how to adapt their recipes; they dared to experiment to hold tightly to their sazón. The skills they honed would enable them to preserve flavors that nurture our roots.

As the oldest daughter and first-generation American, I am choosing the role of illustrating and archiving our history through this meal, true to the essence of what I know to be us. The works are created through a tactile sensibility of touch, response, and contemplativeness in relation to the food that informs our familial identity and my individual sense of self.

MANO A MANO: THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD

How often do we take our food for granted? As a Mexican American I often forget to thank my beans, and only when away from home did I begin to consider how food shaped who I am. The thick blanket aroma of barbacoa, the crisp sound of rinsed cilantro, la piedra grinding along the surface of the molcajete – food can be the manifestation of memories of cultural heritage served on a plate. The further I stray from family, the more desperate my search for a taste that takes me back.

I experience deeper emotions when I eat dishes that connect me with family and loved ones. Eating a bowl of fideo brings memories of the past. I recall sitting with cousins in my grandmother's kitchen, poking the chunks of aguacate floating above the broth. I remember burning the fideo on the stove my first weekend away at college and calling my mother to listen to her repeat the instructions. It is strange, but simply through the act of eating, I can travel to the past and reexperience moments in time. This in turn reminds me of my relationships with people as it forces me to recall who was with me when I enjoyed a particular meal. Other times when away from my loved ones and my soul needs to be fattened, I search for foods that soothe the noise in my heart:

When I am depressed, jjamppong

When I am homesick, pho

When I am happy, fideo

When I am sick, caldo

When I need comfort, congee

Food was the only way I knew how to connect with my culture as a child. As a first-generation American, my parents did not know how to help me express my Mexican heritage. How could they? They were doing their best to navigate this strange land too. Instead, I began to live two separate lives: my public life expressed in english and my family life en español. My parents wanted us to fit in but not lose touch with what made us who we were. Home became an extension of the kitchen, la carnicería, el mercado, el salón, la iglesia. Beyond these spaces, the goal was to assimilate, to fit in as best we could – from New Jersey to Chicago and eventually Houston. Food became an avenue to connect to our culture, a way for my parents to pass knowledge to their children. After school I would sit at the kitchen table and relay my day to my mother in a mixture of english and spanish. I would watch her prepare lunch and dinner. On the

weekends my dad would make carne asada and sometimes a baked potato we would fill to the brim with pico de gallo. Food became the portal to their niñez in Zacapala, their struggles as a young married couple in a foreign land, and their hopes for us.

Once I was old enough, I would help prepare meals too. As a child my clumsy fingers would pry apart guajes⁷ for salsa, revealing an explosion of bright green seeds. My goal was to be more like my mother and use a singular swift movement to flick, peel, then cascade them into a uniform pile. Some weekends we would make the journey to the farmers market solely for guajes until my parents sowed a few seeds outside by the garage.

For many Latinx and other Indigenous and immigrant communities within the United States, food is a way to connect to cultural heritage and a means for identity to persevere against the dominant culture.⁸ How a person recognizes their self-identity is created by their environment as much as their lived experiences. For many this process is complicated. Identity labels are a social construct and yet it is through this construction that we navigate the world and behave in public spaces.

Most of the food my parents prepared was unavailable outside our home. There was no shortage of tacos in Houston and there has always been a plethora of Tex-Mex restaurants, but my parents viewed them as foreign. I remember listening to them complain when a restaurant's sazón was not right and the food did not elicit a full-bodied experience. Enchiladas smothered in yellow cheese did not align with their expectations. The spices and preparation differed from our

⁷ *Leucaena leucocephala* (guajes). This plant is considered a weed and invasive due to its ability to reproduce quickly. This plant tends to grow in coastal or riverine areas. Ahmed Bageel, Michael D. H. Honda, James T. Carrillo, and Dulal Borthakur. "Giant Leucaena (*Leucaena leucocephala* Subsp. *Glabrata*): A Versatile Tree-Legume for Sustainable Agroforestry." *Agroforestry Systems* 94, no. 1 (2019;2020;): 251-268.

⁸ Anibal Capoano, dir. *Truly Texas Mexican*. 2021; Presented by The Texas Indigenous Food Project, JM Media, LLC. Film.

own because this food is Americanized. And yet, those foodways my parents considered to be other became part of me too.

Food such as commercialized Tex-Mex removes ingredients from their point of origin and realigns them to fit the palate of the dominant US culture. This erasure disintegrates the contribution of Indigenous and cultural culinary practices at the root of these foods and overshadows their contributions to American culture. The term *Tex-Mex* emerged in the 1960's and eventually came to differentiate as its own cuisine from that of Mexico's interior.⁹ In spite of this food's popularity, it is still viewed by many as an insult, as inferior and shows the fragmentation and multiplicity of Texas Mexican culture.

Adán Medrano, a Texas chef and writer produced the documentary, *Truly Texas Mexican*, to define Texas Mexican food along the Southern Texas Border.¹⁰ This film explores issues of identity, family, and memory through his family in Brownsville and others in Central Texas, South Texas, and the Coastal Bend, and highlights the diversity of cuisine labeled Tex-Mex. Medrano describes the food as *Texas Mexican*, acknowledging ways in which they are indigenous to the region. The documentary focuses on food as a central marker for identity by contrasting immigrants who must adapt their food cultures and families who have been here for generations working to retain and pass down their distinct recipes.

Authenticity is a fraught word. Globalization and industrialization impact the availability and variety of foods on the national stage, and the increased visibility of certain foods generates

⁹ Dennis Ray Wheaton and Glenn R. Carroll, "Where did "Tex-Mex" Come from? The Divisive Emergence of a Social Category." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 37, (2017);143-166, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2017.09.003>.

¹⁰ Anibal Capoano, dir. *Truly Texas Mexican*. 2021; Presented by The Texas Indigenous Food Project, JM Media, LLC. Film.

questions about authenticity.¹¹ Foods carry a history within them and tell the stories of dispossessed peoples and those who took over.¹² Jeffrey Pilcher describes authenticity as a construction used to “promote culinary tourism and nationalist ideology.”¹³ This construction acts as a border and perpetuates harmful stereotypes by creating a hierarchy, us versus them. If authenticity is an invention, how do we move from an idealized version of food into something closer to recalling nuestra tierra natal?

Food Historian, Monica Perales, frames authenticity as a device to ask, "How is it authentic?"¹⁴ The dominant narrative that Tex-Mex food is not authentic erases the experiences and community of Latinx who consume this food along the Southern Border. In my later years, I have grown fond of Tex-Mex food. I am not less Latinx for choosing to consume and enjoy them. Houston is a sprawling metropolis of over 2.1 million people situated in Harris County.

Scholar Dr. Arnaldo De Leon notes about the Mexican American experience in Houston:

The fact that the Mexican American community in Houston is the product of historic cultural adjustment, therefore, does not imply the repudiation of old cultural ways. To the contrary, “lo mexicano” lives alongside “lo americano” in the Houston Mexican community.¹⁵

This ability to coexist side by side allowed new expressions of foods to be adopted as an extension of tradition. Mis papas les encantan las salsas picantes. Salsa verde in my household is

¹¹ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food. Cary.” Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2012. Accessed April 22, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹² Anibal Capoano, dir. *Truly Texas Mexican*. 2021; Presented by The Texas Indigenous Food Project, JM Media, LLC. Film.

¹³ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Planet Taco : A Global History of Mexican Food. Cary.” Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2012. Accessed April 22, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Perales, Monica. "The Food Historian's Dilemma: Reconsidering the Role of Authenticity in Food Scholarship." *The Journal of American History* (Bloomington, Ind.) 103, no. 3 (2016): 690-693.

¹⁵ Arnaldo De Leon Ph.D. *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston* (University of Houston Series in Mexican American Studies, Sponsored by the Cente) (Kindle Locations 2862-2864). Kindle Edition.

composed of the following ingredients: garlic, jalapeños, tomatillos, cilantro, y thai chili peppers – lo mas picante, the better. My parents sazón guided them towards embracing flavors from other cultures. Their love for this tiny potent red pepper is so grand, they have planted and sowed countless crops since they discovered them at the farmers market in 1996.

THE WORK

The works in *Aqui Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home* manifest observations of my parent's preparation of *barbacoa de chivo al vapor* in Houston, a memory of Chicago, and my recollections of Zacapala. The significance of the dish is reflected in its ingredients but more importantly in the preparation of the meal and how it has evolved over time – adapting to new circumstances yet retaining its essence and authenticity. These works incorporate traditional art components and materials gathered to elevate and share food otherwise unseen or forgotten beyond the context of home.

This project began in the summer of 2021 while again observing my parents prepare *barbacoa de chivo al vapor* and is the culmination of three years of personal interviews between us to remember, visually express, and archive the significance of this dish. I am tracing how this meal has transformed within the immigrant journey of my parents from Mexico to the United States. Additionally, the works in this exhibition represent my search for belonging. As a Mexican American I have always been torn about my identity. “Who am I” is the question that makes me uncomfortable. Each work strives to fill in the gaps for this question and celebrate the uncertainty. *Aquí* is divided into four components, *El Arroz*, *Los Guajes y Carrizo*, *El Pozo* and *La Pancita*.

PRINT AND SCULPTURE: LOS INGREDIENTES

Once I committed to this idea, using food as creative material felt natural. In the beginning of my experience as an MFA student through the preliminary stages of this project, I dedicated a lot of time in printmaking and sculpture toward exploring and replicating texture. Texture forces the eye to slow down. Before the texture of food is felt across the tongue, teeth,

and palate; it is first experienced with our eyes and then our fingertips. Abject or enticing, texture is a major factor in our attraction or repulsion to food.

Printmaking is a foundation for the work as it is a process-driven experience with a focus on procedures, multiplicity, and sharing. Like cooking, the possibilities between processes are endless. The collaborative nature of printmaking mirrors communal food preparation as it facilitates dialogue between students and their instructors and parallels the passing down of familial recipes, of generational knowledge through oral and physical traditions. Matrices, like recipes, follow a proper order of steps that can be manipulated and reconfigured. Senses are engaged regarding the way materials feel and sound. *Minutiae* is particularly important because it forms the basis for developing practice. A recipe can be followed step by step, but you will miss the connections between the steps if you are not present with your senses and your materials. The sociologist Andreas Reckwitz explains:

“A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, – forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements.”¹⁶

Rolling out a slab of ink is not just a preliminary, preparatory act before printing, it is a multi-sensory dialog between the artist and their materials. In relief printmaking, the printer must be attuned to the energy transmitted between the ink and the knife, glass slab, rubber brayer, and matrix. Feeling the viscosity and listening to the hiss of the sticky ink as it is rolled out, making the slab look like the smooth texture of a lime, the smell of the pigment and binder, and dare I

¹⁶ Andreas Reckwitz. “Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing.” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (May 2002): 249–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310222225432>.

say even the taste of the humidity in the print shop –attention to minutiae helps create a routine to tune in to one’s body, and with practice, act as a transmitter of this knowledge to others.

To create the works represented in this exhibition, I started by gathering my ingredients. For weeks I collected guaje seed pods around my neighborhood before asking friends to help, to bring them into this communal process. I bought rice at the grocery store. I spent hours searching through the clearance bins at Goodwill in search of fabric with color and texture similar to the lining of a stomach. I sought important formal qualities such as scale, texture (natural and stimulated), and repetition to create softness and thus emotional connectedness.

I depend on my body’s ability to react to the work I am creating, assessing, and reassessing – very much like a chef sampling food during preparation to assess its qualities and to fine-tune recipes. One of the most important things I value in my work is the presence of the hand. I move between natural and artificial materials to create works that reflect living between two worlds, upon things that go unseen, to make the invisible visible, and the impressions we leave behind.

EL ARROZ: EMOSSMENTS

These works seek to convey pathways of memory and time.¹⁷ Entering the gallery, one is greeted by the warm glow of three hanging veils sewn from guaje seed pods that partition three 30” x 44” framed works from the rest of the exhibition (Fig. 2). Made from rice embossed into white cotton rag paper with an etching press, the stark images depict tools critical to preparing the meal, the unsung heroes of our kitchen: la tamalera, a three-tiered pot my father uses to steam

¹⁷According to Brady, “The production of any given space also involves the processes that shape how places are understood, envisioned, defined, and experienced.” In addition, “places are felt and experienced, and the processes producing space therefore also shape feelings and experiences.” Mary Pat Brady. “Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies. Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

la barbacoa, el molcajete y tejolote my mother uses to prepare salsa, and el tronco de arbol on which the chivo is traditionally chopped into pieces for cooking in the village.

According to my mother, el molcajete da un sabor más original. Her sisters traded theirs for modern conveniences to save time, so she is the only one who continues to use this tool. The flavor imparted from the dark and porous volcanic rock is unique. Ingredients are pulverized into the rough surface and the stone's porosity allows it to absorb flavor over time, becoming well-seasoned. El molcajete enraptured me from an early age. Listening to its song and fascinated by its texture, I used to hold my breath watching my mother grind the garlic, tomatillos, cilantro, and jalapenos. I was always worried that everything would leak from the many tiny holes.

Rice is one of the ingredients used to season a freshly acquired molcajete. First the stone is rinsed and soaked in water, then allowed to dry. Next the tejolote grinds a puño of rice into powder to help remove any loose grit. This continues until the rice no longer turns grey. Once the rice retains its white color its ready to receive salt, garlic, and cumin seeds to finish the curing process.

Long-grain rice is typically used in this meal, but I chose short-grain for embossing because of its roundness – each used like a pixel to form the full image (Fig. 3). Preliminary photo references were processed using a bitmap to separate the values then they were printed to scale and laid on the press. I placed a grain of rice over the dark areas of the image and spaced them accordingly (Fig. 4). This was not a mindless activity; I had to be present and pay attention to the position of my body. If I moved carelessly or let out a puff of air, the rice would shift, and I would have to start again. This act became meditative and introspective. It became a space to reflect on my connections to family. How many grains of rice has my family collectively eaten? How many memories do we collectively share?

Once the grains were arranged to fill the composition a damp sheet of cotton rag paper was carefully placed over. The paper is so large that a second person needed to help. Then the cushion felt was rolled over the paper and the pressure was adjusted to create tight contact between the rice, paper, blankets, press bed, and drum. As the handle cranked and the bed advanced, there was a loud crunch as the rice broke apart under the pressure. When the felt was peeled back it revealed paper stretched and molded around the grains in the shape of the source image. The sheet was then flipped over, and the grains were released from the indentations by running fingers over them. Each work is a monotype as there is only one impression that could be made from each matrix. The subtleties in each monotype are unique just like the iterations of each meal that I have eaten with my family.

This triptych was hung in the gallery and required direct light to fully express the forms raised from the paper. The images disappear as one navigates the rest of the exhibition space. The ghostly impressions of the embossed rice signify these memories, *La Olla* for Dad (Fig. 5), *El Molcajete* for Mom (Fig. 6), *El Tronco* for la familia en Mexico (Fig. 7).

GUAJE VEILS

*Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil,
tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*

The guaje veils act as a border to divide the embossments from the rest of the exhibition and once you cross over, your eyes adjust to the change of light bursting softly through splits in their horizontal rows (Fig. 8), creating a corona around their edges and casting feathered shadows on the ground (Fig. 9). A few feet beyond rests a mound of dirt emerging from the floor (Fig. 10). Shift your gaze towards the wall and sprawling forms construct *La Pancita*, flanked on the sides with stalks of carrizo (Fig. 11).

Lo Que Tu Siembras is three, 8-foot hanging veils comprised of guaje seed pods sewn together with silk thread. I started this piece after gathering them in my neighborhood in Corpus Christi and near the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi campus. Never in my wildest dreams did I believe I would encounter guajes growing wildly here, much less carrizo. In Houston we either found them at the farmers market off Airline or my parents planted them. I only heard about these plants growing wildly along the river in Zacapala from their stories. But that is the beauty of finally looking with open eyes at the bounty that is before all of us. Once they were discovered, I saw them everywhere.

My material explorations with the guajes began October of 2021. I initially tried to cast them in iron. I was curious if the sand mold could capture their smooth veiny texture. The initial results exceeded my expectations. In the thin contour of the impression, I could see the shape of every seed, every vein, and the stem. I was so excited when we poured. Sadly, the iron never made it past the spout; the mold was too thin. Then I carved deeper sections into the sand and tried again but the mold was destroyed in the kiln. Undeterred, I aggressively pursued other casting methods. I made a new mold from silicone, kneaded the material between my hands, pressed it into a flat sheet, and pushed the guaje into its rubbery embrace. This mold was more successful, it allowed resin or wax to flow freely and harden (Fig. 12). I captured a singular guaje shape as intended, and yet this physical object I held in my hands was fake, a substitute (Fig. 13). The replica would never be as perfect as what nature produced. At this moment I decided they needed to breathe by themselves in their natural simplicity: *these are the seed pods, and these are the threads that hold them together.*

What does a seed pod tell us about ourselves? Can it inform my self-esteem and expression of self? That is a heavy burden for a legume to carry. Gathering these guajes over the

course of months connected me to the earth, it was a way to touch and caress, I imagine, the same plants my parents handled in their homeland. How was this different from sitting at the table in my parents' kitchen? I was alone. For the first time I was carrying my parents' words with me into the world, forming new connections to my identity and sharing that knowledge with my friends. They too noticed the guajes across the landscape and shared seed pods they collected.

Using materials that are unseen, overlooked, or left behind is a creative extension of what I witnessed at home. My mom always finds a new purpose for everything. My connection to food waste is strange, particularly the leftover guaje seedpods. We only valued the nourishment from the seeds within, but the pods themselves hold so much possibility. All these seed pods look the same at a glance but upon closer inspection they are each unique. I discovered they dried into a wide range of hues depending on the season – during the fall, a light brown color; the temperature drop in the winter imparted a deep tone, the color of wet earth.

Before beginning the methodical process of sewing, I first sorted the guajes according to the shape of each pod: straight, wavy, or curly. I took them with me when purchasing silk thread to match hues of rust brown, dark brown, tan, brown, pongee, ivory, cream, and prepared multiple bobbins.

I would select twenty seed pod halves to chainstitch together. I alternated colors for each row between the pod's outside (brown) and the inside (cream). I lined up a pair of seed pods under the foot and fed it slowly, until I ran out of thread or guajes. Once all ten pairs were chainstitched together, I clipped the thread and set them aside. To create wider sections, I chainstitched these units together. Completing larger sections became easier as my hands became more dexterous with the material.

Uniform stitches contrast the organic shape of the seed pod. Each hole pierced by the needle left an open wound the thread had to bind together. When light permeates the veils, the holes are prominent, but so too each individual pod within a unified whole. Their arrangement echoes horizontally rolled out spools of camera film (Fig. 14).

The placement of the veils in the gallery acts as a border between the conscious and unconscious. One half shows the guaje as it appears outside – dry, muted (Fig. 15). The illumination of light on the other half is like magic and reveals their complexity: the ellipsoid shape of the seed, the vein structure of the pod, and the seam that held them together (Fig. 16). The veils also represent my feelings dealing with otherness. Depending on who you ask,¹⁸ guajes are either a food crop, providing nourishment, or an invasive weed that reproduces exponentially.¹⁹ This threshold is a membrane for a fluid exchange between different states of identity.

¹⁸ Worldwide, approximately twenty countries view this species to be invasive despite new research showing the possibility for new purposes. Ahmed Bageel, Michael D. H. Honda, James T. Carrillo, and Dulal Borthakur. "Giant Leucaena (Leucaena Leucocephala Subsp. Glabrata): A Versatile Tree-Legume for Sustainable Agroforestry." *Agroforestry Systems* 94, no. 1 (2019;2020;): 251-268.

¹⁹ Abair, Alexander L. "History of Phylogenetics and a Transcriptomic Approach to Resolving Diploid Relationships." Order No. 22584235, New Mexico State University, 2019, <https://manowar.tamucc.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/history-i-leucaena-phylogenetics-de-novo/docview/2310269001/se-2?accountid=7084> (accessed May 11, 2022).

EL POZO

*Luna, no me abandones más
Que tiendo a recuperarme
En la cuna de tus cráteres*²⁰

El Pozo in the middle of the gallery is the point of origin for everything – for generational knowledge, for adaptation, and for the works in the exhibition. In retrospect, it embodies both tradition and change. The presence of this mound of earth in the gallery is an invitation to reflect on the duality of my existence – passing between two worlds – one or the other, but not both.

I never participated in its construction, digging *el pozo* is traditionally a job for the men. Here it was constructed through conversations with my dad and indirectly, my uncle (simultaneously through two separate telephones); verbal instructions I then relayed to my friend Maclovio to help build it out.

The dirt used for *el pozo* was collected from two significant locations: the Zacatal Family plot along the Texas-Mexico border (Fig. 17) and sand collected from the beach directly across the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus (Fig. 18). The bricks providing the shape were gathered from the ceramics yard at school. A crockpot was nested inside filled with aromatic herbs and root vegetables to fill the gallery with the smell of cooking (Fig. 19).

El pozo is the primary reason my father had to adapt this meal from the pit to *la olla*. This memory has always stuck with me, it speaks to my internal feelings of otherness, the tension I feel excavating space for myself at this time, in this country; the building pressure and need to exhale. Sometimes I wonder if the firefighters had not come to our Chicago home, how different would this meal be? *El pozo* symbolizes tradition and the transformation into the meal that I

²⁰Zoé. “Luna.” Genius. Accessed May 13, 2021. <https://genius.com/Zoe-luna-lyrics>.

know today. El pozo is like a portal, simultaneously acting as both an entrance or an exit – an access point to temporal realities – between my ancestry and my present self (Fig. 20).

My goal was to use earth as close to the dirt in my memory, and that meant locating sandy soil. The climate in Zacapala is more arid and the texture is significantly drier. In discussion with my friend Maclovio, he suggested we go to a place where we would be undisturbed.

Driving down to the border with my bestie Maclovio was similar to the journey my family would take from Mexico City to Zacapala. It reminded me of those arduous car rides, anxious to see home, mi familia. This trip was also special to me. Yes, we were driving with the purpose to collect soil for my installation, but we were also visiting a place of personal significance to my friend, his maternal family plot at the Zacatal Family Ranch Cemetery sitting on the border between Texas and Mexico. It strengthened my feeling of connection to an imagined place in my memory, la frontera. My father crossed it many decades ago as a boy in his youth. It was my first time standing there looking deeply into the horizon, contemplating his journey to cross over.

We were surrounded in soil and vegetation in a wide spectrum of colors. The dirt needed to be as close as possible in color to Zacapala. It needed to echo the homeland. It needed to be the representation of my memory. It needed to be a stand-in for el pozo in Chicago. It was important for me to complete the mound with sand from Corpus Christi, my present home, where the water shifts sand along the gulf. It too, like the dirt from the border, acts as a medium to represent a specific place, a moment in time. It blurs the duality of fitting between two worlds, as a combination of heritage and ancestry with my present self – an affirmation that both can coexist in the same space at the same time.

When I removed el pozo, I was sad. But like the food that comes with it, the moment is temporary, but the memory endures.

LA PANCITA: Sewing Connections

*What's more beautiful than the horizon?
Watching the folds in your skin
collapse into a single mass*

La Pancita is a soft sculpture that signifies matriarchal bonds and the importance of ritual (Fig. 21). Observe la manera en lo cual mi madre cortaba la falda libre del carne de chivo. Con una ternurez levantaba la falda y la colocaba sobre las otras piezas. En ese momento admire el rostro de mi madre, la delicadeza en sus manos, y el amor que surgía de su ser. The preparation of the offal's is not pleasant. But *Mamá* makes it look so effortless.

In addition to cooking, I learned to embroider from my mother. She likes embroidered plants and animals from the natural world. I loved getting lost in the box of hilos and the way she broke the surface each time the needle poked through la tela, and yet it was always whole. We had a fat stack of servilletas adorned with bright colors used to keep the tortillas warm.

Comprised of a wide range of cloth and foam materials, *La Pancita* was constructed around a sturdy armature of aluminum strips and foam pipe insulation meant for plumbing. I thrifted most from clothing in the Goodwill clearance bins off Ayers Street in Corpus Christi; it was important they were similar in tone and texture to the lining of a stomach. I pulled hosiery from Value Village in Houston. The large mass of foam was gifted to me by my best childhood friend, Sarah Ta. The first set of t-shirts used to tie the foam were from my siblings and cousins. The decorative fabrics came from a box retailer.

The dark mass of *La Pancita* appears to sway and move, twisting and folding into itself. The shadows it casts stretch along the surface of the wall; a contradiction to the yielding forms that disappear into one another. Neutral colors grace the surface, bits of pink burst forth from the seams (Fig. 22). Layers of fabric are suspended on top of one another; semi-sheer forms gasp for

a pocket of air, tendrils dangle from pendulous forms, and stitched panels overlay to create countless ripples (Fig. 23). Each bundle of material successively hugs one another, unable to resist any urge to be apart, they yield to maternal love.

My mother nurtured her connection to home by maintaining the preparation ritual for la pancita. I watched her prepare food everyday but the experience watching her handle offal was otherworldly. It reflected a way of life in Zacapala that I only caught glimpses of during winter visits. I was fascinated with how she so lovingly cleaned the stomach lining and intestines, the delicate movement of her hands as she finely minced the herbs, dipping her clean hand into the pool of blood to break up the coágulos, unafraid. The matriarch of the family perpetuated cultural traditions to the younger generation. Initially, I resisted.

The offal symbolized parts of myself I did not want to accept. My consciousness was split between the outside and inside, and the only way to cope was to suppress or deny my feelings of otherness by presenting myself as “normal.” To be confronted by the offal was like being shown an extensive family history and unable to comprehend my place. Was I less Mexican if I did not also consume this part of the meal? Was I a bad daughter for not helping my mother rinse the intestines? Would my parents love me less? It was a reminder of yearning for a world I was not physically born into, but inherently connected, like the umbilical cord that united me with my mother. Mamá never saw it that way. I was as much a part of her as she was of me. She was patient and understanding. Every time my parents cooked la pancita, my dad would playfully offer me \$20 to eat a spoonful. I would say no every time.

Food as my parents love language extends beyond their children to our neighbors. The motivation to move to Houston in the Spring of 1995 was to be closer to my dad’s family. Little did we know that our Spring Branch neighborhood would grow our family beyond blood

connections. My parents loved to share their food. Anytime we made a carne asada, tamales, or a baked potato they would pass a plate of food over the fence or walk it across the street. Food became a way for us to socialize and share our culture. My dad always enjoyed teasing my neighbors:

NEIGHBOR: Juve what's in this?

DAD: I can't tell you.

NEIGHBOR: Why?

DAD: Eat it first, and then I'll tell you.

On one such occasion, my dad brought a taco filled with la pancita chopped up finely, a sprinkle of cilantro and onion, and a generous spoonful of salsa verde. Our neighbor did not recognize the protein, but he ate the taco without hesitation. Seeing this exchange as a teenager was pivotal because I felt if my neighbor could enjoy our food, I could too.

A personal limitation I created dissolved. La angustia que me agobiaba empezó a derramarse. A hunger I repressed was unleashed and for the first time I was free to indulge. Solté mis miedos y acaricia la mano de mi sombra. There was no more time to mourn. I spent so much time learning to silence feelings of otherness that when they finally released from the tangled mess of knots in my guts, I could feel everything. Even now I cannot control the emotional outpouring. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this phenomenon as *la facultad*:

Fear develops the proximity sense aspect of *la facultad*. But there is a deeper sensing that is another aspect of this faculty. It is anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depths to open us, causes a shift in perception. This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses

become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness – an experiencing of soul (Self).²¹

This newfound consciousness was the beginning of my affirmation of self. It would still be many years before this genesis would be complete. Others would see it en mi rostro before I could see my reflection in its entirety, “the moment of maturation before self-actualization was still underway.”²² It is the embrace of letting go. If I wanted to be reborn, I had to let myself die. What began as an act of consolation morphed into a process of meditation to celebrate this moment of awareness. Time and transformation are what I thought about as I twisted, folded, and sewed together sheets of foam and fabric for *La Pancita* (Fig. 24). They are changed by the act of mending. The artist Louise Bourgeois once said, “The act of sewing is a process of emotional repair.”²³

²¹ Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th, ed., Aunt Lute Books, 2012. Page 60-61.

²² Cole Cuchna, “Lost in the World by Kanye West,” November 28, 2017, in *Dissect*, produced by Cole Cuchna, podcast, MP3 Audio, 38:25, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/45xxquxsTY8bQBu4LQyWKh>.

²³ The quote is attributed to Louise Bourgeois. Her studio practice uses sculpture as a form of exorcism. For Bourgeois, “Art is restoration, the idea to repair the damages that are inflicted in life, to make something that is fragmented – which is what fear and anxiety does to oneself – to be whole.” Jan Garden Castro. “A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois.” *Sculpture (Washington, D.C.)* 24, no. 6 (2005): 28.

CONCLUSION

Memory manifests within the body. During my graduate experience, every time I shared the story of Chicago, described the preparation of the meal, or how I was processing materials in my work, my peers and mentors recurrently commented on how animated my body would become. They could see the flow of emotion, breathed through my words and into the work. The Tuesday evenings we spent together during our Professional Practices class (fondly referred to as PP Class) became a space to share these experiences and allow others to live these memories vicariously through me.

My studio became my mother's kitchen. Just like relaying my day to day to my mother, the class was my space to exchange with my peers. I was becoming a matriarch in the sense that I was the one with knowledge to share. I feel like I may be exaggerating, but it seemed every time we discussed this body of work, the question to which we always returned was:

“Will you cook this meal?”

When I proposed the idea to my parents, they were hesitant.

Cooking a goat in the gallery?

Are you sure that's okay?

Jaki, el olor del chivo es muy escandaloso.

¿Te dieron permiso?

Va ser muy sombrero.

“Hay chivos allá?”

Each question reflected a shared anxiety. For the last twenty-six years in Houston, all the meal prep centered around a practiced and perfected routine. “Consiga el chivo, y te vamos ayudar.” Yeah Dad, no problem, procuring a goat should be easy in South Texas.

It was not. Let me preface by saying frozen cabrito²⁴ is readily available, even frozen chivo, but finding a goat to be slaughtered for the closing reception, not so much. I called Moody's Quality Meats, Boarri Craft Butchery, La Michoacana, HEB by Port Street, QC Meat Market, and others (Fig. 25). Most of these carnicerías purchased their meat from a goat processing plant in McAllen, Texas. The majority had been sold the previous Easter weekend. I was nervous to relay this information to my parents. The traditional meal began with the procurement of a freshly slaughtered chivo, siempre.

ME: Papí, hay mucho cabrito, pero todo es frizado. El HEB del otro lado vende chivo pero esta cariñosito.²⁵ La Michoacana vende el chivo a \$7.49 la libra y me dijeron que es tierno.

DAD: Está bien.

ME: Me dijo el carnicero que también venden los machitos.²⁶

DAD: Le pregunto a Mamá.

MOM: No, con la carne maciza lo hacemos.

ME: Okay.

We agreed I would buy the frozen chivo the day before the closing reception. I went to La Michoacana on Ayers Street. I was scared as all hell that I was gonna mess up, it was my first time buying chivo by myself. I did not know what to expect but the butcher was very patient with my requests. My dad advised me to purchase about ten pounds, relative to a small chivo. I

²⁴ Cabrito is a goat that is milk-fed and slaughtered young. It is considered the veal of the goat world. Rafael Hernández, "Cabrito." In *Celebrating Latino Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Cultural Traditions*, edited by Maria Herrera-Sobek, 185-187. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012. *Gale eBooks* (accessed May 15, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2721300063/GVRL?u=txshracd2566&sid=summon&xid=0303defa>.

²⁵ Cariñosito translates to darling in English. We use the diminutive form of cariño to express sarcastically how expensive goods in the market are.

²⁶ Machitos are the internal organs and intestines of the chivo.

asked what 10 pounds looked like, and then fifteen. The amount on the scale seemed so tiny! It was difficult to judge because the only cuts available were ribs and legs.

ME: Voy a necesitar más.

CARNICERO: ¿Mas?

ME: Sí.

CARNICERO: Déjame ver cuanto tenemos.

El carnicero disappeared into the walk-in cooler, and I called my dad to see if he received the picture I had sent him for confirmation. I had difficulty matching what I saw on the scale to memories of the meat in the kitchen sink. It looked so small, shrink-wrapped in plastic, frozen. Dad agreed it was not enough. El carnicero returned with a leg and a rack of ribs, “Es todo lo que queda.” He placed it on top of the scale and the numbers shifted to 20.81 pounds (Fig. 26). I gave el carnicero my signature thumbs up y exclame, “Perfecto! Me lo llevo todo.” I bought all the chivo they had that day.

When my parents arrived in Corpus Christi later that evening, they brought a few key things with them: la charola para el arroz, la olla, y pencas de maguey. I felt so much joy when I showed them the chivo and shared the different trozos I told el carnicero to cut. My Dad pretended to inspect the bags; he surveyed the landscape of frozen meat.

DAD: Crees que hay tiempo suficiente para descongelarse?

ME: Ugh, mom?

MOM: Hay que ver.

We finished purchasing the rest of the ingredients that evening. Tomorrow will be a long day. What could go wrong?

Years of practice and routine led the way in my small kitchen. I helped Mamá salt the chivo while Dad charred the maguey outside with a long wand candle lighter. Slowly the apartment filled with the familiar bouquet of ingredients, enveloping each of us in its charm and easing our anxiety. We rehearsed our routine the night before to make sure we were in-sync with one another. Although we had everything at our disposal, breaking away from cooking in our family home in Houston was stressful. We did not say it aloud to one another, but I think we all felt it deep in our guts. I did not really know how many people would be eating with us or if anyone would enjoy our food, I felt first-hand what I imagined my parents felt all those years ago: nervous cooking for the unknown, uncertain if it would work, and afraid to not fulfill the promise of a delicious meal.

Regardless of the knots collecting in my stomach, we had a schedule to maintain. Friends and family started to filter into my apartment. It was great – everyone was excited to eat. By 1:30 pm we had loaded everything into la olla (Fig. 27). I went to school to prepare the exhibition for the closing reception and refill the crockpot for the last time. Tonight would be the first time my parents would see this body of work. When I came back home around 4:30 pm, I expected la barbacoa de chivo to be lista. Every single time we cooked this meal it took no more than three hours. My dad had a gut feeling and checked la olla around 4:00 pm.

DAD: Esta cruda la carne.

ME: Cruda? Como?

DAD: Hace mucho viento aqui. En Houston no hace tanto aire.

MOM: Tienes boxes o madera para taparlo?

ME: Yeah.

We gathered boxes and wood from my closet and made a makeshift fortress around la olla. I did not consider the possibility of wind delaying our meal, not once. Corpus Christi is a very windy city and the porch behind my apartment where we placed it was exposed. The wind was causing el chivo to cook unevenly so sections of meat were still raw.

DAD: No se va cocer.

MOM: ¡Juve! Si se va cocer.

ME: Did I promise food that's not gonna be ready? Soy una mentirosa.

MOM: ¡Jaki! Si se va cocer. Nunca nos ha fallado cocinar al vapor, ten fe.

My dad cranked up the flame and we waited. Another hour passed and the meat was still uncooked. Time to adapt! We briefly considered moving la olla into the kitchen, but Dad decided starting a fire inside would not be good for anyone. Maclovio helped us move it into the carport where it was less windy. Mamá looked at me and said, “Ve a hacer tus cosas. Aqui vamos estar para apoyarte.” I felt wrong leaving, but I knew she was right. I was so excited to socialize and enjoy my exhibition with my family, friends, peers, and my Corpus Christi community. I did not share I was going to be cooking with anyone outside of PP Class, but inevitably word got out:

Where is the food?

I immediately relayed the story about la olla and the wind. My words were greeted with patience and understanding even though the knots in my stomach grew denser. Finally, at 6:56

pm my phone rang, the food was ready, and my friends Maclovio and Clarissa went to pick it up. Once delivered to the Center for the Arts atrium I could feel my body relax. Clarissa and Aroh helped arrange los platillos sobre la mesa, mientras Maclovio fue a calentar tortillas en la microonda. I made a short announcement to everyone waiting in the gallery to serve themselves and enjoy the food.

The sight of watching the line grow, sentí como el latido rítmico de mi corazón estaba a punto de estallar. Without saying a word, my friend Aroh joined me behind the table (Fig. 28). El intercambio fue bonito, estaba con mi comunidad; lo único que me faltaba eran mis padres. I wanted them to see everyone gather for seconds and thirds! (Even the theatre kids who had a program that evening came by the table to eat.) La gastronomía es un lenguaje universal. Poco a poco desaparecieron los trozos de chivo. The large cloud of arroz cooked in the drippings from el chivo began to disappear. Y la salsa verde que ni se diga. Apenas comí, solo quería mirar para poder compartirlo con mis padres.

Por fin llegaron mis padres. Mi papá tuvo que revisar la hielera que contenía el chivo inmediatamente. I saw the smile break across his face.

DAD: I was afraid they weren't going to like it.

ME: Dad!

MOM: It's true Jak. We were so worried about the flavor. Se quemó la agua. Hizo mucho smoke.

ME: Mamí, les encanto la comida.

All that remained in la hielera was the aluminum foil used to keep el chivo warm and a few bones. The meal we labored over so intensely was devoured. My friends shared how much they enjoyed la comida con mis tortolitos.²⁷

Los he soñado tanto aquí, que no imagine a que iba a ser con la entrega de mi amor. Se me atoraban las palabras. When we walked into the gallery their faces lit up when they saw the veils made from los guajes (Fig. 29). They turned to the embossments. My dad recognized la olla. They passed through the veils and saw light radiate through the other side (Fig. 30).

DAD: How did you do this? Mija eres magia.

MOM: Juvie look! Estos son los apuntes de la maquina.

Their eyes followed the shadows on the ground that led to el pozo sitting on the gallery floor (Fig. 31).

DAD: How did you do this?

ME: Porque me dirigiste con tus palabras y se los transmití a Maclovio.

My mom looked up and intuitively knew what she was looking at (Fig. 32).

MOM: ¡Esta es la pancita! Mira cómo se abrazan.

DAD: Wow, hay tanto carrizo, hija.

ME: I told you it grows here.

Things that cannot be said but are felt deeply, like love, these are interconnected layers. For me, this experience in the gallery was like watching my mom manipulate the fascia sobre la falda del chivo. Fascia is defined by John Hopkins Medical as:

²⁷ Tortolitos translates to turtledoves in English. This is my nickname for my parents. I especially call them mis tortolitos when others share affection with them because I can read their body language.

A thin casing of connective tissue that surrounds and holds every organ, blood vessel, bone, nerve fiber and muscle in place. The tissue does more than provide internal structure; fascia has nerves that make it almost as sensitive as skin.²⁸

The fascia is my parents sazón that keeps our cultural heritage alive. The fascia is the culmination of all the people in my life who support me. The fascia is like my community of mentors and peers in Corpus Christi that helped me recognize my strengths and my identity. The adaptation of this meal is an extension of my family's tradition. I believe in my hands because they, my parents, did first.

*Entre tus alas dormí
Y en tu mirada compasiva, crecí
Siempre confiaste en todo lo que soñé
Me cuidaste y me guiaste hasta aquí, ah-ah-ah²⁹*

²⁸ “Muscle Pain: It May Actually Be Your Fascia,” Johns Hopkins Medicine, August 8, 2021, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/muscle-pain-it-may-actually-be-your-fascia>.

²⁹ Zoé. “Arrullo de Estrellas.” Genius. Accessed May 13, 2021. <https://genius.com/Zoe-arrullo-de-estrellas-lyrics>.

EPILOGUE

The recipe is a direct account between me and my parents. It is meant to document and archive this meal.

RECIPE

En el pueblo, todos en la familia ayudan, los barrones pelan el animal y remueven las tripas y se lo llevan a las mujeres. Hay que remover el estiércol de los intestinos y el estómago. Se juntan varias mujeres para lavar la pansa y intestinos. La mama va dirigiendo. Agregas sal a la sangre desde el principio. Ya la dejas tapada con una servilleta grande, o un trapo encima de la tina para que no se paren los insectos. Otras mujeres preparan las tripas. Otras mujeres las hierbas. Todo era en equipo. Trabajas en comunidad para hacerlo más rápido. En Houston ya te lo dan lavado y es muy poquito residuo que traen las tripas. Lo remuevas.

Mientras Papá asa el maguey y pela los carrizos. Mamá lava la carne y pone la sal para cuando se sube a la olla. Mama es la ayudante, y lo ayudo hasta que la carne está cocida para acomodarlo en la hielera, y quitar la charola de arroz y de la pancita. Es un proceso, aunque toma bastante trabajo, a la hora que la familia está comiendo, el cansancio se queda a un lado, todos están contentos platicando, todo es risa y alegría.

Para ser la barbacoa al vapor, el sabor es muy similar. No se siente la diferencia del hoyo o al vapor. Sale bien exquisito, queda muy succulento, muy tender.

In the village, everyone from the family helps. The men slaughter the animal, remove the organs, and give it to the women who gather to clean them. The mom directs the family. The manure needs to be removed from the intestines and stomach. Salt is added to the blood from the beginning. You leave it covered with a large napkin or kitchen towel to keep the insects out.

Other women prepare the intestines or focus on the herbs and vegetables. Everyone works together like a team. You work as a community to finish faster.

In Houston, the butcher will give you the meat cut and cleaned, little residue is left in the intestines. Remove whatever is left over. Dad roasts the maguey and peels the carrizo. Mom washes the meat and cures it with salt so it is ready to be placed in the pot. Mom helps until the meat is fully cooked, to place it in the ice chest, and remove the trays of rice and pancita.

It is a process, even if it does take a long time. When the family sits down to eat together, the exhaustion falls away, everyone sits to talk, all is laughter and joy.

When cooking barbacoa in a steamer, the flavor is very similar. You cannot taste the difference between the earth and the steam. It comes out exquisite, succulent, very tender.

Barbacoa de Chivo al Vapor

Antes de manipular carne vas a lavar las hierbas primero y tenerlas enjuagadas y listas para picar. Y ya después viene el proceso del animal. La bolsita de pansa, la bolsita de intestinos, las bolsas de carne. Asesórate que estas manipulando tus alimentos de la forma correcta. Vas paso a paso.

Before preparing the meat, rinse the herbs and set them aside. Next prepare the meat including: the bag with the stomach, the bag with the intestines, and the bags of meat. Make sure you manipulate your ingredients correctly. Go step by step.

Salting the Goat

Sal para lavar la carne, para remover exceso de carne. Que drene y le pones sal otra vez. Primero la sangre. Lavas carne de chivo y le pones sal para que se desangre para que la carne quede con un color mejor. Para dejar lista la carne. Después lavas las tripas. Las corto, lavo la pansa, y lo dejo todo en una paila separado.

Quita la sangre de la bolsa, llevas tu hielera con hielo. Te dan el animal cortado en bolsas. Lo traes a tu casa, y empieza proceso de lavar, de salado. Lavar para remover exceso de sangre. Le pones bastante sal a todos las piezas y lo dejas reposar por 30 minutos. Quitas la sal y que oscura el exceso de agua.

Le pones sal otra vez y lo dejas en una charola. Lo sacas con una manta, la ventaja de cocinar aquí adentro es que no hay moscas, no se contamina. Luego sigue las tripas y la pansa. Y ya que limpio y las deajo escurrir y luego pico todo.

Papá prefiera las tripas y pansa primero para luego tener todo listo. You pick the animal and it comes home warm.

First the blood. Rinse the flesh with running water to remove any excess blood³⁰. Next, sprinkle a generous layer of sea salt to draw the moisture to the surface. *Para quitar la choquixa de la sangra, desflemar la sangre, que quede bien limpia la carne.* Let it rest for thirty minutes. Rinse again with running water and add a layer of sea salt. Transfer to a pan and cover with a cloth while you prepare the rest.

Remove the blood from the bag, the animal will be cut into pieces and placed into smaller bags. Once you remove the meat and place it in the kitchen sink, rinse the meat with clear running water. Put plenty of sea salt over all the pieces and allow the meat to rest for 30 minutes. Remove the salt and allow the excess water to drain.

Add an additional layer of salt and leave it in a pan. Cover it with a cotton kitchen towel. The advantage of preparing it here is that there are no flies to contaminate your food. Next you will prepare the tripe and stomach. Once everything is clean and drained, dice everything.

³⁰ These are the steps for a freshly slaughtered goat.

La Pancita

2-3 stomachs

Intestines, cleaned and chopped into small pieces

Blood of freshly slaughtered goat

2 heads of Garlic

2 medium Onion minced finely

½ bunch of Thyme

1 small bunch of Oregano

7 Jalapeños

3 bunches of Mint

¼ teaspoon of cumin (really a pinch)

Todo bien picado, le vas a quitar las hojas del orégano y tomillo, también de la hierba buena. Es pura hoja. Todo se pica bien.

Una barrita de guajes de 30 centímetros para voltear las tripas (que sea liso). Recuerda los intestinos vas a usar un palito pequeño, para invertirlo, y lo enjuagues bien con un chorro de agua, y vas a ir cortando sección por sección. En pedazos pequeños, entre 4 o 5 centímetros.

La sangra cuando tú lo compras el chivo inmediato tienes que añadir sal y se bate, un puño de sal de mar, y lo revuelves bien. Pruébalo con la punta del dedo para probarlo y luego lo enjuagas con limon. El limón es para enjuagar la boca para limpiar tu lengua. Puedes escupirlo en una toalla de papel.

Ya que tienes, la sangra cuando la traes, lo tienes que batir con la mano para deshacer los coágulos. Con la mano, lo haces squish, squish. Puedes usar un batidor manual, o con el blender para deshacer los coágulos y luego adhieres la sal.

Me gusta batir con la mano cuando papa lo trae, porque es más natural, queda muy remolida en el blender (too smooth). Mama suela ponerse un guante or una bolsa de plástico para que no se llene de sangra. Unos lo hacen sin guante con la mano limpia. Depende de cómo cada persona se adapta hacerlo. Ya que esta todo bien picado, lo vas a agregar a la sangre.

Rinse the herbs and pat dry. Remove the stem. Mince the herbs, onion, garlic, and jalapeno finely. Set aside.

Find a small stick, approximately 30 centimeters long. This will be used to flip the intestines inside out. A stick from a *guaje* tree is ideal. To clean the intestines, use the small stick to invert the intestines and rinse with water. You will go section by section and cut the tripe into smaller sections that are 4 to 5 centimeters long. Set aside.

When you buy a freshly slaughtered goat, you need to add salt immediately to the blood and mix it well to prevent the blood from coagulating.

Once you are ready to prepare the blood, you need to mix it by hand to dissolve any curdled bits. Use a clean glove (or a plastic bag to cover your hand). Alternatively, you can use a stick blender if preferred. Once the curdled bits are undone and the blood has a smooth consistency, dip the tip of your pointer finger, and taste it to ensure there is enough salt. If after you taste it there is not enough salt, add some more. (Spit it out from your mouth and follow with a lime and rub it over the tongue. Dispose of it.) Fold in the minced herbs, garlic, onion, and jalapeño. Next add the intestines and mix thoroughly. Set aside.

My mother likes to mix the blood by hand as soon as my dad brings the goat home from the butcher. First, she preps it with salt and mixes it with a wooden spoon before assembling ingredients. In her opinion it is too *remolida* in a blender (too smooth). My mother usually puts on a glove for this act. She shares that some people will use a bare clean hand. It all depends on how a person adapts.

If using a glove, *mix the blood vigorously*, and then add coarse sea salt. Mom likes to put blood in a container, immediately adds salt, about a puño from her hand. And then with a wood spoon she uses to mix to dissolve the salt to prevent coagulation. Once everything is minced finely, add it to the blood.

La pansa, el estómago, acuérdate que lo vas a lavar con cal para que quede limpiecita. La vas a invertir y poner cal, siempre se utiliza para limpiar las pansas, porque es un producto natural, para remover el estiérco, para remover la suciedad hasta que queda blanca o güera por dentro. Ya que queda lisa, la enjuagues, la volteas, y te aseguras que no está perforada. Si esta perforada hay que amárala como si fuera un costal.

Intestinos, se limpia y se pica. Se cortan en pedazos pequeños, paraque sea fácil de meterlo adentro de la pancita. El ajo, cebolla, hoja de laurel, jalapeño, orégano, hierba buena, y tomillo todo finamente picado.

Vas usar un hilo para amar la pansa y se queda como uno bolsa. String for baking. Y luego se pone en una paila para poner la a cocinar al vapor. Lo vas a rellenar para dejar 4 dedos de espacio, unos 5-6cm. dejamos un poquito de piel de la pancita para tener espacio para amararla bien.

Cuando rellenamos la pancita pues la llenamos y vaciamos todo y ya la amaras con un hilo, blanco y fuerte. Butchers twine. También puedes usar hilo nylon o crochet, tiene que ser fuerte o

blanco. Lo pones en una charola y lo dejas reposando. Antes de llenar la pancita me gusta hacer el arroz.

The stomach, you will clean it with *cal* to remove the residue in the lining. Cal is always used because it is a natural product. Invert the stomach and apply the *cal*. Use your hand to rub it like you were washing clothes to remove the brown color of the stomach lining. Once it is white and smooth, rinse it thoroughly with water. Invert it and check for any perforations. If any perforations are present, tie it off with butcher twine.

Take the cleaned intestines and cut them into smaller pieces. Next, mince the herbs, onion, and garlic. Then mix the blood to make sure it is smooth. Once the consistency of the blood is smooth, fold the intestines and herbs into the blood and mix until evenly incorporated. Carefully transfer into the stomach.

Fill the stomach with the blood mixture and leave space, about 5-6 cm (or what my mother describes as 4 fingers) to be able to tie it securely with butcher twine. Place into a pan and allow to rest.

For the Consomé

2-3 bags of Garbanzo beans

3 Onions

2 heads of Garlic

Vegetable of choice

Salt to taste

For Toppings

Diced onions

Minced Cilantro

Sliced Jalapeños

Limes

El agua que se pone al vapor, suficiente agua, tres cebollas, tres cabezas de ajo, vas a preparar los garbanzos, como dos a tres bolsitas de garbanzo.

Se va cocinar con el chivo, en esa agua con la cebolla, ajos, le vas a poner unas hierbitas, ramitas de tomillo, dos a tres ramitas de orégano, aquí va a caer el jugo, y ya luego no más le das el toque de sal y añadir zanahoria, col, o para la gente que le gusta picoso, le ponen chile de árbol para que sea un poco picoso. Es al gusto. Cuando ya retires, que ya se cocinó el chivo, pones el caldo en un olla grande, y lo hierbes con su verdura, y tienes cebolla, cilantro, y lima encima.

Este consomé tiene el sabor de maguey, del agave, cae todo el jugo del chivo.

Place plenty of water in the bottom tier of the steamer and add three onions, two heads of garlic, and two to three bags of precooked garbanzo beans. The consomé is made from the juices collected in the bottom tier of the steamer. When you remove it from the open flame this will be flavored by the onion, garlic, maguey, and the drippings from the goat. Traditionally, the garbanzos are precooked and added to the water so they cook alongside the goat.

To complete the consomé, transfer the liquid from the bottom steamer to a large pot. Add a sprig of thyme, two or three sprigs of oregano, and salt to taste. Next add carrots, cabbage, or any vegetable of your choice. Once the vegetables are cooked, serve hot. Add onion, cilantro, and lime to your liking.

For the Rice

4-6 cups of rice

¼ onion

2 cloves of garlic

6 roma tomatoes

Vamos a moler el jitomate con un pedazo de cebolla. Lavo bien el arroz y lo oscuro bien. Luego lo sofríó para que quede con una textura mejor. Pongo en un cacerola un poco de aceite para sofreírlo, cuando se siente loose, y tome color dorado, le agrego el jitomate y lo dejas ahí por tres minutos que se fríe. Le agrego la knorrswiza y lo pruebas que queda bien de sabor y un poco de agua. Porque va a absorber el jugo del chivo. Para la knorrswiza, le pones el toque ideal, lo dejas un poco saladito. El jugo que tira el chivo va a salir con sal, para que salga en su punto. Y luego lo pones en su charola cuadrada. A esa charola se le pone un aluminio encima y le haces muchos hoyitos con un needle. Ahí es donde va a entrar el jugo del chivo. Ni muy aguada ni muy duro, con una textura, como spongy.

Rinse rice under running water. Allow excess water to drain. Add onion, garlic, and tomatoes and blend until smooth. Heat pan. Add oil. Toss rice in oil until it becomes aromatic and takes on a light gold color. Pour tomato mixture over rice and simmer for three minutes. Add a pinch of chicken bouillon to introduce a touch of salt. (You do not want to over salt the rice because the rice will absorb the juices of the goat which has been salted). Transfer mixture into a square pan. Cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil. Poke a lot of holes into the foil using a thin needle. This will allow the juices of the goat to flow into the pan and create rice with a spongy texture.

Layering Procedure/Cooking Time

La primera olla lleva agua, con cebolla, ajo, y hierbas de olor. Siguiendo es charola con arroz, carne maciza, y la siguiente olla, son los brazuelos y el espinazo. La última olla son los costillares, la falda, y la pancita. Cada capa de carne tiene el maguey asado y pedazos de carrizo si tienes, si no, no.

Fill bottom of steamer with water. Add three onions, three garlic heads and aromatic herbs. Place the second tier on top. Add the tray of rice, the tougher cuts of goat, the shoulder, and the spine. Separate each layer of meat with *el maguey asado* and pieces of *carrizo*. Place the third tier on top, this layer will have the more tender cuts of meat like the ribs and the skirt and la pancita. Cover and steam for three hours.

Serving

Ya sabes cuando lo subes al fuego lo vas a dejar ahí tapado cocinando por tres horas. Apagas la lumbre y sabes que no le falto fuego a la barbacoa, no falla al vapor. Siempre queda bien suave, muy succulenta.

Turn off the open flame. Remove lid and allow steam to escape. Take out pan with la pancita and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Transfer meat to a cooler. Remove pan with rice. If you wish to make consommé, transfer what is left of the seasoned water in the bottom of the steamer to a large pot.

OTRAS NOTAS DE MAMÁ

En el pozo le tienen que calcular cuanto fuego necesita el carbón, si falla sale la carne dura. Regularmente el que hace la barbacoa a veces meten dos, tres, o más chivos. Tienen que calcular la lumbre. El tamaño de su horno no es muy grande, no ocupa mucho espacio si saben cómo colocar su carne.

Para los que hacen al vapor, es muy fácil. No te estas complicando el tiempo que tienes que rascar el pozo, tener la olla preparada, lo estas haciendo más sencillo. Vas usar el gas, para asar el maguey en la parilla. Cuando lo pones en tu olla y colocas la carne, el vapor, ese sabor se va a ir impregnando en cada capa.

La naturaleza es muy generosa, se quedan esos sabores tan exquisitos, le pones tú salsa en tu taco de barbacoa y lo disfrutas. Hasta la gente que no lo ha comido le va a agradar. Tiene un olor rico.

Lo pasamos aquí por que no te permiten hacer el pozo para quemar la llena. Lo más sencillo es el vapor, una olla de stainless steel, no estas usando una mala calidad de metal. Es algo delicioso, algo sano, algo limpio. Sea un día especial, es un cumpleaños o una fecha memorable de celebrar, regularmente la barbacoa lo hacemos hecho por que no nos hemos visto, es más higiénico para hacerlo en casa. Que no es la típica barbacoa que costumbras. Por eso uno lo disfrute cuando lo haces en casa, es muy fácil y accesible de hacer.

Acá encontramos el maguey en Fiesta. El mercado también tiene maguey. Si no hay carrizo está bien porque es el maguey que da sabor. La salsa tiene role también en taco. En generación a generación, hay gente que se dedica hacer la barbacoa, porque la comercialización o la venden cada domingo o durante fechas especiales; el 16 de septiembre, 5 de mayo, día de Muertos. Hay gente que es su forma de vivir y es su sujetó.

Para días especiales, las personas que bajan a la ciudad con el barbacuidero, tengo un cumpleaños o boda de plata, o celebración. Lo que tengas. Necesito que me haga barbacoa de cinco chivos y no más te cobran por ese servicio.

En las ciudades rurales, unos la prefieren de chivo o borrego. El de borrego es más grasosa, el chivo es más lean, tiene menos grasa. Las mujeres recién aliviadas decían que la carne de chivo era muy sana

Es una tradición que se va generación a generación aprendiendo. Para unos más fácil para aprender, a unos que tienen el toque que todos le queda delicioso, y a otras que les cuesta saber cuánto poner.

Ese aroma tan peculiar tan exquisito que llena el olfato. Lo consumes todo, no puedes desperdiciar nada. Todos criaban los animales y sabías que salía de tu corral.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Photograph of a traditional pozo from a YouTube clip



Figure 2: Jacqueline Negreros, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, installation view from the left hand side of the Weil Gallery



Figure 3: Photograph of rice placed on the stencil for el tronco



Figure 4: Photograph of Jaki placing rice on the press bed. Photo Credit: Cassie White



Figure 5: Jacqueline Negreros, *La Olla*, 2022, rice blind embossment, 30"x42"



Figure 6: Jacqueline Negreros, *El Molcajete*, 2022, rice blind embossment, 30”x42”



Figure 7: Jacqueline Negreros, *El Tronco*, 2022, rice blind embossment, 30"x42"



Figure 8: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, detail



Figure 9: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, detail view of shadow cast



Figure 10: Jacqueline Negreros, *El Pozo*, 2022, installation, dimensions variable



Figure 11: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, installation view of El Pozo and La Pancita



Figure 12: Photograph of a wax cast of the guaje next to the guaje for comparison



Figure 13: Photograph of resin cast of the guaje



Figure 14: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, detail of seed pods



Figure 15: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, detail view of side that is lit directly

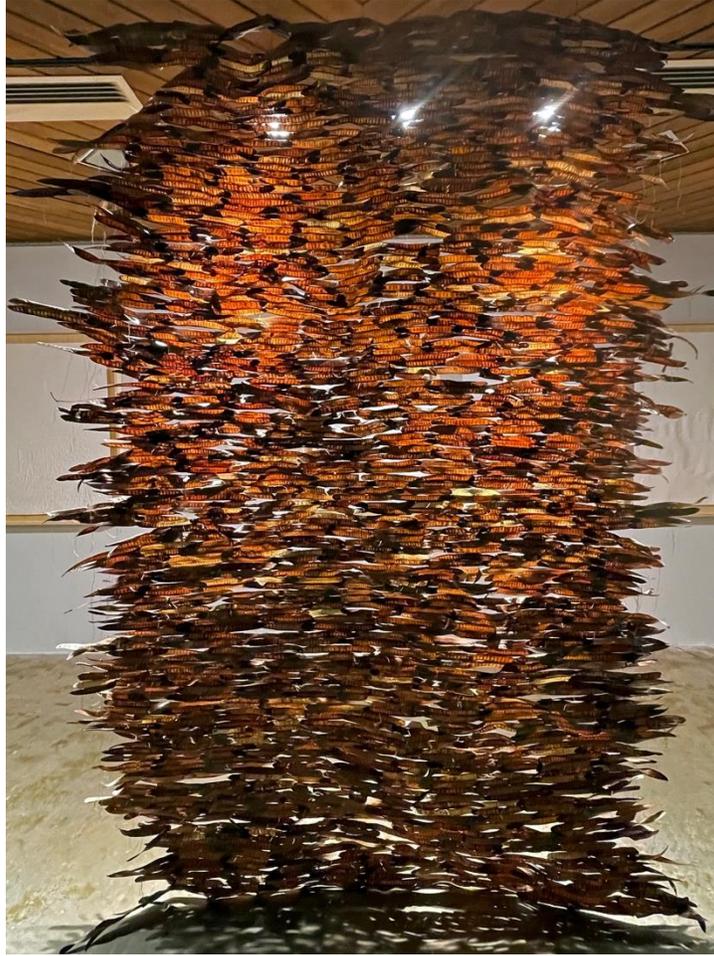


Figure 16: Jacqueline Negreros, *Lo que tú siembras bien en tierra fértil, tú lo vas a cosechar en un futuro*, 2022, detail view of side that is lit through



Figure 17: Relampago, Texas, 2022. Photograph of the Zacatal Family Ranch Cemetery



Figure 18: Corpus Christi, Texas, 2022. Photograph of sand across the TAMU-CC Campus



Figure 19: Jacqueline Negreros, *El Pozo*, 2022 detail view of the crockpot inside El Pozo

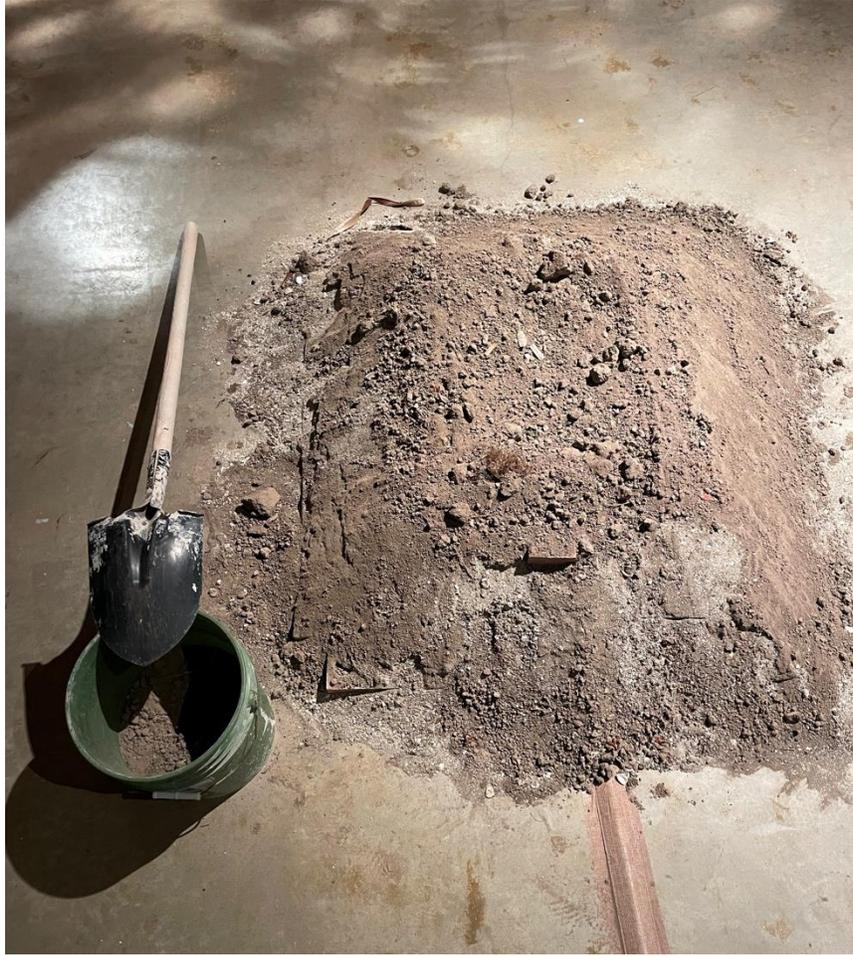


Figure 20: Jacqueline Negreros, *El Pozo*, 2022 installation view



Figure 21: Jacqueline Negreros, *La Pancita*, 2022 installation view, photo taken by Ryan O'Malley



Figure 22: Jacqueline Negreros, *La Pancita*, 2022, detail of tendrils



Figure 23: Jacqueline Negreros, *La Pancita*, 2022, detail of neutral tones



Figure 24: Jacqueline Negreros, *La Pancita*, 2022, wide shot



Figure 26: Photograph of 20.81 pounds of chivo at La Michoacana



Figure 27: Photograph of Paloma y Juvenal with la olla



Figure 28: La Comida, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, closing reception, Weil Gallery, 2022



Figure 29: Jacqueline Negreros, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, installation view

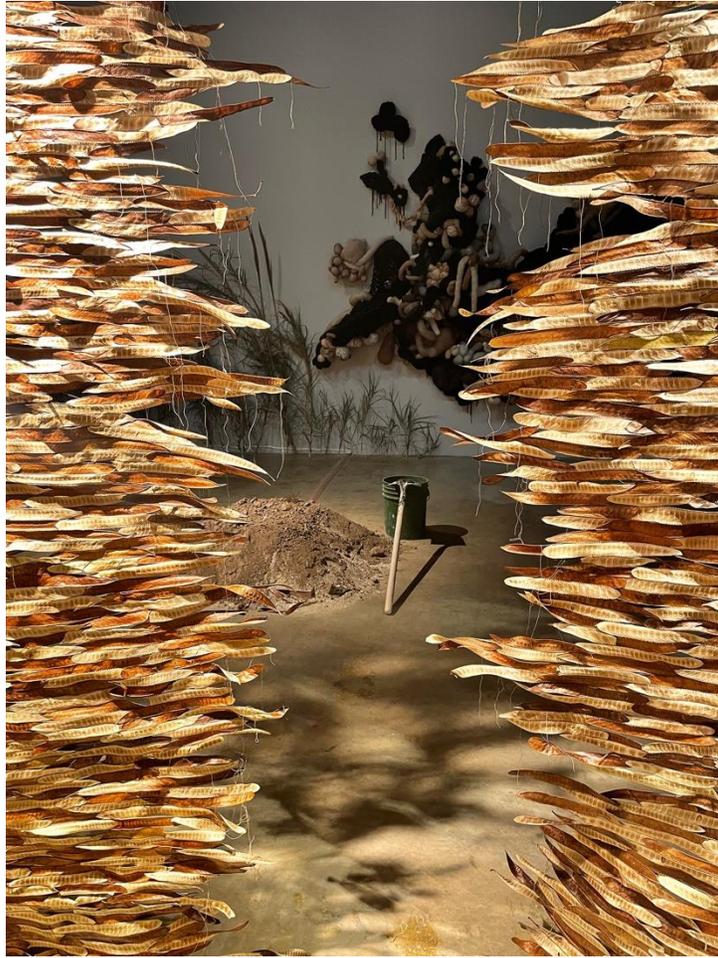


Figure 30: Jacqueline Negreros, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, installation view through the veils



Figure 31: Jacqueline Negreros, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, installation view of the veils and El Pozo



Figure 32: Jacqueline Negreros, *Aquí Is Anywhere We Choose to Call Home*, detail of left flank

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