

*Thesis Project*

By  
Rosana Cruz

Thesis Defense  
Animated Arts  
Fall Term 2020

---

## Table Of Contents

1. Thesis Proposal
2. Artist Statement
3. Project Summary
4. Oral Presentation
5. Bibliography

*Thesis Proposal Final*

By  
Rosana Cruz

Thesis Critique Seminar TH401  
Roy Tomlinson  
Spring Term 2020

---

From a young age I was brought up surrounded by agricultural practices and stories passed down from my maternal grandmother. My Mexican cultural heritage and lifestyle have always given me a deep sense of pride and instilled a deep sense of responsibility and respect for the women in my family. Although there have been many difficult situations to overcome and many painful memories, I still feel that there is still much I don't know about the strong women in my family and especially my beloved Abuelita Paula.

Some of the questions I began to ask members of my family included asking about our origins, which differed depending on the generation and gender of the individual I was asking. The answers were never quite as simple or straightforward as I had imagined. It was not an easy question because ideas surrounding identity and its formation have fluctuated throughout my family differing greatly amongst siblings. Some of my family celebrates their indigenous heritage from the native Huichol people of Mexico through my grandmother, while others reject it as an insult, considering it irrelevant to whom they are now. The more curious I became about our family history, the more I was beginning to understand the complexities of the questions I asked. In this work I will research with the aim to clarify and preserve the information I gather.

In tending to my grandmother we found that she and I share an intuitive bond that overcomes spoken language. I understand her beyond the many roles she has taken on throughout her life, beyond the masks she wears before her children and learned to listen to her as a person. My goal is to honor her and allow her to speak for herself, patiently listening to her discuss her life at her own pace. In the process of researching our heritage I want to create a safe space where she can share information that will inform the portraits to capture her individuality in an educated, respectful and informed manner. I propose to make a series of oil paintings on

stretched canvas that will be displayed in a gallery space for the audience to view, but that will ultimately be given to her.

This work will explore migration and memory, cataloging my maternal grandmother's life experience and identity. I will be working beyond the confines of time, distance and the boundaries of land borders, embracing a multicultural experience. I aim to establish a physical history from oral histories and first hand accounts while simultaneously celebrating and connecting to my maternal grandmother's heritage. Through the process of interviewing my maternal grandmother and relatives I hope to document the memories of home and preserve the essence of the individuals' identities.

In these portraits I intend to use cultural iconography as signifiers and patterns within the portraits. I plan on surrounding my Abuelita with items of personal affection, to conserve what she finds important in life. By researching and cataloguing information about my abuelita I am not only capturing and honoring her, but simultaneously exploring the formation of personal and cultural identity. Via portraiture I also hope to continue the dialogue of the migration of my family, learn about the formation of identity and document our oral history and ultimately use that information to produce physical visuals. Family ties will be presented through visual symbolism and I will investigate what forms an idea of home. In what way does space and land give home a physicality and how can I represent that?

Part of this project will be the process of recording interviews with my Abuelita Paula, my grandfather, and researching extended relatives. I set out to find physical remnants of her life in Mexico and attempt to inform the portraits beyond the surface level. Some limitations are apparent as I begin this inquisitive journey. The distance of a border, death of family members,

migration of people, illiteracy, the loss of text, and lost photographs have made it so the initial process will rely heavily on the information I can gather from enacting the memories and experiences from my grandmother.

I would like these portraits to be a reclaiming of identity and a means to preserve her history, to be a liaison between the present generation and those of the future. I am wanting to educate my family and my niece about our ancestors and our roots. To empower them and future generations with the knowledge of their history. I think of the portraiture process as an act of preservation and as an opportunity to document our culturally rich history through the passage of time.

## Artist Statement

Rosana Cruz is a Oregon based Mexican American multimedia artist and painter. She aims to reach audiences by presenting information she observes from her own life and preserving it within her work. Her work centers around understanding her relation to the world, the passage of time, celebrating heritage and identity.

# Thesis Defense Speech Outline

---

Rose Cruz / December 02 2020 / 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM / Zoom

## Lobby, small talk and intro by:

Ardis Defreese

## Slide outline by number

1. **Cover page - Welcome**
  - Hi, My name is Rosana Cruz, I go by Rose.
2. - (Next slide) **Introduction of work and vision:**
  - My vision for this project was to create a series work that would both serve as a visual connection for my family to their roots and as a form of celebration of our heritage as Mexican Americans.
  - I asked the individuals to join me as I investigated the role heritage has played in the formation of our self identity, social identity and national identity via portraiture and symbolism.
3. (Next slide - 4.) **Grandma's Role in bringing us all together and appreciating our culture.**
  - Our Abuleita Paula is the binding force in our family, she is our maternal grandmother and has taught us and our family the importance of keeping our heritage alive.
  - No matter how far away our family is, she is the touchstone we return to and we honor her selflessness and strength in keeping the family together.
5. - (Next slide) **Women as keepers on knowledge, storytelling and heritage.**
  - Our mothers have passed down information for us to learn and remember our roots. Our ties to our Mexican heritage, the Spanish language, the retelling of stories of overcoming hardship and of strength is just a few ways.
6. **Examples of traditional media, past work:**
  - I had my first introduction to drawing formally in 2015. I think the introductory drawing class planted the idea of the possibility of art as a profession. I saw beauty in observation and learned the practice of drawing from life.



- I started my journey pursuing art, translating what I saw into lines, values and shapes to make a form emerge from paper.

### **7. Portrait studies-**

- During my time at PNCA I had the opportunity to explore multiple interests, Animation, Digital art, Puppetry and Stop Motion. While exciting I still felt the need to revisit my initial inclination to traditional media. I took drawing classes and further studied the process of making self portraits in graphite.
- With this thesis project I attempted to combine skills, develop my interests further and incorporate individuals I felt drawn to know beyond surface level, I took risks and learned to work using oil paints.

### **8. Paint portrait studies-**

The learning process included a lot of experimentation to try to find a style that worked for the project. I practiced many different techniques and approaches to creating portraits. Ultimately I decided to go for a semi realistic approach.

**9. Influential Artist:** These are some influential artists that I was introduced to, I admire them and they directly inspired my work, they made portraiture a fresh and different experience.

**Megan Moore:** is a sophisticated portrait painter, her style was a visual inspiration for the 2-D backdrop, I loved the juxtaposition of realism foreground on a stylized background. Repeating patterns and the use of portraiture.

**Kehindley Wiley:** is a contemporary painter working with a modern twist on classical portraiture, his work involves painting black people and people of color in powerful poses.

**Thomas Hovenden:** Incorporates family dynamics into painting, visually explores the feeling of journey via migration. I felt that I could connect to this work considering my ties to my family's migration, the connection to heritage and gave me the inspiration to work with visuals to show an individual's cultural ties and investigate the identity formation process.

## **10. Influential Readings:**

These readings helped support and inform my paintings. *Self Studies* by Karl E. Scheibe did so by discussing the concept of Identity vs. the Self. I found this relatable in portraiture as I considered the portraits a pause for reflection and contemplation. Through this work I invited the individuals participating to think about the way they see themselves, what and how do they identify?

*I:* by Jonathan Glover introduces the idea of the continuity of consciousness and the effects of time, concepts such as tribalism: loyalty to one's social group and national identity. I felt it particularly useful when considering cultural heritage through the lens of our migrated family and the preservation of verbal history through storytelling, but also when considering the paradigm shifts in thinking, and the development of the role of national identity as Mexican Americans. In this project I ask the individuals to share their relationship visually and more, via a questionnaire. The replies were varied but consistent in conveying the importance of preserving cultural identity within national identity.

*Identity Theory* by Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, discusses the idea of the relation between the self, identity development, and social interaction. In my work I aimed to incorporate this via the symbols chosen by the participating relatives to represent how they see themselves and our grandmother within the patterned backgrounds. The items were important signifiers of cultural heritage and every participant chose an item that spoke directly of their relationship to our grandmother. They also chose these symbols to convey the role our grandmother has in shaping who they are today.

## **11. Tutorials:**

The tutorials I watched included the youtube videos by Cesar Santos, demo's by Ardis Defreece and countless hours watching how to make portraits online. The information passed down by my mentor and online instructors informed my process and approach to the portrait process.

## **12: Understudies:**

These are an example of understudy sketches used to map out the painting. On the left I have an example of the approach using charcoal, a traditional way of starting a portrait. On the right I have a version of an understudy sketch using oil paint. Both are painted over gessoed wood panels.

## **13. Learning Opportunities:**

Along the way I had the opportunity to learn how to use mediums properly and what ratios work to aid the drying process of the paint. I learned the fat over lean rule and the importance of having a reference photo on hand while working on the portraits to maintain a likeness. I also learned to work general to specific and improved my drawing skills and speed. I learned it was always acceptable to paint over and start again if corrections were needed. I learned that once paint dries sometimes it will dry duller or pull

I learned that you don't always need to blend and the importance and versatility of dry brushing.

14. Next I'll show you some images of the work in progress while I was making the work.

## **15-19: Work In Progress:**

15. We're looking at three portraits, at this point in the project the sketches are in, the values are blocked in and I'm waiting for the pieces to dry so that I can make corrections and continue adding more detail on top. In the next slide I'll show you how I got to this point.

16. I started with a sketch in oil and then blocked in some general values without blending.

17. After blocking in the values allowing them to dry and placing a wash in the background and blocking in the shirt I again allowed it to dry and went back into add detail and heightened the contrast and value and made corrections to facial features. The next steps to this would be, once dry to add in additional values by dry brushing. Then working on the backgrounds.

18. In this next portrait I documented my progress as I blocked in values and experienced one of my major learning opportunities. I had left my home and forgot my picture, but I continued to work on the portrait without a photo

reference and I lost features, which ended up getting blended away. I needed to slow down, allow time to dry paint over the areas to correct and redefine features. I realized I was rushing the process as I was short on time and needed to slow down and change my mindset.

**19.** Once I made corrections I blocked in the color for the background and it had an effect on the values, I continued to layer on values in response to the contrast and proceeded to add shape and definition to the hair and clothing. I then allowed for time to dry before working on the patterned background.

#### **20: Further Explanation of Participants Intro:**

Here is the complete work shown all together. There are a few elements that bind them together besides the familial link. The style, grey scale over colored backgrounds. The backgrounds consist of important symbolic elements to each individual. A gold interweaving line that links all of us to one point, is an abstraction of our grandmother. Everyone is an individual, but we are linked in multiple ways. The composition they are displayed in is based on birth order, eldest to youngest. The youngest is looking inward, towards those who came before and the eldest is looking after the younger individuals, caring and leading the way. The eldest is looking towards the future and the youngest is looking towards the past while those in the middle look towards the present. Now we will go into further detail for each individual.

#### **21. Cindy Ramos/portrait 1:**

Cindy is my elder sister, but she is also the eldest cousin/grandchild of the family in our generation. She plays a vital role in guiding and providing advice. She is respected by all the younger generation and has been a keeper of information and tradition with a focus on family and community. Her background pattern is composed of the symbols she chooses to represent herself. A cross, to represent her faith and devotion to her community, an abstracted molcajete or mortar to represent her link to our abuelita Paula, the time she spent learning from her and appreciating Mexican culture. Lastly the stars to represent her hope in the darkest of times. The title she chose was the homemaker, she prides herself in the raising and support of her family. Cindy chooses the color lavender to represent her and her personality.

## **22. Raquel Alvarado:**

Raquel is the eldest among her siblings and is the second oldest cousin. Her character is one of a bright, strong individual with a caring outlook on life. This giving mindset has driven her towards the medical field where she has devoted hours of her life to helping others. Her work ethic has pushed her far beyond what many people can do and has resulted in a trusting person who is willing to take opportunities and realize them to their fullest potential. She chose the color pink to represent her personality; extroverted and bubbly.

Her symbols include: a stethoscope, she wants to be remembered as someone who makes everyone feel better, willing to help and approachable. The roses in her background represent her relationship with our abuelita and the traditional florikco dress she wears to represent her celebrating heritage.

She identifies heavily with her profession and takes pride in her accomplishments. She titled herself as The Nurse.

**23. Self Portrait:** I chose to include myself for various reasons, one of them was because of access to myself and the relationship between my grandmother and I and the other was to incubate ideas about the development of identity with myself prior to asking that of others. I think by using myself in the project I was able to externalize the questions I was asking.

By including others I was able to widen the lens I was using, include multiple perspectives for the project, while also simultaneously incorporating another element, time.

I am the second eldest of four children in my immediate family and one of the many middle cousins in the ladder. My family sees me as an artist, so I would describe myself as one for the title of my portrait.

The symbols I chose to represent my heritage are: The nopal, a type of cactus eaten in traditional Mexican food. It is a painstaking process to prepare, often pricking oneself along the way but is a strong and nutritious vegetable that has lots of health benefits. The nopal like my grandmother is able to grow in the harshest of climates and provided my abuelita with her favorite fruit, the atun also known as a prickly pear. She has many fond memories and has shared stories about feeding her entire family when harvesting atun in

Mexico. She wishes we could experience that together, so the nopal to me is a symbol of her strength and warmth.

The other symbols I have included in my background pattern are: a bird, maize, and a double crescent moon. The bird represents the migration of my family, the maize is a staple in Mexican food, versatile and still grown by my family today, it has taught me a lot about my heritage and past. And the double crescent moon represents my sexuality. All of these symbols are part of my background and are part of my identity. The color yellow is the one I most respond to, it reminds me of the sun and fills me with energy.

#### **24. Alma Fernandez:**

Alma is the second eldest of four in her immediate family and one of the youngest cousins in our family. She describes herself as a social worker in her title as she focused on that as her profession received her degree, works as one and is continuing a route to a law degree. She is a hard working, goal oriented and independent person. The color she responds to the most is burgundy.

The symbols she chose for patterned background include; the bible verse representing her faith, the scales for her sense of justice and her pursuing of law, the ring formed by the scales is an abstracted ring. The ring was passed down to her from her maternal family after the death of her mother as a child, although she was not the eldest her family, saw her as the most responsible and passed it on to her it is a very sentimental item to her. The keys are both to her home and another to her car. The key to her home is a symbol of her independence and strength to be on her own, while the key to her car is representative to her travelling on a journey. The pattern in the background is representative of her chosen item, an embroidered napkin used in warming handmade tortillas, it is something our grandmother used to feed the family and the embroidery reminds her of our grandmother and her tie to Mexican heritage and culture.

**25. Veronica Alvarado:** one of the youngest of the group, both in terms of her immediate family and extended family. She describes herself also by her profession, she has a degree in journalism and has an interest helping others by spreading information available. She finds a link to her heritage and

culture by working with local organizations that aim to strengthen the latino institutions and communities. The symbols in her background are; the mango tree, abstracted but represent her time spent in Mexico under the mango tree in the rain. Her symbol for our abuelita Paula is the sword. A complex symbol of strength but also of injury. Lastly the symbol of the microphone, used to amplify her voice to people, share information, uplift, educate and help others. She celebrates her heritage by connecting to others and working to be a catalyst for change.

**26. Thank You:** These symbols show the diversity that one's life can have and how we've all been inspired and molded in varying ways by our abuelita Paula, and our heritage as Mexican Americans. But as with every generation we will continue to grow, continue to remember, and continue to try and pass down our strengths, our stories, love, and importance of our heritage.

## Annotated Bibliography

Adelson, Warren. *Sargent Abroad: Figures and Landscapes*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1997.

I am really interested in the blending technique, values, rendition and texture that Sargent exhibits in this book. The composition and lighting of the portraits captures my interest in terms of classic portraiture.

Hovenden, Thomas. "Breaking Home Ties." Philadelphia Museum of Art. Accessed February 9, 2020. <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/47809.html>.

A painting discussing the process of immigration and the impact that it has on the family. I feel that this painting is still relevant to the immigrant community today, I feel that assimilation still occurs today, I find that in my work I ask myself what is identity? During this time America was very interested in the process of "White washing" or homogenizing the incoming immigrants. At the time the painting was received really well because there were many immigrants that were feeling a loss and yearning for family.. America was instilling the idea of homogenizing immigrants in order to make a uniform people. However well intended the homogenizing process also led to an erasing of cultural identity.

Carrera, Magali M. *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. University of Texas Press 2012., n.d.

In this book there is discussion about the formation of identity and categorization of new Spain, Mexico. Specifically looking at portraiture and casting paintings, how that impacted identity and the complexities of which I feel still have an impact today.

Golden, Thelma. Hobbs, Robert. Lewis E. Sarah, Jackson Keith Brian, Halley Peter, "Kehindey Wiley" Rizzoli, New York

The juxtaposition of underrepresented people of color within portraiture. He blends realism with an abstract take on the elements surrounding the background of the portrait. Informs the way I look at the rendition of brown skin in oil portraits. Also makes me consider the effect that the pose I render a portrait will have on the viewer.

Hammack, Phillip. *Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity*. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2008

This information informs my work by providing information about Identity theory. I will be considering the principles to better understand identity as I interview and gather information to inform the portraiture I create..

Kandel, Eric R. *The Age of Insight: the Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain: from Vienna 1900 to the Present*. New York: Random House, 2012.

I am visually drawn in by the curvature and flowy designs of Art Nouveau. Klimt's usage of stylized symbolism and forms in something I consider incorporating into my work to convey storytelling components.



Katz, Vincent. *Janet Fish: Paintings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.

In this book Vincent Katz covers the works and gives a brief overview of points in Janet Fish' life. While it covers mostly the collections of her work Vincent Katz gives us a narrative backdrop with his cover essay that tells us who she was, who she is, and what brought her to pursue art and create her pieces. It also has amazing documentation of Fish's paintings in their saturated colors.

Olson, Eric T. "Personal Identity." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford University, September 6, 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/>

The Theory and facets of personal Identity Theory. A helpful and resourceful asset through the Stanford Plato site offering explanations, resources and essays on Identity Theory. This theory is one of the supporting elements as I try to understand the formation of identity and its variables.

Shinnar, Rachel S. "Coping With Negative Social Identity: The Case of Mexican Immigrants." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 148, no. 5 (2008): 553–76. <https://doi.org/10.3200/socp.148.5.553-576>.

Supports the inquiry of my thesis with research conducted with social Identity specific to Mexican immigrants in mind. This journal focuses on the research done with various individuals and how their self-identities are formed by the way they are labeled or talked about by their work environments and/or certain demeaning societal beliefs.

Moore, Megan. "Micah as Prince" Accessed January 12, 2020

<http://meganmoore.net/paintings/micah-prince>

I love that Megan Moore is working with rendering realistic portraits and then places them against a stylized backdrop. She uses gold and metallics in her paintings, the effect of her careful placement is one of confinement. The design behind its figures is always flat, I am interested in her decision making and consider the effects that this juxtaposition causes for the viewer.

Mutu, Wangechi. "With Wangechi Mutu's *The New Ones, will free Us*, The Met Facade Is Now on View." Purdue OWL. February 1, 2020. Video, 3:04.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2019/wangechi-mutu-director-message>

Mutu has created work for the MET museum and discusses issues of representation and the process of making work to honor the women of her culture. It is a temporary exhibit that can be seen from outside the MET museum. This work is related to mine in many ways. I feel connected to the way Mutu talks about the work and looks at the piece as a way to change the way people interact with people of her culture in the present. Change the way that the women of her culture are seen and giving them power in the way she composes. Colonization has

definitely painted people of color and other cultures in a certain light and Mutu's work this specific piece showcases a sense of dignity and pose.

Mutu was born in Kenya, raised in and is of African descent.

Glover, Jonathan. "I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity. 1988

*I:* by Jonathan Glover introduces the idea of the continuity of consciousness and the effects of time, concepts such as tribalism: loyalty to one's social group and national identity. I felt it particularly useful when considering cultural heritage through the lens of our migrated family and the preservation of verbal history through storytelling, but also when considering the paradigm shifts in thinking, and the development of the role of national identity as Mexican Americans. In this project I ask the individuals to share their relationship visually and more, via a questionnaire. The replies were varied but consistent in conveying the importance of preserving cultural identity within national identity.

Scheibe, Karl E. "Self Studies: The Psychology of Self and Identity". 1998

*Self Studies* by Karl E. Scheibe did so by discussing the concept of Identity vs. the Self. I found this relatable in portraiture as I considered the portraits a pause for reflection and contemplation. Through this work I invited the individuals participating to think about the way they see themselves, what and how do they identify?

Burke, Peter J. Stets, Jan E. "Identity Theory". 2009

*Identity Theory* by Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, discusses the idea of the relation between the self, identity development, and social interaction. In my work I aimed to incorporate this via the symbols chosen by the participating relatives to represent how they see themselves and our grandmother within the patterned backgrounds. The items were important signifiers of cultural heritage and every participant chose an item that spoke directly of their relationship to our grandmother. They also chose these symbols to convey the role our grandmother has in shaping who they are today.