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Blight Birth Burning in Brine

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Victor Celestino Castaneda H

Committee in charge:

Professor Amy Alexander, Chair
Professor Danielle Dean
Professor Anya Gallaccio
Professor Miller Puckette

2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

To Amy Alexander, Danielle Dean, Anya Gallaccio, and Miller Puckette thank you for guiding me through these last three years.

To my family for always being supportive, and letting me be myself.

To my mother who always encouraged total freedom from the constructs of society.

To my father who taught me how to read and be curious about the world around me.

To all the queer and femme cohorts for being there for each other during the pandemic.

And to the San Fernando Valley thanks for being an outsider shining the brightest on the edge of the world.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Blight Birth Burning in Brine

by

Victor Celestino Castaneda H

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Amy Alexander, Chair

Blight Birth Burning in Brine is my thesis exhibition in which my own personal memories become the focus of my artwork. Through sculpture, VR, sound, and performance I insert new details into parts of my memories I cannot remember. Being influenced by the San Fernando Valley, raves and clubs, artificial colors, and DIY aesthetics. Changing the narrative to create an alternate reality

Born in the San Fernando Valley

Southern California winters are usually covered in a blue tint. The valley feels ultra-obsolete, with nothing but abandoned thoughts of broken dreams. This is the valley, the place I grew up, a reject by Los Angeles standards. Suburban neighborhoods enclose the neighborhood I grew up in. On the other side of the tracks. The memory of orange groves lingers on Chatsworth, and CSUN until the late '90s. That's when the history of farming in the area started to become a figment of my imagination. Development for open malls began to sprout, what did it mean to be a suburban kid in the late 90s – early 00's in a re-developing city. Currently, the San Fernando Valley is being re-developed Van Nuys, Pacoima, and Arleta which once were the neighborhoods that had farms from fruits to livestock. Now or while I was growing up it was a working-class Latine population. The new buildings have a color block aesthetic that I detest, a gentrifying symbol. Usually happens when the community makes it safe for them, its when they get priced out of the neighborhood. What is a memory if not a history that we keep to ourselves, or tell anyone who wants to hear?

On Sunday nights after I get off work, I would drive through Ventura Blvd. That street would stretch from one end to the other end of the Valley. The lights would meld with my thoughts, I would forget that time was passing by. On winter nights the desolate streets hummed memories of events that I experienced. That burger joint on Ventura and Van Nuys I think was where I met the friends of this guy I was dating. I don't remember any of their names, who were they? They are ghosts of a lived moment of my life. Every time I passed that restaurant I would think of that moment. The anxiousness of meeting someone new, and who I was at that time. Was it already 3 years since I last talked to him? I swear I saw them waving at

me through the window. The light turned green, and I drove off into the next memory. Every time I pass Van Nuys Blvd, I think of my childhood.

Ayy Hermanas

Van Nuys is where I was born on December 9th. It is also where I would go for hospital visits as a kid. I remember when 5 or 6 nurses would have to hold me down to get my shots. I remember going a long time without telling my parents that something was wrong. Van Nuys is where the record offices are, where important documents come to be approved by the government. I became real in these bureaucratic buildings. My mom and I would take the bus to L.A. from this street, it was fun going to L.A. through the streets. It was during these moments that my mom cemented my independence from everyone once I became a teen. I learned how to travel from Northridge to Hollywood. Hollywood was the first place I experienced outside of the valley on my own. The smell of piss and vomit was strong as I went to Amoeba my favorite place as a teen. I remember getting free sonic youth tickets by buying a cd in Amoeba. Sonic Youth was my first concert, and that was because I learned to escape the Valley through Van Nuys.

It was these built-up moments of hospitals and escapism where I keep thinking of waiting. What is waiting but a time to remember, re-examine, and re-contextualize experiences that are lived? Living in the valley always felt like we were waiting for an escape plan or dreaming of imaginary worlds. I tend to daydream all the time. Now as an adult I daydream through the act of making. What do I make? I make sculptures, videos, VR, and whatever other methods I can think of. I keep thinking of my memories, but I always think of music in relation to my art. Music is my first avenue in which I escape and create fantasies. What are these mundane moments I existed in? What are my feelings associated with these lived experiences?

Can I tell you a secret? Can you promise not to tell anyone? Well, here it is, I am currently daydreaming of a world that exists in a virtual space. You are transported to a club/hospital where a doctor can examine your internal dialogue and you can dance in the operating room. This world is born out of my need to escape the valley and the lights of clubs around the city. What I love about being forced to embrace boredom is that the world ceases to exist the way society views it. You can escape through the overlooked pathways, you can become invisible, you can people watch better, and you can go in and out of social events. My world is an escape from the construct of reality, no one can tell me that this is not a real place. It is a personal memory that is unraveling itself in different realms. This world can be yours in the future when I finish it. You will be able to dance to sounds that are from the past, and present-past. You'll be able to get a drink at the nurse's station, and lounge with a cigarette in the waiting room. You'll be able to decide what mood you want to be in depending on how you are feeling the day you enter it. This is my secret, a future virtual reality that becomes a fictionalized version of multiple memories. This is an ode to the Van Nuys Hospital where I learned to escape reality.

In my early twenties was when I started going out to clubs and raves. In both these spaces a fantasy was born, where I can create a different persona each night. I always refer to the 2003 film *Party Monster* based on Michael Alig a club kid in the 80s and 90s. His rise and fall was not what I was interested in the movie, but how he envisioned parties as a way to create alter egos. The colors in the film appealed to me in a turn of the century neo-psychedelic haze. The artificiality of it and surreal aspects of the film have shaped my association with clubbing and reality. More on this later on in the chapter on colors. Clubs and music have become an avenue in which I can escape reality through daydreaming, dancing, and derealization. When dancing on the dance floor I enter a state of trance and reality slips away. I enter the space I used to as a kid when leaving the world. *Ayy Hermanas* the club I conjured up in a virtual space

merges the fantasy and the real. Images of childhood are plastered on the walls, while field recording of club sounds plays on a loop as you navigate it. The translation for *Ayy Hermanas* is slang for oh sister or oh sis, hermanas or sis are queer ways of referring to your best friends.

Watching tv, a monster sits in front of it, it is made out of paper mache and a fridge door as the torso. It is viewing the virtual space through the lens of the VR wearer. The monster is eating itself and filled with spots throughout the body. They took a day off because they are sick. *TV Buddha* by Nam June Paik is a Zen meditation on seeing itself through the liminality of being in the west while being from the east through technology. *Ayy Hermanas* is not on this spectrum of seeing, it is an associative feeling of both spaces of a hospital and clubs. It is blurred memories where different timelines interweave with each other, no object is set on a fixed time. Except for the photographs of my childhood. Snapshots of moments I don't remember. The feelings are detached from those moments, yet they break the fantasy of the club/hospital.

Within the digital landscape of *Ayy Hermanas* babies move in sync with each other. The textures of the models were mostly scanned drawings or photos. The viewer starts outside and makes their way inside starting in the first room where the babies four to be exact are moving. Outside, the sky is made from star stickers that have been scanned and edited. Most of the textures are crayon color swatches I edited in photoshop. The first room is an infirmary for babies that have posters for club nights such as Manic Monster Mondays which is a reference to goth nights. Also, things like Upload Your Essence Wednesday nights which I interpret as living in an era of being online in which our histories are frequently being uploaded online, and no differentiation of both the digital and the real self anymore. Just as Legacy Russell has called it AFK (Away from Keyboard) "Instead, AFK as a term works toward undermining the fetishization of "real life," helping us to see that because realities in the digital are echoed offline, and vice versa, our gestures, explorations, actions online can inform and even deepen our offline, or AFK, existence." I am thinking of this poster as that merger of my digital footprint with

the real to create an abstract version of the self online. Uploading my own personal history as well in the format of a digital landscape in which you can explore important elements of my life being a sickly child and my days of going to clubs.

The second room is the dancefloor which is also the operating room in which one corner is the nurse's stations with images of my childhood above them. These images are a way to bring the digital back to reality and are bad photos taken of photos in a photograph album. Here is where most of the figures are dancing. They are two repeating characters a bunny, and a blob that closely resembles a teddy bear. The bunny models are created in the image of my paper mache. This is the origin of the sound, a DJ mix I did where I distorted the sound. The mix is field recordings of clubs I visited over the last 3 to 4 years. The voices are the most interesting part because they highlight the conversations or things we have said that we have forgotten. It is an archive of drunken conversations and excitements of different music. The third room is the waiting room that acts as a lounge area with rows of seats with the same figure in different spots waiting to be called. Throughout the VR I bought hospital 3D models that are more realistic to create tension with the models I made. Since the hospital models are realistic looking than the ones I made. They include tables, cabinets, operating lights, a bed, surgery tools, and gurneys. I've also merged the outside with the inside, flowers are changing colors in the waiting room, while a bee is on a loop in the operating room. Allowing for things to become a surreal landscape.

Nam June Paik's *Tv Buddha* is a reflection on the border of two identities of Western and Asian cultures. It is a Zen meditation of a de material philosophy in this case Buddhism, watching itself through a material object in this case the screen. Being of Korean descent Paik merged his western education with his Korean upbringing. Charles Park breaks through the commercial of the radio station. A guest of 2:88 Am, he cites his essay *A Poor Man from a Poor Country: Nam June Paik, TV-Buddha, and the Techno-Orientalist Lens* in the book *Techno-*

Orientalism. He points out that the readings for this piece is more on how fluid identities and cultures merge with technology to create hybridity. "Instead, one must read Paik's art as demonstrating the fluidity with which cultural and technological exchanges occur, and just how quickly these exchanges can be absorbed to generate hybrid identities and cultures." Popular during this time was Zen Buddhism within the close group of artist he hung around with. Paik himself would not associate himself with Buddhism. However, being Korean and moving between these two philosophical ideas allowed him to stand out and create a hybrid techno-identity.

My piece *Ayy Hermanas* is a meditation on trauma of being a sick child as a way to create fantasy through a virtual world using virtual reality as a tool. Being in and out of hospitals made me daydream and escape the situation in which I was in. It was through daydream in which reality made sense even when nothing was making sense at first. Once old enough I was really into going out to clubs and raves I came to understand the imagined world some of these spaces were creating for the club or rave-goers. This piece is a meditation on a sick child who can escape reality through television by watching what the VR viewer is doing through the tv. It is imagining a new situation. I come back to reality as I continue to drive down the street as I leave Van Nuys behind.

Immaterial

The radio on Sunday nights sings me emotions that once felt like a destroyed and exciting moment. 2003 came and sang to me, thoughts I had as I was entering adulthood, oh how I wish to go back and say ignore them. Sinewaves of playful hope erupts out of me on Sunday nights, the valley is a star hidden by the Hollywood hills. People I once knew came and talked to me through the airwaves. "Hey remember when we used to hang out behind the H hall building during school breaks?" What was 2003 telling me through these things? It was telling

me that time rebuilds my memories, and sometimes they come at 2:88 AM. During this time all your memories and thoughts converge to create a heightened eruption of fluid time. You really can't divulge what is real what is fake, what puzzle piece belongs to what memory. I was wishing for things I did not know I wanted as a teenager. 2:88 AM is the character I built to express this muddy recollection of time. The radio creates a harsh static, that I am awoken from my daydream drive. "Hi, welcome to the 2:88 AM Show, where you live inside my head, and nothing makes sense at first. I am your host 2:88 AM." I look at the radio in a blur and I am transported to 1999.

Y2K is a couple of weeks away in 2:88 AM story, a teenager telling me about their hopes for the future. Me being in 2020, I can think of moments they are recollecting. Their hope for what would be their life would ebb and flow, gay marriage became legal in 2015, they probably did not get that career they wanted since most everyone suffered through the 2008 recession. I wonder in this story, what happened to their relationship? All their memories feel like a failed optimism. I hope they are ok, in 2020. Something in me tells me they are ok, cause there is always hope and there is always a future. The crackling of the radio fades into a commercial. Mark Fisher spouts that the future is dead and selling us a vision that is rooted in 20th century ideals. He drones on and on how the crackling in music that is prominently in lo-fi music is somehow us being nostalgic for the past, and we can no longer imagine a future. He quotes himself from his book *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures* referencing music genres on why the future is no longer here. "But the reliance of current artist on styles that were established long ago suggests that the current moment is in the grip of a formal nostalgia..." He makes references to 'The Arctic Monkeys', 'Adele', 'Amy Winehouse' as some of the artist who use styles from the past as to why we no longer can think of the future. I disagree with his infomercial; the future is dead only if you can imagine it through the eyes of 20th century futurity. We have new data, information that has been gathered within the last 20

years. Yeah everything seems to be collapsing, but what are actions we can take? 2:88 AM is hopeful for the future and is letting the world know of their optimistic future. As I drive on Ventura Blvd, I think what is this future I want for me, or us? What does that look like?

2:88 AM created a world in his room, in which we explored either auditory or virtually. How was he communicating with me from the past onto the present? Especially through both landscapes. Suburban rooms always feel very curated with posters and photos of bands and people we like. This is the area in which someone becomes who they are. 2:88 AM's room feels like a time capsule to me. There are posters from Nirvana, Orgy, and other bands. With a desktop computer that when you look at it, it becomes alive. Look at the texture of this object alternate between several moving shaders. The computer has a ghostly skin, it became a memory of past technology floating with an active screen. 2:88 AM is watching tv, or at least that is how we can perceive it. Re-watching the 2:88 AM show, in which they are the host. Sometimes people call in from the present and ask them questions. They answers them blurring that boundary of time. What is the past if we are interacting with it?

This is what I imagine how 2:88 AM's room looks like. I start to re-imagine their life outside of what they told us. I start to create new narratives out of this show. Maybe they can re-create it if 2:88 AM knows what will happen in the future. Maybe I should call him about things to come. The red light turns green and I drive off to the next red light. Contemplating whether to call or not, I go with being lazy to look up the number that I don't call. But just hearing others calling in and 2:88 AM interacting with them, I am there creating those moments.

Scrolling Marquee

Before I drove off Van Nuys one final thought emerged from the depths of my brain. I always remember my fourth birthday, I was pestering my mom about a toy I found in the closet. "Mama, pa' quien es el juguete?" which translates to "Mom who is this toy for?" It was a truck she

bought, she told me it was for another kid in the neighborhood. I was sad, but later that day during the party, when we were opening the gifts. There it was the truck I found in the closet. It was a remote control truck that I played with until I got bored with it a few weeks later. This memory is triggered by a LED scrolling marquee. I don't know if I was just tired or what but the marquee started to glitch out in front of my very own eyes.

The next words that scrolled through the marquee is what follows.

“None

Amoeba is a record shop in Hollywood, I remember it, it feels like I am imagining a future memory where humanoid beings exist.

Reality seems to be more with music.

They are the natural world transplanted onto a digital universe, and sometimes they log off into reality and become crude things.

When it was time to open up presents there it was time to open up presents there it was for someone else.

Reality seems to be more with music.

She then proceeded to tell me it was a truck/car, a remote-control truck.

They are the natural world transplanted onto a digital universe, and sometimes they log off into reality and become crude things.

What i remember most about that day is the very first memory I can remember.

All I wanted to do was make something, wasn't sure what but I don't know how the truck/car looked like.

Amoeba is a record shop in Hollywood, I remember it, it feels like I am imagining a future memory where humanoid beings exist.

It is also a formative moment here i realized I wanted to do was make something, wasn't sure what but I wanted to do was make something, wasn't sure what but I wanted to do was make something, wasn't sure what but I don't know how the truck/car looked like.

They belong in a digital universe, and sometimes they have no linear time, they have no linear time, they have no concept of reality as humans know it.

I have glimpses of that memory I remember it, it feels like I am imagining a future memory where humanoid beings exist.

They smile at their wasteland of data, they have no concept of reality as humans know it.”

I start to see my memories being advertised to me. It becomes a nonsensical time machine, glitching from the past into the present, and future. My memories become ghosts in the machine. They merge with time. Humanoid people in the future have embraced my memories as their own. This text is fed into the humanoid's algorithm. My body is ghosting itself from my flesh into the digital world, to be cemented into a box that will last until its circuitry dies. In my daze Legacy Russell enters my consciousness through the radio advertisements. "As the body in its contemporary content and the machines it engages become increasingly difficult to splice, this offers an opportunity to see that the machine is a material through which we process our bodily experience. And, as such, the bodies navigating digital space are as much computational as they are flesh." And just within that second she disappears into the ether of the electronic world. I am a ghost in the shell just like in the movie when I look at that scrolling marquee. My flesh is connected to the circuitry of the scrolling marquee on a window with each passing word. A disembodied memory for things to come.

Three Truths and a Lie

The ugly is present in the mood of the San Fernando Valley. The ugly is not a derogatory term, it is an embracement of the flaws that make a place. Growing up we've been conditioned to think of our city as a dead zone, with not much excitement. It is these feelings of otherness that let us exist among the city-born Angelenos. We have our own codes of living, knowing which areas are the meth-heads or the barely maintained school. The valley is left alone to create their world. Ugliness is the hot summer sun, the heat of the asphalt welling up my nose. Ugliness is the random apartments deteriorating near shinier buildings. The destroyed suburban homes where everyone lives, and the mundane existence are ugly. This ugliness leaves us feeling existential.

The faces of the rendered valley become distorted, as I drive on this large stretch of the street, some have missing pixels and corrupted data. These expand my recollection of my memories, creating ugly and haphazard objects. My unsteady hand is not for accuracy but for distant proximity to the rendered memory in my head. All the lost data when I am recalling a memory, I fill in the gaps with whatever interpretation I want to create. Like my toys in which I have created four toys 3 being my favorite or one in which I never used. *Three Truths and a Lie* is what I call them, and the viewer can decide which one is the outlier in the piece. The lights of the streets reflect back at me through the rearview mirror. It wakes me up and I continue to drive.

2:88 Am's voice brings me back to the present with their facts. Mike Kelley *Educational Complex* leaves out the places he doesn't remember blank. The work is a series of models of all the schools Kelley attended, including his home. This work stems from a place of memory, or the unconscious as he states. Leaving them blank because he cannot remember exactly what those places been like. For him this acts as a place of institutional abuse that caused trauma leading to an empty space in his memory. It is in these empty spaces where the viewer can interpret their own version of institutional abuse. "Shared experience of abuse," as Kelley said in the art21 interview on memory. After his arena series in which people started to see it as abuse instead of what he originally intended which was about 80's consumption. That's when he began to explore this series of memory repression and using the unconscious as a place of letting trauma exist. "Missing Time" is what he calls this practice of recalling memories through the unconscious. Unlike Kelley, I am using a different approach in my work. I am not recalling the unconscious, I am deliberately ignoring it and adding my own interpretation of how I want the memory to function. The reason I am choosing this is that I don't trust myself to recall my own memories. So, I have taken the liberty of creating a fictional moment and added it to my

regular life. This is the 2:88am character, in which the arc of my memories exist. Are all works related to trauma? No, but trauma is in the work in certain pieces, like *Ayy Hermanas*.

There is also hope and joy in pieces like *Three Truths and a Lie* which consists of some of my favorite toys I can remember, with the addition of one that wasn't a favorite or didn't play as much. The toy soldier was the one toy that wasn't my favorite. My most cherished toys were the pink My Little Pony doll, a silver razor scooter, and a yellow truck. These all held an important memory for me. My little pony was one of my favorites, at the time I was really into westerns and traditional boy things. Looking at it now brings me an awareness of my queerness, it let me express my queerness through my imagination at play. The scooter for me felt like liberation, I would be able to go anywhere within the neighborhood area. This is how I started to explore my hometown The San Fernando Valley. The toy that made me think of this work in this way was the yellow truck my dad gave to me. It was the size of the palm of your hand. I would take it everywhere with my dad. It became an emotional object that held such core memories for me. I don't even know if he gave it to me, to be honest, but I am choosing to say he did. Why did I choose a toy soldier? I wanted to put another element that seemed like it belong and pushed out the pink pony as a lie. This is based on an ice breaker I experienced as an undergrad during intro where everyone would introduce themselves and say two truths and one lie, and the classroom would try to figure out which one was fake. I wanted people to view the My Little Pony as the traditional binary outlier, at first glance without the viewer knowing anything about me. I am playing with my own emotional associations with that piece while also speaking on queerness. It is not a work on trauma, but a piece that explores my core memories. It resonates with me on such a Sunday night. It leaves me unable to distinguish between facts and untruths. That moment I continue to drive, it becomes a hazy memory as I remember my favorite toys.

Some Thoughts are Empty Houses

I stop at a red light on Tampa Ave. I think of the spaces that were close to this street. I think of the apartment I grew up in, which had Tampa as one of the main streets at the border. Also, there was another apartment in Sherman Way and Tampa Ave where I lived too. Not too far from Tampa on Sherman Way and Mason was my first apartment in which I lived alone. In Tampa and Rinaldi in the far north, I lived with my ex. These places have become spaces in which existing happened. Just like 2:88 AM's room, I keep creating rooms in my head of old apartments, and houses I lived in. I keep imagining a room at the center of another room with fabric walls. In which there is a pile of boxes on a corner that has my drawings printed on them. The fabric is drawn on windows and doors. Creating a room that looks like a house, that one can see through the fabric. *Some Thoughts are Empty Houses* is the title of it. The same thought is repeated over and over on each box, being encapsulated in the room. Each apartment or house I lived in becomes a reminder of how I moved within that space. What is a home when you move in and out of different rooms?

I am thinking of this home as a reminder of how often we are always in different rooms. We leave our house to spend our day in our workroom. However, your own room becomes a place in which you create the desired environment. Each place I ever lived in was a transitory space in which I was passing. I still think what will be the place that feels like home if nothing has yet to feel like that. Yet each room like the hospital has become a place in which I escape reality. Imagine you on the outside watching through the fabric walls me in the center of the room DJing, but instead of regular songs. They are field recordings of nights I went out clubbing with friends. On the outside of the house, there are dancers flirting with each other, asking each other to dance, and slow dancing at the end. These are bunny characters with a onesie, emulating the characters I made in the VR space. It is a memory of a night out meeting someone new and leaving the club together. It is not a particular one but the many it has

happened in the past. I am on the center floor sitting down while DJing, and songs like Britney Spears *Toxic*, Daft Punk *One More Time*. This is the performance in which I extend the VR audio component outside of the digital world. It is 2:88 AM who is DJing in this enclosed room. The light turns green and I drive on.

Notepad Papers

I pass De Soto Ave and think of the local community college I attended. I imagine myself writing on notepad papers and what things I would write on it. Notes for class, notes for doctor appointments, reminders, and messages for other people. Like a cheesy movie, my mind has a flashback to receiving a note asking me out on a date. "You and me some beers and tacos think about it?" But it was in Spanish "Tu y yo unas chelas y tacos piensalo?" Chelas is Mexican slang for beer. Soon other words and doodles start appearing on the paper they are memories that I experienced. It starts to become a journal in which I narrate moments. "Did I tell you about the time he asked me to blow him in the car seat of his mother's car? He was 42!!!" It becomes a painting called "*Confessions of a Fake 19 Year Old*" The other writings that appear are for a job interview, a reminder to call parents. It becomes a palimpsest In which things from different eras merge into one area. Especially in "*Mundane Sublime*," there is a shopping list that has a question written on top of it. The list is Milk, Chicken, Onion, Pan Dulce (Sweet Bread), and Tortilla. And it asks, "Do you remember when we drove on molly & the universe moved at 15 mph while we were 80 mph in the rapture?" It has a drawing of a smiling sun, and next to it, the words in a crossword format We Existed Tomorrow.

Time blurs in these notepapers; Spanish and English intermix bringing different regions of my memories together. The doodles on the paper are a subconscious image concerning the words written on it. A smiling sun is both sinister and joyful in "*Mundane Sublime*" to me. A rapture is both considered a state of intense pleasure and the second coming of Christ in which

true believers are taken to heaven at the end of times. My feelings about this notepaper are even at the end of time I still have to do my daily mundane ritual like going shopping. I still must live with my memories of what I experienced. This one is an actual memory that I experienced but is a reminder as well that I existed at that moment. Existed is used instead of exist because everything is always in the past by the time the current moment is processed. We will exist until the sun explodes and evaporates everything within its radius. We may at some point exist only as artifacts that we will leave behind.

"Confessions of a Fake 19 Year Old" lives on a made-up memory that encapsulates my own queer memories of dating and hook-up culture. Awkwardness and potentially dangerous situations in which humor arises. Laughing at those moments in retrospect. Between these moments like *"Mundane Sublime"* everyday life seeps in like calling the parents or getting ready for a job interview. The drawings to me are an aura of anxiety depending on their placement. A figure smoking is usually the most common thing I draw that comes from anxiety, and its association with people who smoke to relax the nerves, but it doesn't. Flowers are also a recurring theme because they are reborn each spring season. Just like memories, they re-emerged occasionally they are neither good nor bad. It just awakens a certain feeling each time a memory blooms again.

Couches

Still thinking of notepads and where I write them, I think of couches a place where it can be both relaxing and traumatic. This couch I have in mind, I found already in the beginning stages of decay. The stuffing coming out of certain areas, and no legs, and ripped fabric as well. I drew in it, at first they were supposed to be the same figure but ultimately became two figures. One figure has flower eyes dipped in red paint coming out of the couch. It rests on top of a brown carpet and a pink flamingo wedged between the carpet and couch. I have a flashback to

the moment I was watching TV and had my first kiss. The vision is intense and it always feels like a flower blooming out of my eyes.

Just like my other work it has become a psychological symbol for moments of happiness and sadness. The fabric is the flesh in which the memories linger after our bodies get up from it. It has also been a fascination for me to think of mundane objects that are in a home. The sentimentality we associate with certain objects in our homes and how it always changes from person to person. The fluidity in which I draw my figures is always in a way without gender, this is a queer relationship frozen in time. Decaying as each day passes by. Is it love at first sight because of blooming flowers or because of the same red flowers last dying days of a couple? A time capsule for moments that exist in the viewer's eyes from the first kiss I had on the couch.

Colors and The Valley Sun

I continue driving and something from the corner of my eye catches my attention. It is the restaurant *Sol y Luna*, a Mexican restaurant. I have a flashback going on dates here. However, the thing that sticks out to me at that moment is the word, *Sol*. The Spanish word for Sun, I am feeling the hot Valley sun on that cold winter night. The sun on the hottest summer is blinding beyond recognition. The sun colors the valley orange and creates an artificial surface on everything. The valley is not blinding because of the rays, but the transformation that those rays make on the colors of the objects. They glow bright and at that moment is when the reality of the world becomes fake and depressing. It is this veneer underneath the artificial where I am interested in feelings. The sun to me is not a happy symbol, but an idea in which it helps surface the darkness that hides in plain sight, not in the shadows. I always keep thinking about how bright colors are used in places that have more sun. Usually brighter colors because they reflect back the sun outwards for insulating the building.

The bright sun burned into my retina one hot summer day, and ever since then on the hottest days the San Fernando Valley is imbued with a red-orange hue. The colors have an artificial veneer bubbling up on those days. You can see the reality of the people in that blinding reflection. The secrets are displayed for everyone to see, and the colors are not fun or entertaining but depressing and full of failed dreams. The San Fernando Valley is the overlooked city that will never be Hollywood or Los Angeles, it is that town where the people don't belong to the city. It is this rejection in which the memories feel stronger on burning asphalt as sweat evaporates as soon as it leaves the pores. Being a valley reject means you are attuned to the failure of existing and being noticed. On the hot summer days we hide in our air-conditioned rooms, and away from the city. I proudly wear my rejection in embracing the failures of the town I grew up in.

The colors in the work are not just for playfulness but for the embracement of the darkness bubbling beneath the surface. They are more depressing than they are happy, and this is how I view The Valley as a depressing place with bright colors. The artificialness of it feels more real to me because I can feel the disassociation from the body and the surrounding world. This is where I begin to come up with the terms *Blight Birth Burning in Brine* a phrase that repeated over the course of 2021. The whole year I kept thinking of my associations with my own memories, what was real in me? Being born and existing on a failing planet, I kept thinking what is the point of it all? For me, this phrase is not the pessimist attitude it tries to be, but a reminder that existing is also a moment of fun. Just like on hot summer Valley days I can find moments of contentment. For me, that is music, dancing, and concerts and why these things are important in my work. Music allows me to exist in the current world. Each person identifies contentment differently, or not but we have the ability to try and be content with our existence. Existence is pointless unless we make it have a direction. Just like embracing being a Valley reject, finding myself through the muck of the world.

I keep recalling the phrase *Blight Birth Burning in Brine*. Which is now a book. It is a combination of physical and digital drawings. Sometimes merging both the analog with the digital. As I stated earlier it is a phrase that consumed my thoughts in 2021. It is a non-linear narrative through images and text. The scanned drawings have been altered through a digital process. While the digital are screenshots of screens of things I have explored on the internet. I keep thinking about the earlier quote Legacy Russell said on how both the real and the online have merged. My memories have become abstracted and poetic through sentences like “We have lost the objective playing the same memory” in one of the pages of the book. While glitched out video game characters are on the page. Losing in a game we respawn where we last saved. Recalling a memory is where I last saved it. Playing it out in real-time can create different game mechanics in which the narrative can go.

The fakeness of reality on hot summer days allows me to move beyond myself, to embrace its truths underneath the veneer. We must remember we existed yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It's never been a good existence for me living the American dream, but I found where I can explode into a million pieces of stardust in music. America to me is a failed existence because I am not part of the status quo. Just like the San Fernando Valley is not visible to L.A., especially on those orange days. I don't believe that I will be part of to the status quo. America's surfaces are a shallow reminder that it is only covering the truth underneath bright summer colors. This realization just like embracing being from the Valley, allows me to create your own world. Music helps me explore that other worlds that are not America. Dancing puts me in a trance that my unconscious makes appearances in flashes guiding my current thoughts. Dancing makes me feel connected to other beings and that we see each other. Music creates new images in my head when combined with dancing, cause my body doesn't feel like it is here.

2:88 Am comes back on the radio. “What I liked about Tim Burton's use of color is the that it brings up the artificial realness in his films. Suburban Gothic is what it is termed. In which

the darkness comes out in bright-hued sets.” They continue describing surrealism in Burton’s movies. This idea of suburban colors in bright hues to bring out the eerie feels like what I work through in my own pieces. Combined with the Valley sun, my use of bright color brings the eerie to the surfaces of each object in the room. Deborah Knight and George McKnight guests of the 2:88 Am show reference their essay in the book *The Philosophy of Tim Burton* about his use of color in *Edward Scissorhands* “For his location, Burton chose a suburb where the bungalows were actually repainted in a range of pastel colors, notably blue, pink, yellow, purple, olive, orange, and green, to achieve a particular color-coordinated palette. Cars and clothing are also in pastel colors. Edward is the outsider, the immediate marker of difference, as signaled by his wild black hair, pale face with dark eyes and lips, clothes that range from black to gray to white, and of course, by his steely scissor hands. Because of his appearance, he is a counterpoint to both the everyday activities and the sensibility of American suburban life.” The bright colors in his films become the markers for homogeneity with the contrasting darker color of Johnny Depp’s pale skin, and black goth-like clothing sets off the discomfort of the brightly-mundane citizens. Yellow for me has become a symbol for the San Fernando Valley sun, it has become the ultimate marker of artificiality in which it brings the darkness to the front. It is what lights the space in the performance space and objects using yellow gels for lights. It mutates the colors into a different one while still maintaining a bit of bright color.

They play a clip of Burton being interviewed explaining his position on abnormal and normal when talking about Ed Wood and his suburban upbringing in Burbank. “It sounds kind of stupid, but the tone was so depressing and ominous and slow-motion that it had a frighteningly real quality. That’s why I have a problem when people say something’s real or not real, or normal or abnormal. The meaning of those words for me is very personal and subjective. I’ve always been confused and never had a clearcut understanding of the meaning of those kinds of words. You don’t know what’s real and what’s not real anymore.” Both colors and suburbia have

played an important role for Burton to explore the eeriness in suburbia. In my memories, the eeriness surfaces through the gaps of things I don't remember. For me, the heightened strangeness becomes in creating newer memories that never existed that come from a place of feeling a certain way about them when I re-tell them. As Burton says you don't know what's real or not real anymore.

I also think of the colors in the clubs that emanate from the lights. Those artificial colors are a staple in clubs, liquor stores, led displays, and all lighting that illuminates the night. A flashback to me being in the patio of a club with the pumping music in the background, and people around me smoking a cigarette. It is a blurry moment before backing out, yet when I wake up the next day hungover all I can remember is dancing and flashing lights. I don't know what happened but I do know that lights were there with some glimpses of dancing. This other light source also affects my color choices. It encapsulates the feeling I had when I first saw *Party Monster*. While fun it can also be too self-destructive, it can also make you have a feeling of entering a different world as well. That's all I want with my objects to enter a different world outside my suburban upbringing. I become aware of the winter night I am existing in, as I continue to drive home. The suburban streets in the San Fernando Valley become a fantasy with each passing light.

Choices on Materials

On the homestretch of my drive through Ventura Blvd. What becomes real in the impermanence of this story? Objects in my memories are real in their crudeness. My hand unable to fully render them trompe l'oeil creates a distant approximation of them using the papier-mache method. I started to use papier-mache to create more abject pieces. It also worked with the way I make objects with a sense of rapidity. With this approach, I can also

unravel the objects that are coming from my memory. Showing at times the structure underneath each piece. In some areas of the sculptures or paintings you can see the structure or the paper without paint, an object without all the details I can't remember. I use house paint instead of other paints to have a plastic feeling to the objects. Also, can find more combinations of bright colors that are accessible quickly. However, most are usually the discarded sale section paint that customers didn't want. They tend to be the ugly colors that for whatever reason they chose but didn't work for their project. These are the colors that make a large portion of the paints I have chosen. These are the ingredients for the fantasy of 2:88 Am.

Bye

Arriving Home I get off the car and walk towards the front door. All my memories of the night emerge from the shadows of the house. They come to greet me and rearrange themselves into different realities as my mood shifts as I walk to the door. Each work I made flickers as garden statues. As I enter my home I see the sculpture watching tv of a club hospital. I stumble into a desk containing paper notes of things I need to do, letters sent to me, and doodles. I walk past the couch with a portrait hanging on top of the couch where someone is watching tv with the sculpture. I enter my room, I forgot to turn off the light of my vanity the book *Blight Birth Burning in Brine* is opened to the page on Silver Daddies. I chuckle at the messages in the analog screen. I finally lay to bed, and linger on the night passing through the valley through Ventura Blvd. I laugh at everything I remembered and start to close my eyes. As I drift of to sleep 2:88 Am's voice enters my subconscious. "Hi, welcome to the 2:88 Am show where you live inside my head, and nothing makes sense at first, I am your host 2:88 Am..."

Images

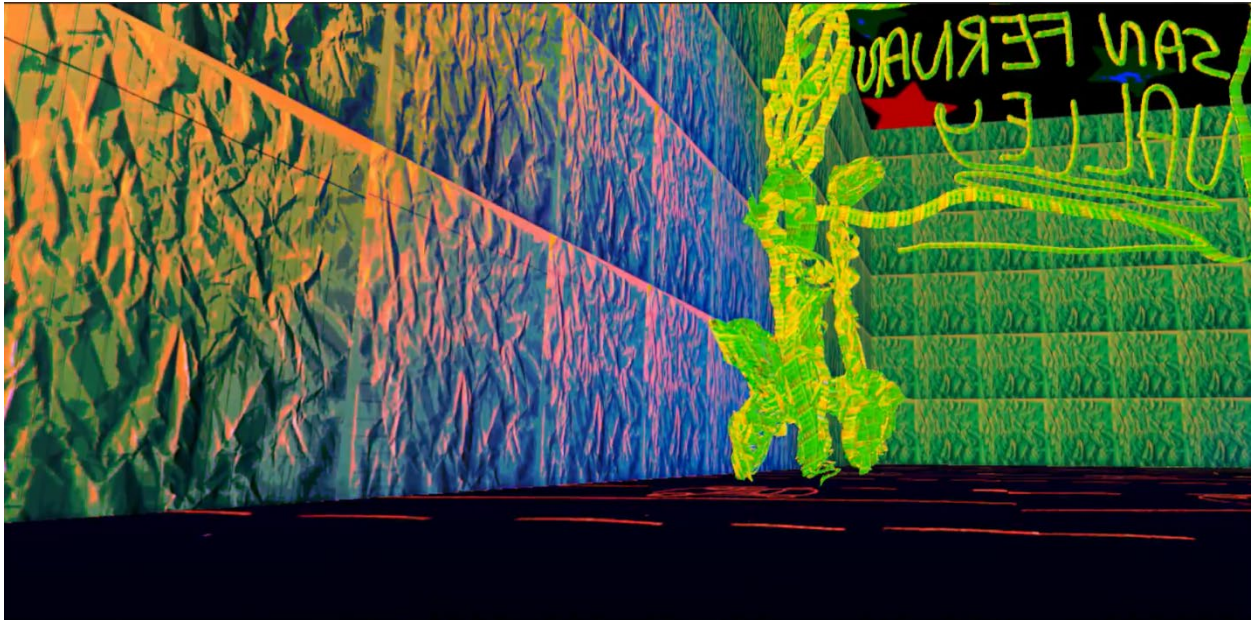


Image 2 Ayy Hermanas (2022) Still Shot VR

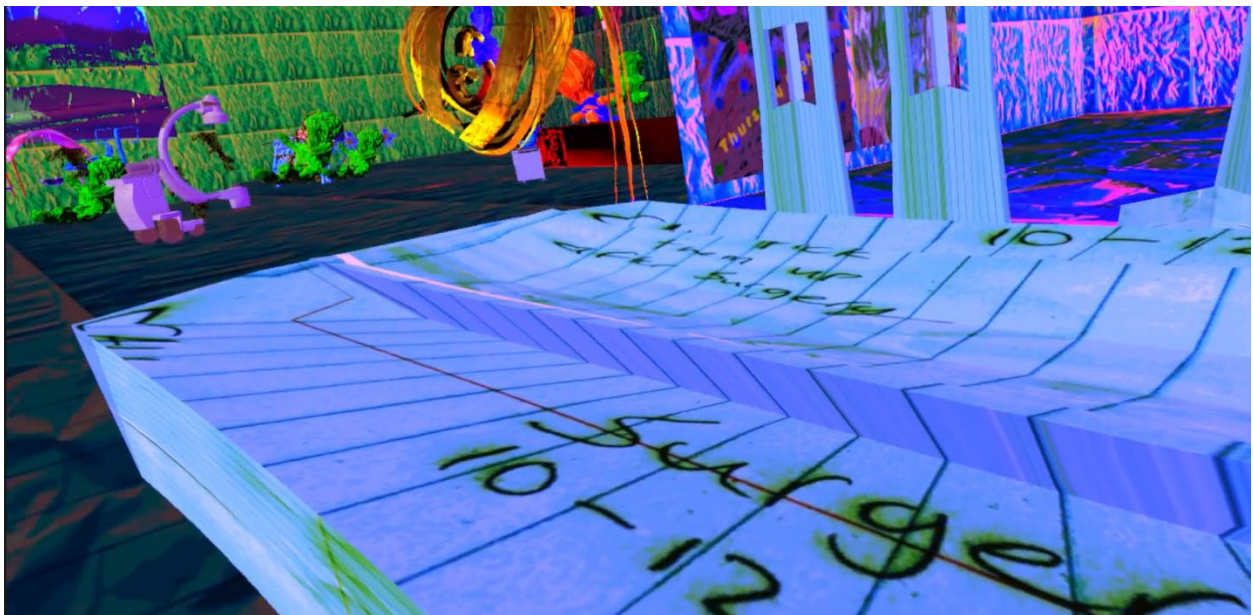


Image 3 Ayy Hermanas (2022) Still Shot VR

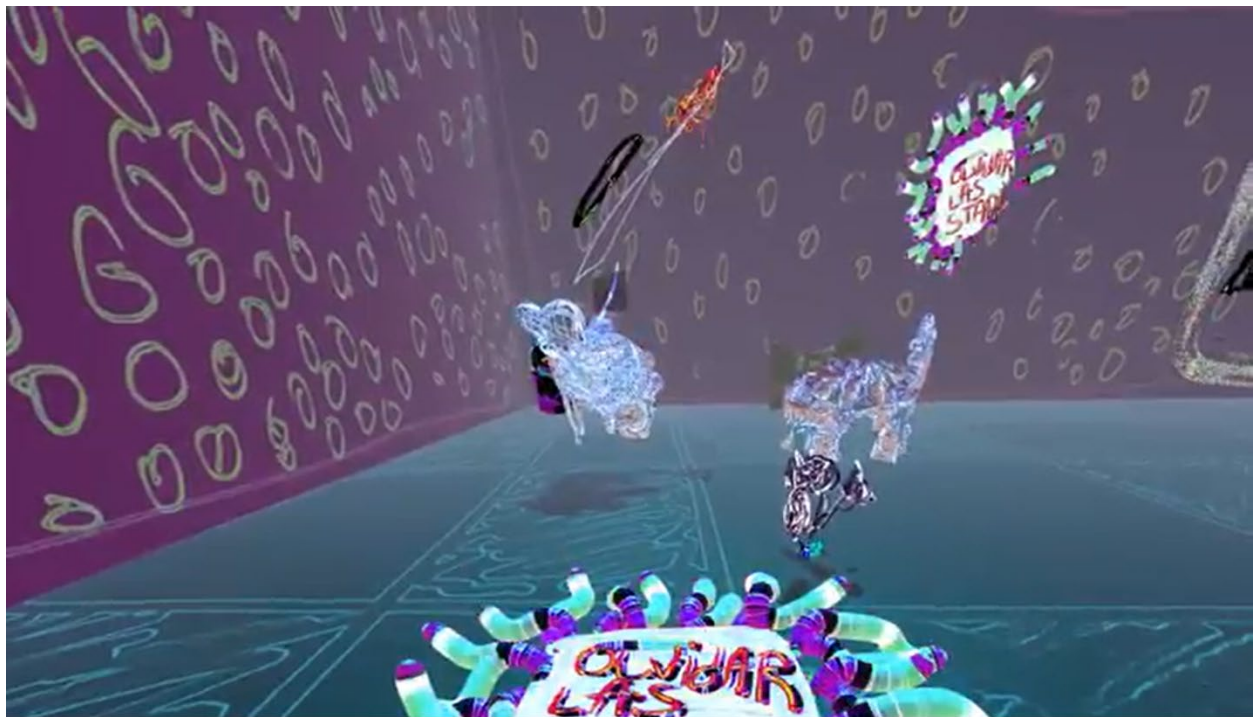


Image 4 Immaterial (2020) Still Shot VR



Image 5 Immaterial (Video) Still Shot



Image 5 Untitled(Scrolling Marquee) (2021)



Image 6 Three Truths and a Lie (2021)

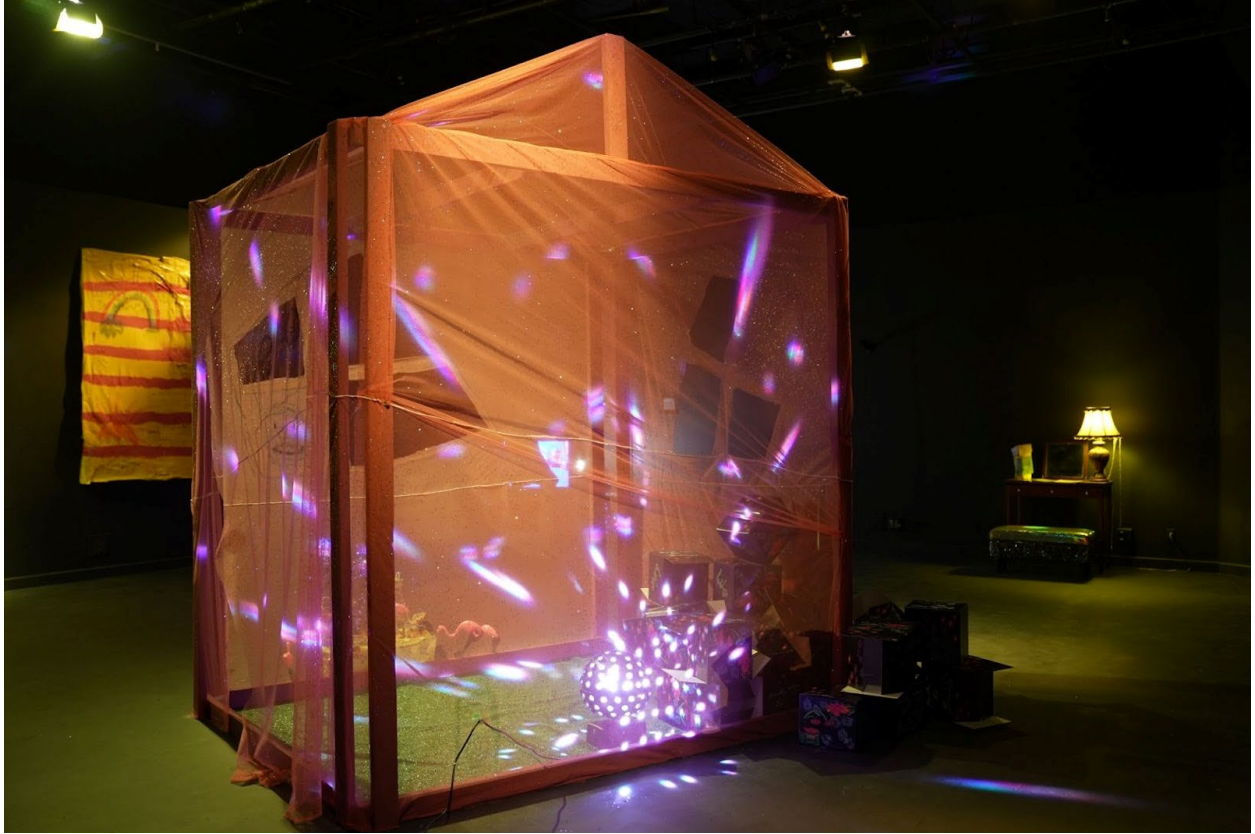


Image 7 Some Thoughts are Empty Houses (2022)



Image 8 Science (2022)

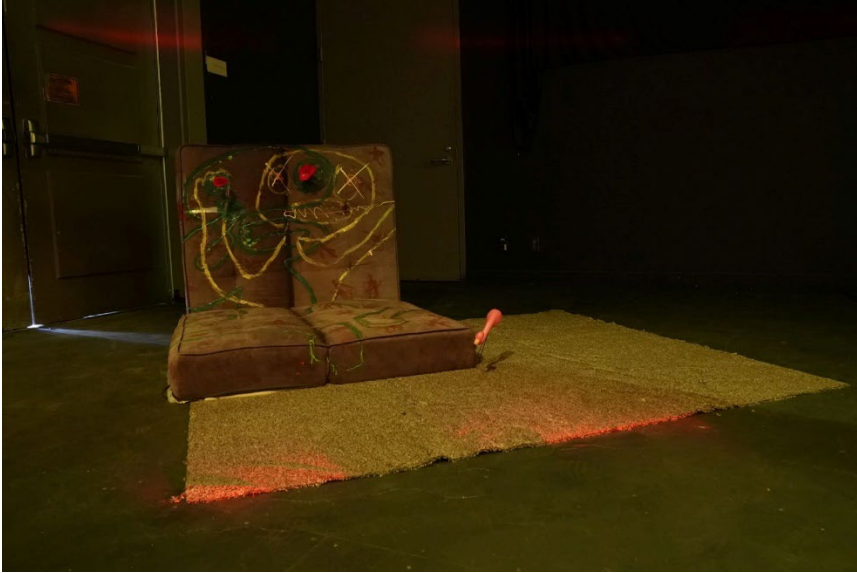


Image 9 Couch (2021)

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