

Diversity Statement

As a first-generation, bilingual Colombian-American born in Queens, New York, I have spent my life navigating and embracing the intersections of two cultures. Growing up in an immigrant family, I witnessed firsthand the complexities of my family's adoption to an American culture, struggling to accept new cultural norms, while maintaining a deep connection to my Colombian heritage. This life experience has profoundly influenced my approach to both teaching and creative practice. I find excitement in seeking voices that inspire new ways of experiencing the world. It seems that my story is one of deep listening, learning through observation, and the commitment to growing by gaining insights within a process of the creation of knowledge and searching through all the cultural signifiers that make up our contemporary world. I believe that by living in six (6) different cities on two continents, diversity whether in culture, thought, or experience—is essential to the creation of meaningful work and the cultivation of an intellectually rich, collaborative environment that has the potential to challenge the institutionalized canonical voices of today.

Throughout my years as a practitioner and educator, I have invested deeply in fostering environments that promote creative experimentation, intellectual trust, and culturally informed discourse. Early in my career, I learned the value of cultural exchange and equity in the arts during my undergraduate internship from the University of Maryland, College Park at Pyramid Atlantic, a nonprofit art organization dedicated to bookmaking, papermaking, and printmaking while having an educational outreach mission focusing on the arts education, exhibitions, and lecture events. Under the mentorship of Arts Professor Helen Frederick, I was introduced to the principles of cultural diplomacy and the importance of equity in the arts. Frederick's inclusive approach in community building to exhibition-making, centered around artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, was transformative and shaped my understanding of how a curatorial practice combining the arts, design, and technology can serve as disciplinary platforms for cross-cultural community dialogue between the University and the many institutional art world spaces.

This foundation led me to my role as Director of the *Foundation for Art Resources (FAR)* in Los Angeles, where my team and I created free public exhibitions, lectures, and media events. My work at FAR was dedicated to making cultural institutions accessible to all members of the Los Angeles community and ensuring that arts and Humanities luminaries from different parts of the world reached diverse audiences, especially those who had historically been excluded from cultural Art event spaces - Museums, Alternative Spaces, and Galleries.

Building on my early experiences moving from the Washington, DC area East Coast to the West Coast, I pursued graduate studies at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where I earned Master's degrees in Art and Architecture. These programs, along with my continued professional work as an architectural designer, entrepreneur,

and professor of practice, reinforced my belief in the power of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural collaboration.

As a PhD student, postdoctoral fellow, and now as an advising Design Research Director at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), I continue to have the opportunity to work alongside artists and scientists with the AlloSphere research group at the California NanoSystems Institute, with UCSB's Media Arts and Technology program. Here, I was mentored to be a part of a global research community and now ambassador exploring the intersections of art, science, and technology becoming a research leader and domain expert in Immersive Virtual Environments (IVE's). Art, Design, and Scientific Visualizations as interactive virtual worlds is a part of the trajectory of this research.

This type of experience further shaped my approach to intellectual diversity, as I collaborated with colleagues from across the globe to develop immersive virtual environments that challenged traditional notions of knowledge, art, and research exhibiting works and presenting research at conferences/festivals. The work I have been involved in throughout the years, pushing the boundaries of both artistic expression and scientific inquiry, would not have been possible without the diverse perspectives that each team member shared in the academic, nonprofit, and professional worlds.

In addition to my work in the arts and sciences, my involvement with the Non for Profit organization, DigitalFutures (DF), an international platform for the dissemination of knowledge, has allowed me to extend my commitment to global engagement. Over the past several years, I have contributed to the expansion of DF's multilingual content, which now reaches audiences in over 13 languages and millions of views on YouTube. Through this platform, I co-organized the "InclusiveFUTURES" summer conference and the "Conversations on Inclusivity" workshop series which helped continue the "Young" series of talks and also was an inspiration for the Legends series. These initiatives reflect my ongoing commitment to ensuring that knowledge, particularly in the fields of art, design, and technology, is accessible to all people and everywhere with an internet connection. As part of my trajectory with DF, I have worked to expand DF's reach with the help of members into regions such as South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, with a focus on creating opportunities for underrepresented voices to participate in global online dialogues.

My involvement with the ACM SIGGRAPH Digital Arts Community in the last few years has similarly allowed me to foster international collaborations that focus on amplifying diverse voices in the arts, sciences, and technology communities. As part of my continuing commitment to enabling knowledge creation by producing new opportunities for participation in panels and exhibitions events, this work continues growing new networks by supporting new voices with artists' research from all over the world. My work in the last few years in leading curatorial initiatives for new artistic Urban Media exhibition opportunities is a part of a research at reengaging the city in dialogue with our global community of researchers to learn and be inspired by each other by sharing our artistic media visions.

In my current evolution of combining mentorship and teaching roles, I bring these diverse artistic and professional experiences as well as my strong passion for research into the classroom,

creating a space where students from all backgrounds feel empowered, heard, and valued. Over the years, I have developed a teaching philosophy in a hybrid studio that prioritizes critical thinking, experimentation, and inclusivity at the intersection of theory and practice. I encourage my students to analytically engage with diverse perspectives in exploring existing limitations of canonical knowledge, challenge authority, and develop creative solutions to complex problems. Our process of using case study reviews in our classes and labs help to ground and give real-world meaning to discourse. In the responsibility of designing a course to enable dynamic learning through problem solving, my goal is to give rise to the next generation of leaders willing to find a way to learn together by strategically thinking at all stages of a work. A holistic approach to learning together and making works in teams gives the class as immediacy in asking the tough questions that have been put forth by artists and philosophers from our past to give us a speculative advantage in the here and now within our chosen fields to explore.

One of my accomplishments in teaching was the creation of a new curriculum and vision inspired by the AlloSphere and the Media Arts, and Technology Program, UCSB, sharing arts research with our own Santa Barbara County, Central Coast communities. A collaboration sponsored by the Mosher Foundation along with Dos Pueblos - Engineering Academy and Santa Barbara - Computer Science Academy High School, we participated in a three year pilot program to share R1 University research culture and opportunities with local communities. Today originating from this research investment is a continuation of outreach efforts in sharing the instruments and technologies that greatly influence our field. In my current online teaching role, I am serving both college and high school students critically exploring creative technologies in an online class format by integrating AI into the foundations of Data Visualization as well as exploring in a studio titled "Virtual Reality & Worldbuilding + A.I." I believe that education should be a transformative experience that not only equips students with the skills necessary to succeed but also empowers them to shape the world around them.

It is my instinct to reach out to the unknown and to explore knowledge creation and discovery whenever I can. The diversity of my professional and academic journey is a continuity of how I see the world shaped and who I am as a research practitioner and scholar. I have spent my career working to create spaces where knowledge, creativity, and opportunity are accessible to all, regardless of background. Whether through curating exhibitions, developing curriculum, educational outreach programs, or teaching students, I have always sought to foster inclusive environments that encourage collaboration and innovation. As I continue to teach and work with students, I remain committed to expanding the reach of education and creating opportunities for voices that have been historically marginalized. I believe that embracing diversity—whether in the classroom, in the workplace, or in the world—leads to more dynamic exchanges, richer learning experiences, and ultimately, a more inclusive and equitable future for all - that gives the entire world a chance to live in harmony together. The experience I take, as I have done since my youth, is leading my family into the future by sharing my passion for change and a new way to be. As for my students, integrating philosophy, practice, and theory, I aim to help mentor a next generation of voices while encouraging engagement with new approaches, ideas that are uniquely their own. Today I see my journey as curating engagement with all of my communities together in re-imagining a new reality of hope by witnessing the opportunities of our world in the here and now.