

“Where are you from?” “De donde eres?” One question, asked in various ways, seeking a particular answer depending on who has asked. It’s a unique experience for the second and third generation kids. In a city that was and is still being built by immigrants, where do we fit in? Most of us never learned our native language fluently, so as to make it easier to excel in academics and the professional world leaving us floating between the two worlds of the land of opportunity and the lands of our cultures.

Deemed not “enough” by both our families back home and our neighbors here. The Bronx is our native land. We have blossomed from its soil. But the seeds arrived from lands oftentimes far away. How do we connect with our culture in a city of a million different cultures all at once? These are the questions that Lizzy Alejandro, Alexis Marie Montoya, and Kamille Vargas-Estrella are seeking to answer through their work.

Lizzy Alejandro’s text works bring to life Spanglish phrases and Spanish slang and phrases every child knows, even those of us who didn’t speak the language growing up. Drawing from past experiences, Alejandro sets out to dismantle and challenge topics considered taboo while creating dialogue within the works relating to history and personal experience.

Alexis Marie Montoya’s thoughtful and intricate collages intertwine many cultures all at once. Through her re-creating art based on collecting art from elsewhere, Montoya examines her own relationship with her culture, especially through the eyes and taste—the intersection of food and culture, especially in the Bronx and Latine communities.

And Kamille Vargas-Estrella’s photographs capture her fellow neighbors of the borough, often grappling with their own identities. From water-towers overlooking hidden parks where her daughter plays, to daily activities of her fellow Bronxites, Vargas-Estrella celebrates where she comes from with a quiet strength that invites viewers to explore her hometown. Through her lens, she examines her own place.

As each artist tackles the questions of their identity and societal issues, one question can be answered the same by each of us. “I am from HERE.” “Yo soy de AQUÍ.” The Bronx raised us. Our culture has made us. And we don’t stop.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

Alexis Marie Montoya is a Puerto Rican and Peruvian multidisciplinary artist and food writer born, raised, and based in The Bronx. Her work examines the intersection of food and culture, especially within Bronx and Latinx communities. Alexis is a former line cook, food educator, and organizer who leans on her experience to inform her artistic practice.

Alexis earned a bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations and a minor in Visual Culture from the Rochester Institute of Technology. In 2023, she was a BronxArtSpace Governors Island Artist-in-Residence. She has exhibited work at BronxArtSpace, Casita Maria Gallery, and Bronx River Art Center (BRAC). Her artwork and food writing can be seen across publications like Bon Appétit, Edible Bronx, and more.

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Lizzy Alejandro is a visual artist and curator from The Bronx, NYC. Her work explores themes of identity and challenges notions of the status quo.

Alejandro received her MFA in Digital Media from CUNY Lehman College. Her work has been exhibited at galleries and institutions such as Fordham University, Taller Boricua Gallery, Lehman College Art Gallery, BronxArtSpace, Andrew Freedman Home, Lincoln Hospital, the Bronx Latin American Art Biennial, Longwood Art Gallery, El Barrio's Artspace PS109, River Front Art Gallery, Bethany Arts Community, Photoville 11th Annual Festival, Hopkinton Center for the Arts, Piano Craft Gallery, and Brandeis University.

Alejandro lives and works in The Bronx.

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Kamille Vargas-Estrella, a proud Bronx native, captures the unspoken beauty of her community through photography, reframing The Bronx by highlighting moments of quiet resilience and strength against its industrial backdrop often associated with hardship. Her work reveals the essence of the borough, transforming everyday scenes into powerful expressions of

pride, hope, and connection. From water towers towering above hidden parks to the daily lives of Bronxites at work and play, Vargas-Estrella's lens serves as a bridge between her personal roots and the broader narrative of a community rich with potential. Her photography reflects a deep commitment to her heritage and belief in the promise of her people.

ABOUT THE CURATOR:

Anna Matos is a Bronx native art and creative business professional. With 10 years of experience in the primary art market world, Matos has worked with emerging artists from around the world helping them to establish practices to sustain a career in an ever-changing field.

Matos has a BA from Fairfield University in Art History and philosophy and a MA from SUNY FIT in Art Market. She has worked as an artistic correspondent to Venu Magazine, is a USPAP certified art appraiser and for the last nine years, has been the director of WALLWORKS NEW YORK, after having worked in galleries in Chelsea. Following the shifting trend towards virtual and digital media, Matos also offers social media marketing and management outside the gallery, offering services and support to emerging artists and smaller creative businesses and organizations.

With the goal to make art galleries and museums more transparent, Matos has been an advocate for transparency in the art world, focusing on artist rights, treatment, and protection. She offers creative consulting, curating, arts administration, social media management and appraisal services under her company, AAM Creative.