

Underground Writing - Newsletter

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Yaneyda

Collaborative Visions

Marilyn Montúfar

Photographer, Teaching Artist

Matt Malyon

Executive Director, Teaching Writer

Greetings, Friends.

The arts have provided a deep solace for many amidst the challenges of our pandemic era. This has also been true for us as an organization, and for photographer, [Marilyn Montúfar](#). Looking back now on the collaborative project we undertook with the Mount Vernon Migrant Leaders Club for the 2020-2021 academic year, it seems like an artistic project with the potential to generate joy and hope and beauty. We're grateful that these, in fact, are the results, and we'd like to share briefly with you an overview of the project this year.

Matt:

In August 2020, photographer, Marilyn Montúfar, ordered a copy of *When the Dust Rises*, featuring writings by students at our Migrant Leaders Club site. Motivated by the impact of how



individuals feel being represented in the arts, Marilyn reached out to Marco Morales (then coordinator of the Migrant Leaders Club) and Underground Writing to propose a project involving photography and new student writing about the impact of COVID-19.

In November 2020, we began a collaboration that spanned the 2020-2021 academic year. Given the pandemic, we worked collaboratively using a variety of methods. Marilyn travelled to Skagit Valley a number of times to take photographs of the students—complete with masks and social distance until the photographs were taken. The students began new writings at home and shared them via Google platforms. We also met every week on Zoom so as to check-in, talk about upcoming deadlines, and work through the project.

As I (Matt) worked with Anaelsin, Juli, and Yaneyda on their writings, they began to form written portraits in a way similar to the process experienced with Marilyn’s photographs—hesitancy transforming into courage transforming into confidence and honest transparency. What emerged alongside the resonant photographs were written pieces similarly beautiful and strong. And each student—through the process of editing and revision in this challenging pandemic era—began to see herself more as a writer.



Juli

The young women from the Migrant Leaders Club also seemed to understand themselves more in general through Marilyn’s guidance—as she took photographs, talked to them, and worked with them as a teacher and mentor. It has been a beautiful thing to witness.

Marilyn:

Since fall 2020 I have been collaborating with Underground Writing—a literature-based creative writing program—on a photography series focused on mentoring and photographing female migrant youth with heritage in Mexico. The participating youth are mentored in art by me and in self-expression through writing by Matt Malyon, Executive Director of Underground Writing.



[Order our anthologies of student writing.](#)



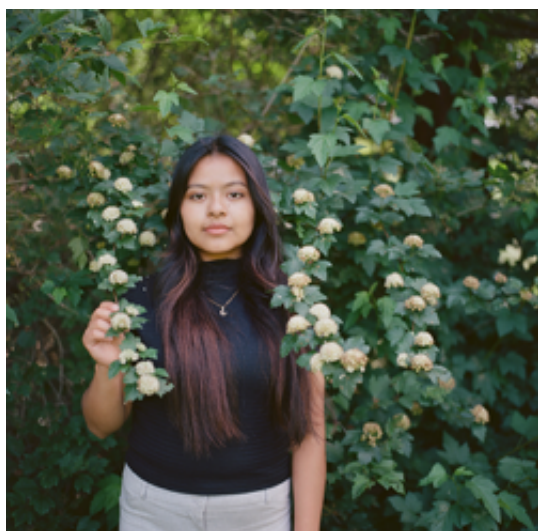
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In early 2020, when I learned that the pandemic was disproportionately impacting farm working communities, I reached out to communities in remote farm regions and learned about the work of the Migrant Leaders Club (MLC)—a high school club for migrant youth—and Underground Writing.

The photography created, paired with youth writing, shifts the dominant narrative about Indigenous and Latinx individuals by granting youth a platform to share their own narrative. What I learned is that through the creative process of exploring identity, the youth embraced a deeper understanding of what it means to be Mexican-American, a Chicana with Indigenous Mexican roots. To embrace the ability to fluctuate between various languages, such as Triqui—an Indigenous language originated in southern Mexico—and simultaneously challenge what it means to be a migrant existing in multiple cultural spaces.

In October 2021 the youth participated in their first artist talk (Spanish/English) during MEX-AM, an arts festival led by the Mexican Consulate celebrating Latinx Heritage Month. In February 2022 the youth will lead their first exhibition installation at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner, Washington, celebrating the unison of multiple identities.



Anaelsin

Project exhibits:

The collaborative photographs and writing have been exhibited at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery (Seattle), The Clemente (New York City), Small Talk Collective (Portland, OR), the Fowler-Kellogg Art Center (Chautauqua, New York), and the MexAm 2021 Festival (Seattle, WA). Bringing it all back home, planning is currently underway for a local and celebratory exhibit: *Outside In Education Gallery* at MoNA (Museum of Northwest Art) in La Conner for February 2022. Stay tuned to our social media outlets for more information as we get nearer

the date.

News & Updates



[Alvin with Migrant Leaders Club students]

Thank you, Alvin!

An inevitable challenge—and gift—for everyone during these times has been a reassessment about personal bandwidth—what we have the time to do, and how to prioritize. For us as an organization, this has included a few departures based in the needs and lives of our individual team members. Shout outs and gratitude to Alvin Shim, who has decided to step away after serving as our Communications Director for the past few years! Though we are sad to see him go, we want to celebrate him and all the beautiful work he did during his time with us. In early 2018, Alvin proposed we begin what's now become *The Underground Writing Podcast*. A few months later, he joined us on our trip to New York City to attend Quiara Alegria Hudes' musical, *Miss You Like Hell*. From that point forward, Alvin devoted hundreds of hours to help us develop our online presence, particularly in social media and via his role as the producer / editor / co-host of *The Underground Writing Podcast*.

Join us in gratefully celebrating Alvin by listening to a few of our favorite podcast episodes:

[Community Spotlight: Zoe Mullery & Brothers in Pen](#)

[Our Story \(with the Migrant Leaders Club\)](#)

[Long Way Down](#)



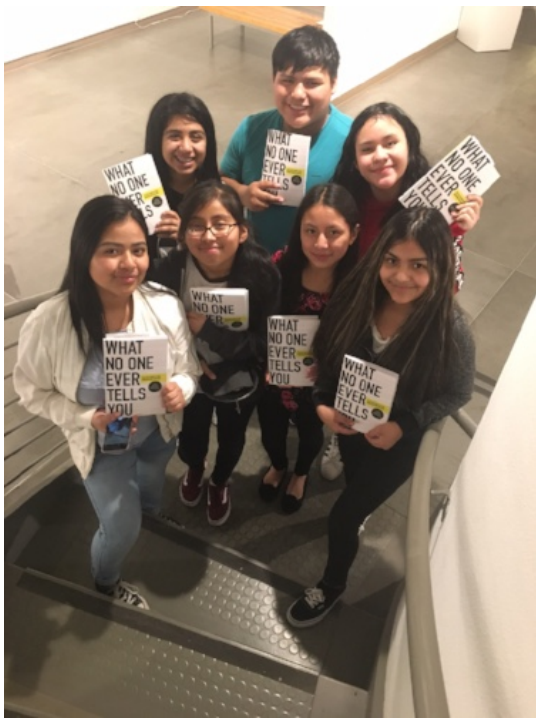
[Workshop reopening - December 9, 2021]

Oasis workshop site reopens

We're excited to announce that our workshop site at the YMCA Oasis Daylight Center has reopened – mask safety guidelines in place. With four students, and a fifth listening in, we dove deep into poetry by Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes (responding to Whitman), and texts created in previous Oasis workshops. As always, the Oasis students challenged us with keen insights in our dialogue about the readings, and wisdom in the texts they created during our time together. We're grateful to be back at this site and are already looking forward to our time together in January 2022.

COVID-19 UPDATES

We continue to prioritize student safety by adhering to the state-required Covid-19 precautions. We are facilitating fewer in-person workshops at this time, and we continue to create e-deliverable workshops for our sites. In addition to the projects mentioned above, we continue to publish student writing via social media and intermittent Covid-19 era episodes of The Underground Writing Podcast & *KITE*.



[Students | Migrant Leaders Club]

Unlocking creativity through writing workshops and voice amplification for at-need and underrepresented students, to assist in the restoration of communities, the imagination, and individual lives.

* We serve migrant, incarcerated, recovery, and other at-need communities in Washington.

* We focus on making an impact inside our local community, and inspiring outside it.

Our sites:

Skagit Co. Juvenile Detention

Youth | Weekly workshop site

Mount Vernon Migrant Leaders Club

Mount Vernon School District

Youth | Collaborative projects site

Skagit Valley Recovery Community

Adults | Monthly workshop site

YMCA Oasis Daylight Center

Youth | Monthly workshop site

Skagit Co. Community Justice Center

Adults | Weekly workshop site

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