

Essential Workers:

A VISUAL NARRATIVE



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The exhibition is made possible by funding from the Pasadena Art Alliance.

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A Visual Narrative

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Carlos Barberena (<i>Illinois</i>)	Sojin Kim (<i>Washington</i>)
Jessica Caldas (<i>Georgia</i>)	Amanda Lee (<i>Utah</i>)
Liz Chalfin (<i>Massachusetts</i>)	Poli Marichal (<i>Puerto Rico</i>)
Audrey Chan (<i>California</i>)	Narsiso Martinez (<i>California</i>)
Charles Cohan (<i>Hawaii</i>)	Michael Massenburg (<i>California</i>)
Juan de Dios Mora (<i>Texas</i>)	Marianne Sadowski (<i>California</i>)
Celeste de Luna (<i>Texas</i>)	Maria Cristina Tavera (<i>Minnesota</i>)
Oswaldo de Jesús (<i>Puerto Rico</i>)	

Essential Workers: A Visual Narrative

The Coronavirus pandemic shifted our way of living, how we engage, and how we see life and each other. It was and continues to be a divisive period as it was unifying. A time that elevated the inequitable systems we live in and how the pandemic affected people differently.

The virus impacted people of color, Black and Brown communities, while the Asian community was on the receiving end of racist attacks. Boyle Heights, an immigrant community with multigenerational households, had the highest number of victims in the city of Los Angeles. Despite the virus' rapid spread, our minimal understanding of it, and the growing number of victims, the nation and the world required several sectors of society, commerce, and industries to continue functioning. The Essential workers were at the frontline.

Los Angeles Times writer Alejandra Reyes-Velarde, who covered the essential worker's role during the pandemic, eloquently wrote, "Before the coronavirus pandemic altered our lives, we had no universal name for people who worked to make our nation function. We had no reason to pause and ask, what does it mean to be essential? The answer became clear when the world was forced to hide from the deadly coronavirus. Some of us work to sustain ourselves, and others to sustain society at the expense of themselves".

Essentials workers is a group exhibition that highlights and honors the contribution and services of seventeen individuals throughout the seven U.S. territories during the COVID-19 pandemic, seen through the eyes of seventeen artists. The artists interviewed and captured an essential worker's journey and challenges that kept society and the country's health, market, and well-being moving forward during challenging conditions.

Each print is accompanied by a photograph of the sitter and their story, revealing the pain, challenges, fear, and desperation they endured. Yet the stories, as do the prints, beautifully illustrate their strength, daily perseverance, and pride in their work. These stories recount the arduous work of a farmworker and nurses, people working in the food service industry, to the struggle and adaptation of educators and social workers. While vaccines are available and fatality numbers are reducing today, the artworks capture, memorialize, and remind us that these individuals, Essential workers in all fields, are vital for the core functions of the economy and society and, as such, should earn competitive pay and acknowledgment for their work.

Participating artists include Marianne Sadowski, Narsiso Martinez, Audrey Chan, Michael Massenburg, Amanda Lee, Hanna Hathaway, Celeste de Luna, Juan de Dios Mora, Charles Cohan, Liz Chalfin, Sojin Kim, Jessica Caldas, Chloe Alexander, Tina Tavera, Carlos Barberena, Poli Marichal, Osvaldo de Jesús.

The exhibition is made possible by funding from the Pasadena Art Alliance.

-Marvella Muro, *Director of Artistic Programs and Education*

What does it mean to be essential?

By Alejandra Reyes

Before the coronavirus pandemic altered our lives, we had no universal name for people who worked to make our nation function. We had no reason to pause and ask, what does it mean to be essential? The answer became clear when the world was forced to hide from the deadly coronavirus. Some of us work to sustain ourselves, and others to sustain society at the expense of themselves.

The people who make our lives run more smoothly were largely invisible in a pre-pandemic world, ghosts in a country they power. They work in grocery stores, meatpacking plants, on assembly lines, making our foods and everyday goods. They clean our offices and homes. They are janitors, farm workers, housekeepers, truck drivers, factory workers and nurses. Many of them are Latino and many of them are undocumented immigrants. They toil for the minimum wage to survive, even in the best of times.

When the spread of a mysterious virus terrorized Americans, these invisible workers continued working. There was no choice. It was, as it always had been, go to work or don't get paid. So they went to work, now bearing the responsibility of maintaining a sense of normalcy during the first major quarantine in a century.

The coronavirus spread throughout the country, largely avoiding wealthier communities with enough free space for people to take refuge, and instead moved into working-class, overcrowded neighborhoods.

Hospitals became full of dying COVID-19 patients and nurses and doctors worked beyond their limits to save lives. Farmworkers still worked in grueling conditions to feed the nation while everyone else stayed home, ordering in from the restaurants where cooks struggled to make a living. Delivery drivers worked overtime, delivering everything from food to toilet paper to families too afraid to leave their homes.

As COVID-19 became a politicized phenomenon, with President Donald Trump downplaying its risks and failing to give speedy

aid and resources to those who needed it most, these workers risked their lives working without proper protective gear. Society projected glory onto them. We called them frontline workers—those leading our army in the battle against an invisible foe.

During the lockdown, apartment dwellers cocooned in the safety of their homes roared outside their windows at night in a symbolic “thank you.” Banners outside nursing homes and restaurants thanked them for being “heroes.” But workers paid the price of being essential at home and the workplace.

Essential Workers slowly became infected in their workplaces as they had no choice but to work and depended on often unsustainable salaries that paid their rent. Workers found no escape, bringing the virus from their workplace to their overcrowded, multi-generational homes. It cost them their lives. It was not long before the country saw its devastating loss.

Latino and Black communities, representing a large service industry population, died disproportionately. Young people who were starting their lives also died at alarming rates, many leaving behind orphaned young children. The survivors were left wondering if we're heroes, don't we deserve more?

The impacts trickled to their family members and communities, affecting young people who found no other way to survive but to drop out of school to find work. In Black and brown communities that were the most affected, you'd be hard-pressed to find a block that wasn't mourning.

In many ways, we are a changed nation. The pandemic deepened the divide between the country's wealthy and poor. The rich got richer, and those getting by were further destabilized, falling deeper into debt and poverty. We have a new language to describe the last few years, maybe a new understanding of the value of life and the importance of family and community.

But in many ways, we remain the same. Much of the world has moved on, vaccinated and adapted to a post-COVID-19 world from the comfort of their homes. The trauma induced by the collective mourning of marginalized communities who bore the brunt of the virus still stings. And arguably, essential workers are back in the shadows.



Gemal Eustache (b. 1986) is a first-generation Haitian-American and self-employed chef. His early life was in New York, but he later moved with his family to Atlanta, where he spent the remainder of his childhood and secondary school education. He trained at Le Cordon Bleu after graduating from high school in 2004 and has worked in a variety of hospitality-related roles, including as a personal chef to the president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, as a caterer for parties, weddings and events, and as an independent meal-prep provider and delivery service.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Gemal was a newlywed and expecting his second child. Like many people in the food service, the restrictions on public gatherings and indoor dining negatively affected his business. Fortunately, during this time, Gemal worked as a chef for an assisted care facility in rural Georgia, where he created menus, managed a kitchen and prepared daily meals that catered to the health and caloric needs of the live-in residents; elderly patients who could not care for themselves or suffered from chronic conditions requiring around-the-clock care.

It has been well-documented that the pandemic primarily began spreading in the United States elder care facilities, as well as the suffering and isolation that the people living in them experienced. These factors, coupled with the stresses that regularly plague assisted care, including inadequate staffing and care for residents, were felt profoundly by the staff that runs these centers. While they were required to continue 24-hour care in conditions threatening the lives of those they assisted, their own lives, and their family members, their plight was less reported on as the pandemic wore on.

Gemal's dedication to his work was typical among many essential workers whose labor is required but often overlooked. "The elderly are some of the least cared about populations in the country," Gemal lamented. "A lot of times, they are just forgotten about in the conversation about value and protection."

The pandemic reshaped Gemal's work perspectives and career goals, as it did for many workers in the labor market. He has since resigned from his position at the elder care facility and purchased his food truck, granting him 100% control over his labor, staff, what he offers, and to whom. "I never wanted a restaurant because I enjoy the freedom that catering provides," Gemal explained. "Having my truck allows me to do both."



Chloe Alexander
Gemal, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Street vendors are an essential part of any city. Besides giving the city life and keeping it running, they are an economic source for many families. During COVID-19, street vendors showed that they are also Essential workers who can rise to the occasion and fill the gap for social protection, food, and the provision of basic needs that governments neglect, especially for the most vulnerable.

Carmen Nava is a street vendor who has sold homemade tamales for over 25 years on Chicago streets for 25 years. "My experience as a street vendor began in 1998-99. I sold on the streets and the police were always, always harassing us. They arrested me several times, and they also took my things; they took my coolers and never returned them...nor the Tamales. Now, it is different because I got my license, I am fine, the city inspectors and the police come by, and they do not tell me anything. Although sometimes people call the police on me, I do not know why; I do not know if they are the neighbors or the business owners, but anyway, I have my license, so they do not do anything to me."

In 2019, the city approved her cart after a long struggle and a process full of difficulties. She is the first Street Vendors Association of Chicago (SVAC) member to obtain the license. With this, members of the association will be able to use the community kitchen they created two years before and prepare their food according to the city's laws. It also paves the way for other members to get licensed and legally operate in Chicago. <https://streetvendorschi.org/>



Carlos Barberena

Carmen Nava, 2023

Linocut print on Kitakata paper., Ed. of 26

15 x 11 in.



Tiffani Carter, who also goes by Tish to her family and friends and Gumi for folks even closer, was born to teach. She has always wanted to teach and continues to do so because she is best at it. Her joy of education is infectious, and her patience and generosity with children of all ages are evident in all she does.

Tish always sought out schools that focus on social skills, emotional and social support and expiration-based learning, so when the pandemic hit, she found herself in a place where supporting her kids was possible, even as she transitioned to virtual education and connecting. Tish changed schools during the pandemic. Throughout her teaching career, she has learned that other schools she's been to have drastic differences, especially in how they approach teaching kids who have experienced the pandemic. "Kids have gotten used to several years of helplessness, and if they don't know how to do something, they seldom seem to explore or investigate how to. Instead, they'll stop and wait for someone to do the work for them. Further, social problem-solving skills are decidedly weaker, leading to more problems. Parents seem less likely to believe their child may be responsible for their behavior and more combative towards teachers."

Despite this, Tish continues to pursue education with passion and fervor. Moving to a different state mid-pandemic, where cultural attitudes towards education are drastically different, has only made her more inclined to seek positive educational experiences for her kids. She expresses, "a lot of parents think teachers waste time not doing more academic things and instead focus on how to share, how to pass exams, how to raise hands, how to listen, but when we skip those skills, we end up with kids who don't know how to do these things." In all of this, her motto "go slow to go fast" makes all the sense in the world. I am so grateful that her kids get the experience of being taught by her.

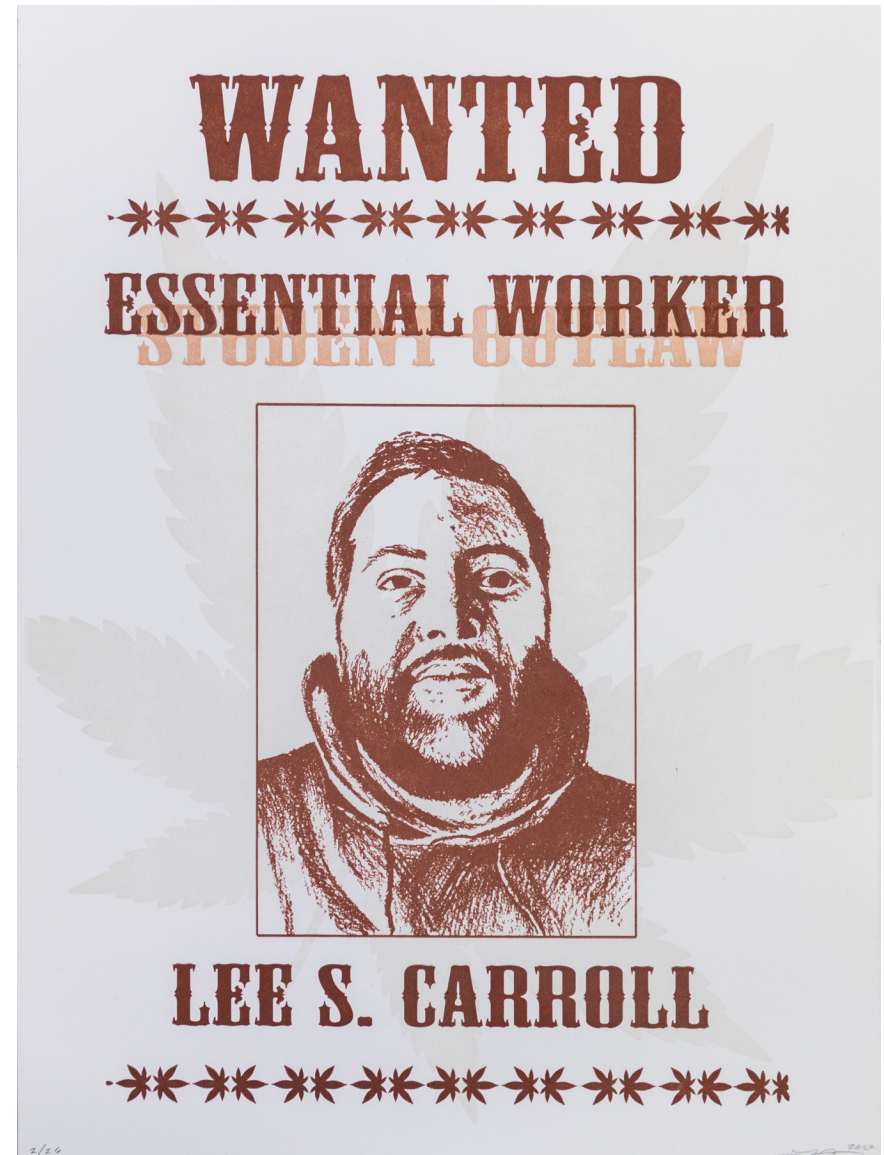


Jessica Caldas
Tiffani, 2023
Linocut, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Lee S. Carroll was a sophomore at a private college in Connecticut in 2009. One evening when he was working his work-study job in the recreation center, the campus police entered the dorm room he shared with three other students searching for marijuana. The school had a lax alcohol policy but a strict marijuana one. Lee walked in during the search as a police officer took a piece of scotch tape and picked up a flake of cannabis from his desk, turned to him, and said, "this is possession." He was kicked out of campus housing, prohibited from being on campus outside of class, and placed on academic probation. He spent the rest of the semester living in a cheap motel, clandestinely going to campus in a hoodie and sunglasses, fearing any encounter with authorities, feeling both persecuted and outcast. His academics suffered, and his college career concluded before the term ended. Fast forward to 2020, Lee was employed at the first legal cannabis dispensary in Massachusetts, the only one yet in the New England/New York region. Before the Covid pandemic, serving over 2500 customers in a single day was not unusual. When Covid sent everyone into lockdown, the cannabis dispensary was deemed an essential service making Lee an essential worker. At first, he felt it was a badge of honor and was proud to be helpful (especially to medical patients). The early months were stressful, as no one knew precisely how the virus spread or what precautions to take to stay safe. They sanitized hourly, wore homemade masks, rerouted customers to maintain distance, and devised new systems for contactless pick-up. Despite bans on interstate travel, out-of-state cars filled the parking lot, and he and the dispensary staff felt exposed and vulnerable. Although grateful to be employed when so many people were laid off, he questioned the true meaning of essential. The irony of being an outlaw a decade earlier and an essential worker during Covid was not lost on him.

I selected Lee as my subject to speak about the cultural shift between 2009 and 2020 regarding cannabis, as much as the role of an essential worker during the height of Covid. Here is a young man who has experienced this change in attitude and laws firsthand.



Liz Chalfin
Essential Worker
(formerly Criminal Student), 2023
Relief Print, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



SCAN ME



Interview with Claudette Walker, Patient Care Associate for 32 years at Jacobi Medical Center Emergency Room, Bronx, New York. Interview by Audrey Chan on January 30, 2023.

What was happening at the moment this photo was taken?

It was my retirement party the staff gave me. It's like a family. Everyone knows me as the grandma that supplied the coffee at my job.

What drew you to medical work?

I started out doing patient care in the home, taking care of one person. I got used to that, so I branched out and I went to the hospital. I used to escort the patient to their x-rays and telemetry, and then I crossed over to direct patient care. I went up again as a Patient Care Associate with a nurse's aide degree and did phlebotomy and EKG. It's kind of fun. The patients are sick, so they want to talk to somebody, especially older people. I have patients that were in World War II and the Vietnam War. By the time you finish taking care of them, they tell you their whole life story.

How do you feel about the term "essential workers"? Was that term ever used before the pandemic?

Before that, we were "support staff," believe it or not. We were not "essential workers." We have ten doctors who need support staff: the nurses, the nurse's aide, the EKG technician, the x-ray technician, and the housekeeping. And then all the offices are closed so the essential workers become the bus driver, the garbage collector, the nurse's aide, the nurses. So for each stuff that happens, they give us a different name, which is basically the same. New recognition but the pay didn't change.

There are a lot of intense things that you all witness and experience on a normal day in the ER.

Yes, because you didn't just have the COVID patients coming in. We have three trauma bays at Jacobi. We have a trauma bay when they have a severely sick patient – motorcycle accident, car accident, cardiac arrest. So you also have the accident victims coming in. You have gunshots coming in. So it wasn't just one thing; it was everything. And you're in a city hospital, you cannot refuse patients. So you have to make space and you just have to roll with the punches. You have to be able to jump from one thing to the other. You gotta go fast.



You had mentioned that you had seen a lot over your thirty-two years in the ER, like the AIDS epidemic.

That was a very hard time. I got there in '90 when it affected adults, teenagers, and children. And the drug epidemic was very high so most of the people getting it was either from drugs or from their partner or from blood transfusion. So that was kind of heavy.

How was it for your team to experience COVID over the last few years?

COVID was kind of heavy. Say, 70% of the new nurses did not experience the AIDS epidemic, so this was their first situation where they were overwhelmed. So you couldn't say we experienced this already so this is just a second wave. The only person who could say that was the older people about to retire. It was like, okay, we went through the AIDS epidemic, we can handle this but this one was very heavy.

Audrey Chan

Claudette's Retirement Party, 2023

Serigraph, Ed. of 26

11 x 15 in.



March 13, 2020. HNL, Honolulu International Airport closed indefinitely. No flights in. No flights out. An island state of isolation.

March 14, 2020, the University of Hawaii at Manoa campus closed. 25,000 people vacate the premises and are not allowed to return for two years. Vanished, the campus has been abandoned. 320 acres devoid of students and staff.

Except for the most essential workers, left behind to tend to the abandoned university architecture and landscape.

For two years, Grant Rivera was the keeper of the spirit for 24,000 square feet of the art building at UHM. A wise sentinel watching over the 'Universe-City' deserted. Wherewithal, patience, and quietude. A backline/frontline backbone maintaining the deserted and silenced building. Much more to this story than this story. With all respect to the humble and steadfast nature of Grant Rivera, this print is a graphic celebration of his unsung crucial spirit within the institution that is the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

This print is a collaborative graphic celebration of Grant Rivera by three UHM Art Department community members. MFA student Rosemary Connelly provided skilled photo/digital manipulation. Rick Oama-Elam (street handle 'Tonk') contributed his distinctive script of Grant's name. Charlie printed the color blend background and orchestrated the layering and print runs. All members of the collaboration know Grant well and have unlimited respect for his exceptional daily contributions to the department and facilities pre, during, and post Covid scenarios.



Charles Cohan
Grant, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Many people experienced mental and emotional stress at the expense of COVID-19, especially at already understaffed schools that asked employees to perform tasks they were not trained for. The print features Miriam Marroquin—an office clerk at an elementary school who volunteered to care for children who showed COVID-19 symptoms during work hours without questioning how her health was affected. Such a display of altruism is what motivated the print here.

An explanation of the print's symbolism follows, which pays tribute to Ms. Marroquin's efforts. She is at the center with a proud stance and a visionary gaze, with wings that wrap her, symbolizing protection. The turtle hatchling represents the students receiving comfort and security. The ten hands give testament to her multifaceted nature as a person and a professional. Additionally, she was born in October—the tenth month of the year.

She is depicted at a taller scale than the two other staff to give her status. The left staff is illustrated as a nopal (prickly pear) to highlight nurturing properties. The banner underneath is waving and becoming wind, serving as a metaphor that the wind could lift and carry negativity. The second staff is an oval mirror, with water flowing out that provides life and health. The splashing water represents the uneasiness attached to volunteering in such a role.

The two sticks that perforate the stone above the staff are not only in perfect balance but are a direct reference to the Mexican expression “picando piedra” (chipping stone). Ironically, the hand holding the cage is protection and isolation, offering a resting place for the white-winged dove. Simultaneously, the ribbon's silky texture provides a soothing feeling and mental tranquility. The hand with the open and extended pose represents security and serenity for those who respond to her kindness and protection. The dove in the upper right flies towards a prosperous future. The hand with the pose of the holy trinity also symbolizes a justice hand. The hand with a ribbon flowing between her fingers allows her to be at peace and rest, and finally, the hand with the sprouting bean alludes to a healthy harvest, while its piercing roots signify stability.



Juan de Dios Mora
Carenzia, 2023
Linocut, Ed. of 26
11 x 15 in.



This is a portrait of my best friend, Theresa Wilburn Olmeda. I have known her since the fourth grade when she was just plain Terry Wilburn from La Feria, Texas. There is so much to say about such a dear person and valuable community member that I almost don't know where to begin. Terry is a registered nurse, a wife, and a mother of two daughters. Listening to her stories about her job as a nurse has always astounded me. Her job requires as much emotional labor and empathy as nursing, and I always wonder about healthcare workers. I don't know where the grace, strength, and professionalism under such conditions come from nurses like my friend Terry but it provides the kind of healthcare people need in this post-pandemic world.

Terry was a pediatric nurse at one time and now works as a home health nurse driving around in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, one of the country's most impoverished areas. Sometimes she (Bluetooth) calls me from her work phone, and I get a strange call from a rural Texas county, calling while driving back roads to keep her company from one house call to the next. On occasion, she's been surprised by manic drivers or the looming border fence that seems to shoot across the landscape with no rhyme or reason randomly. I don't usually do portraits, but I wanted to do a picture that reminded me of what Chicago printmaker Carlos Cortez might do, something that honored workers and was recognizable to her family and community members. This specific portrait of Terry is from when she first graduated nursing school in her 20s, young, smart, and mischievous. I hope I captured that sparkling sense of humor that she brings to everything she does, which is what makes her such a delight! Our mothers used to say things like, "Show me who your friends are, and I'll show you who you are," and we used to roll our eyes. We were so young and impatient! But as I grow older, I hope my mother (QEPD) is right about this too.



Celeste de Luna
A Nurse's Heart, 2023
Linocut, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



When the pandemic was declared in 2020, I was an independent rescuer for three years after being separated from a small rescue group beside Poza del Obispo beach in Arecibo. In “normal” times, rescuing animals is physically exhausting, with a high emotional cost and few economic resources. With the arrival of the pandemic and government-imposed curfews, the situation worsened.

Many of us have feeding routes for abandoned animals that hide from the heat during the day. They come out in the early hours of the morning, afternoon, or night to look for food. It is also the best time to rescue scared, sick, or hungry animals we want to help. The curfew covered precisely the period that we most needed to work.

Conflicting news and rumors about animals transmitting the virus to humans added additional pressure. Although it was discarded later, at that time, it generated uncertainty about handling rescued and owned animals without ending up sick! On one occasion, I visited a person who needed help with thirty cats and did not know what to do.

The abandonment of animals multiplied in isolated places. As such was the case with the dog Yuma and her babies. I rescued them with another partner on a dangerous mountain road between Florida and Utuado. Their destiny was death by starvation, being run over, or being attacked by other animals. Yuma was a noble dog who approached confidently, letting us accommodate her without resistance in a car where her puppies were located. When restrictions on animal flights were relaxed, Yuma and her pups traveled to Maine, where they found the home they deserved. Achieving this happy ending with Yuma was difficult.

Veterinary offices were forced to close at the pandemic’s beginning, operating months later with limited hours. We had to complete the veterinary protocol so that Yuma and her babies would be in optimal conditions to travel, and we spent many hours in the car waiting to access the vet with our animals. The good news was that shelters in the US had emptied with mass adoptions of people seeking to ease their loneliness in the long days of confinement. That boom was temporary. Many of these animals were returned to shelters or abandoned when people returned to work, study, and their daily routines outside the home.



Oswaldo de Jesús
Haydée de Jesús-Colón, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Our restaurant closed for seven weeks starting in March 2020. For seven excruciating weeks, we cleaned until our hands were raw but begged the public to choose us for their curbside dinner. We scraped by for a year and lived in constant anxiety. A whole year of financial statements covered in red, ensuring you see the losses loud and clear. It became an endless stream of uncertain promises that “normal” would return to us soon. The experience of looking at our employees in the eyes, knowing they were counting on us to get them through, and lying to comfort them when we couldn’t find comfort ourselves, was never part of the job

description. We took all the government aid we could get. “OPEN FOR CARRY-OUT” was painted seven feet tall on our front windows. By what still feels like a miracle, we made it through.

We all held our breath in the days leading up to reopening. When it was time for the doors, the sense of camaraderie reminded us why we worked in restaurants even when the world was giving us every reason not to. Although there was a clear sense of dread for the risk we took opening our doors, customers eager to get out of their houses and back into restaurants flooded our doors. Our regulars kept us going when we were running on fumes. We may not have seen them every day, but they were there posting about our menu, sharing our curbside policy, and ordering from us frequently. In the slow and uncertain days of carry-out, the staff had talked longingly about getting back to “the way it was before,” but we never pinned a clear description on what “normal” and “before” were. In all our talk of Before, there wasn’t a time we considered After. How could we have known that just making it through to reopening wouldn’t be enough?

As our city slowly began to reopen, our sales skyrocketed unprecedentedly. We were suddenly doing twice that of our pre-pandemic sales with half the staff with minimal experience. It felt like a never-ending shift in the weeds, every day bringing a new surprise with understaffing, food shortages, and unruly customers. The mix of mandate enforcements on the general public, the anxiety of exposure to COVID, and the lack of sleep from the stress of shrinking profits and rising inflation are enough to drive you mad.

Inflation and labor shortages are the real villains in a restaurant these days. The cost of food makes profits nearly nonexistent, and the labor shortage created intense competition among restaurants searching for experienced staff in our small, secluded valley. We find ourselves hiring anyone with prior restaurant experience. We’ve been grateful to retain a few employees and an abundance of customers from “before.”

We have been lucky. Our doors may have closed temporarily, but tens of thousands never reopened and likely never will. Every time we hear of another restaurant closing, it instills a fear that we could be next. How can you stay ahead when you can barely keep up?

The Jack’s Wood-Fired Oven Management Team



Hanna Hathaway
Into The Weeds, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Patience Nyampong Ampofoh is a certified nursing assistant, hospital patient care assistant, emergency department technician, and one of the roughly 2.3 million home care workers who provide essential support enabling senior citizens and people with disabilities to live safely in their homes. She and other home health aides do face-to-face, hands-on work that requires a high level of trust. They assist with everything from meal preparation to bathing and dressing, from health management to simply providing companionship. They are disproportionately women, and many are immigrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted this sector of workers. Their safety and health were often compromised while caring for vulnerable community members. Some lost hours or assignments during the lockdown—and had to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Others left the workforce due to burnout, fears of infection, or to care for their children when schools closed.

Originally from Mampong in the Eastern Region of Ghana, Patience formerly worked as a health inspector at Tetteh Quarshie Memorial Hospital and studied at the Accra School of Hygiene. In 2009, she came to the US and has worn many hats. In addition to her responsibilities as a leader in her church and as a wife and mother supporting the extended family in both Maryland and Ghana, Patience has been an essential part of the family care team that made it possible for my parents, well into their 90s, to age in place in their home in Washington, DC. For more than seven years, she has helped them continue living in their home of 53+ years despite their diminishing mental and physical capacities. With patience and positivity, she managed good and not-so-good days during the most uncertain stretches of the pandemic.

My old dog Ollie used to eagerly await Patience's arrival for her shifts—doing the canine version of a tap dance at first glimpse. His consistent enthusiasm brought rare comfort to those stressful early weeks that stretched into months and then years—reinforcing, during a time of social distance, the essential and mutual benefit of simply caring.



Sojin Kim
Patience, 2023
Reduction linocut, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



My friend of two decades, Matt Pogatshnik, is an artist, philosopher, and poet who works as a Fulfillment Manager at a Costco Business Center. When I spoke with Matt about this project, our conversation ranged between the day-to-day concerns of his position to more esoteric concerns of the pandemic era. I wanted to work with Matt on this project because he was essential not only because of his work but also to my understanding and processing emotions of the Covid years.

He knew things were severe the week the NBA canceled their games, Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson announced their positive status, and the Formula One Grand Prix was postponed. Things happened quickly after that: the kids were home from school, trips canceled, and entire life timelines were re-routed. He is nostalgic about one part of the first few weeks—the feeling that we were all in the same predicament, trying our best to solve it together.

Matt is an incredibly poetic person with a unique way of looking at the world. The first worries he shared are those he had for others; the small business owners who didn't know what effect a shut-down would have on their businesses, the co-workers who left or retired because they couldn't be exposed to Covid, the impact the remote learning has had on his kids.

He carried a slip of paper during his commute to work that stated his essential worker status in case anyone questioned why he was out in the streets. At the store, people would try to work in groups to buy over-the-limit products such as hand sanitizer, toilet paper, paper towels, and disinfecting wipes to re-sell. Intense customers confronted workers stating, "it's only old people dying," or complained about the mask mandates.

He touches on his fears as an essential worker when we knew so little about the virus and its transmission. "You'd be putting hand sanitizer on the gloves to clean a basket that had pens in it and then work all day and then get to the car and touch your steering wheel and then touch your face. Worry. Did I sanitize my hands or face? Is this the time that I get it? I guess I'm bringing it home to my family now...lol."

When we discuss more esoteric topics, we return over and over to grief. We wander down the lanes of lost family members, the process of deeply understanding that living inside black skin in this country is a reality he can't comprehend, the lost comfort of believing we were all in the same boat, grieving that he was "so ignorant for so long about the reality of other people's lives."

Matt has a natural ability to examine complex emotions and ideas in a way that is both beautiful and thought-provoking. We talk about art that has helped process the grieving of all that was lost during Covid: Reservation Dogs, Station Eleven, Nick Cave The Red Hand Files, Hanif Abdurraqib's A Little Devil in America, and Delejos (from afar) by Julie Piñero.

In this print, I wanted to make Matt transcend his big box store and all the solid objects in it. I wanted to show how I see him, as a bundle of light moving between the past and the future, the grief and the joy.



Amanda Lee
Essential, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Johanna Dominguez is one of the founders of the renowned Taller Comunitario La Goyco, located on Loiza Street in Santurce, Puerto Rico, and is currently its Community Wellness Program Coordinator. (www.lagoyco.com)

During the Covid-19 pandemic between 2019-2020, the government of Puerto Rico implemented drastic safety measures that severely affected the island's population. A considerable number of undocumented workers, many from the Dominican Republic, lost their jobs and the means to survive the lockdown. Johanna, who knew about the precarious situation of this fringe population that has contributed so much with their labor to benefit our society, decided to take action and began a GoFundMe. Her initiative successfully led her to organize a network of volunteers to distribute provisions and medicines to the neediest families. Johanna also noticed the lockdown had exacerbated domestic violence and decided to find centers that could offer safe refuge to victimized women and their children. She also found doctors that could donate their services. It is thanks to people like Johanna that our society vindicates itself. Johanna Dominguez is one of the Essentials that illuminate the lives of those they touch.



Poli Marichal
Johanna Dominguez, 2023
Relief Print, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



Silvina is an essential immigrant worker who has toiled in the fields in the United States for twenty years. Working year-round, she endures harsh weather conditions and pesticide residues in the orchards picking produce such as apples, cherries, asparagus, peaches, apricots, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and grapes. The bags of apples are heavy and must be carried throughout the shift every day, including Sundays, and the asparagus has to be picked and bent over, under the heat, without shade for hours. Because harvesting happens at dawn and only for a few hours, cherries are the least harsh to pick, and the most

difficult are apples and asparagus.

Field workers are hired on a contracting basis and paid according to product and variety. For example, the minimum payment for a crate of red delicious is \$19, and the most are \$30. Earnings by the contract depend on the tree size; big trees are paid around \$1, and small ones between \$0.40- \$0.60.

Silvina says she was afraid because of the virus during the pandemic but was thankful to keep working. We never stopped working, she remembers. Some orchards provided protective masks, and some didn't. She shared that she was excited to get vaccinated as soon as it was available because of the protection and the feeling of being safe. She also liked that some orchards trained them to protect themselves around the work and practiced safety measurements, such as using disinfectants before and after clocking in and out and keeping the recommended distance among workers. Silvina has contracted the virus twice but is still worried.

During harvest season, Silvina wears jeans, long sleeve shirt, a hoodie, a bandana wrapping her hair, a bandana covering her mouth and nose, glasses, gloves, special shoes, and a baseball hat. She says some workers take off the bandana or glasses because it's difficult to wear both when working at a fast pace.

Working at her own pace, she is happy with the amount she picks, and her glasses and bandana do not bother her. During winter or pruning season, she wears thermal pants, regular pants, a thermal shirt, a regular shirt, a sweater, thermal gloves, a thermal jacket, a winter beanie, a bandana covering her mouth and nose, and winter boots, including thermal socks. Pruning also requires heavy-duty scissors and the tools to fix it in case it breaks.

Silvina has four kids. The oldest is in her last year of graduate school to become a registered nurse. The second oldest is in her second year of college to become a nutritionist, and the other two are still in high school. Silvina enjoys the acquaintances she has made throughout the years, their company, and conversations during harvest season in the fields. The harsh cold winters are the most challenging despite the many layers of clothes she wears. They work even when snow falls, making her sad and unable to help a tear or two.

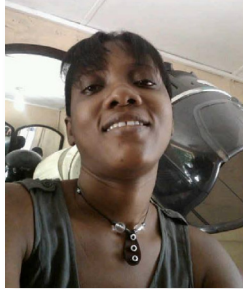


Narsiso Martinez

Silvina, 2023

Serigraph, Linocut Collage, Chine Collé, Ed. of 26

15 x 11 in.



Mabelle Williams is an artist, nurse, seamstress, and mother of three children. I met Mabelle in Port de Prince, the capital of Haiti, one year after their devastating earthquake in 2011. She was a participant and helped organize an art biennial with the group called the Atis Rezistans, an event that would be named Ghetto Biennale. I was an artist accepted into a month-long residency, spent time with her and her family, and learned more about Haiti's history.

Haiti was the first country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery from the French. Later, the French would return to demand payment to keep their freedom or go to war. Haiti ended up paying taxes for 100-plus years, crippling the Haiti economy for generations to come, leading to internal political corruption and outside interest in exploitation.

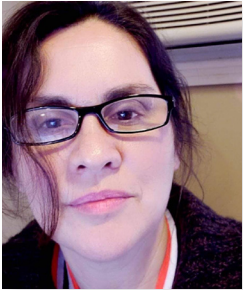
Mabelle is a trained nurse and worked with the Sports Center of Crossroads, providing care for orphan children. She loves giving healthcare to the community, especially helping newborn babies come into the world. Mabelle applied for a scholarship at Brown university to further her career as an obstetrician, but she could not obtain that opportunity due to visa issues. The bureaucracy and unstable government makes it hard for citizens to get visas. People have tried to migrate to Florida and Mexico and have repeatedly been denied and sent back.

Because of the fragile health care in Haiti, more people died from poor health with the virus. She and other workers had to take extra precautions as the government tried to keep the population updated. The big challenge is that 60 % of the children do not have Internet access or enough phones or laptops. Recently, Mabelle, a trained seamstress, set up a school suitcase-sewing workshop to make school bag kits with school supplies. The bags were given to school children nearby in the Petion Ville.

Only during the pandemic did we fully appreciate essential workers in the USA and worldwide. We honor them for their sacrifice, especially those who do a lifetime of service while working in the shadows.



Michael Massenburg
Mabella, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.



“Lincoln Hotel is a place transformed through pain. It is a nest where mental health professionals are in crisis response 24 hours without stop. It is a space where those without a house or care succumb to the reality of heroin needles. Here in this portion of Los Angeles, Lupita is blacking out with panic attacks and days of crystal meth consumption. Yes, here in this Pandemic, all people’s sufrimiento, we are called to stay.” Marcela Urrutia

When the Covid-19 Pandemic hit, Marcela worked as a community psychologist with Los Angeles Correctional Facilities inmates. The prisons went under lockdown, and she didn’t want to be confined to working remotely but wanted to actively help others. This desire goes deep in her.

Marcela was born in Chile during Pinochet’s dictatorship. It was a time when people took to the streets to fight the dictatorship. As she puts it, “you don’t stay quiet. You do something about it”. She needed to be present during the Covid-19 Pandemic and actively help the most vulnerable.

The State of California established Project Roomkey to provide shelter options in hotels to protect the homeless in a setting where they could be isolated. Marcela started working for Union Station Homeless Services as a community psychologist for Project Roomkey. She was asked to listen to stories gathered there, especially by Spanish speakers who connected with someone who came from south of the border.

The job was tough. Every day was a crisis of overdoses or fights among the people staying there. It felt like a psychiatric ward without doctors. And those gathered for their safety felt locked in a hotel and were drawn back into the streets. Stories of pain, confusion, and addiction held all the desperation and toughness of streets. She witnessed heart-breaking stories of women who had found themselves spiraling down into addiction and prostitution for their survival; a young woman returning under the freeway overpass to sell her body, the mother bound in a wheelchair while her daughter slipped into the night dressed as Hello Kitty to make porn movies at a gas station. So many stories would haunt Marcela’s dreams.

It was essential to be present and essential to persevere. But how can you find your own life among so much suffering?

Marcela found refuge away from the hotel by meditating, by the love of her husband, family, and friends, and seeking remote therapy to stay strong as a pillar for others. What brought her the most peace was sitting by the ocean, letting the vast open water carry away the nightmares of this Pandemic. . . all people’s sufrimiento, we are called to stay.



Marianne Sadowski
Marcela, 2023
 Serigraph, Ed. of 26
 15 x 11 in.





This screenprint highlights correction officer Esteban Gilbert Fuentes who provides insight into the impact of Covid-19 on the criminal justice system.

Esteban, now 58, was 26 years old when he grew tired of working labor jobs and accepted the position as a corrections officer at Stillwater prison. The Minnesota prison, built in 1914, is the state's largest closed-security institution for adult males. Esteban shared that he was extremely intimidated when he first began working, as he did not know what to expect. The only thing he found familiar were some prisoners he

recognized from his neighborhood.

America has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. When COVID-19 struck, jails and prisons were poorly equipped and could not provide primary medical care. By December 2020, one in every five state and federal prisoners in the United States had tested positive for the coronavirus, a rate more than four times as high as the general population. In some states, more than half of prisoners were infected (The Associated Press, December 18, 2020).

Esteban talks about the challenges within the prison system as the pandemic ensued. "Quarantines" were precautionary lockdowns and justified as a safety measure, but they were more often used as punishment. In mid-April 2020, at least 300,000 people incarcerated were experiencing some form of solitary confinement (Solitary Watch, June 2020). Many incarcerated people were kept in small cells for nearly 24 hours a day with little activity or human contact—with devastating consequences to their physical and mental health. The United Nations has deemed it torture to hold people in such conditions for more than 15 days without meaningful human contact.

Esteban had to enforce the lockdown policies and worked long shifts because of a chronic staff shortage, as employees stayed home when exposed to Covid-19. He also found it challenging to realize that he and the staff were essentially a threat to the prisoners, with the possibility of carrying the virus as they left and re-entered the premises.

Correctional officers have the second highest mortality rates of any profession; extreme stress, substance abuse, depression, workplace injuries, and suicidal thoughts. The life expectancy of corrections officers is 59 years (compared to 75 years for the average American), and they experience a disturbingly high 34 percent incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021). Esteban strategizes how not to let the work "get to him."

Despite initial hopes that leaders would respond to the pandemic by releasing inmates, the prisons released almost no one. Successfully navigating this new normal will require deep reductions in prison and jail populations and concerted efforts to improve carceral healthcare. (www.prisonpolicy.org/virus)



Maria Cristina Tavera
Fuentes, 2023
Serigraph, Ed. of 26
15 x 11 in.





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