

SÈANCE OF DUALITY: SUMMONING THOSE LIVING IN-BETWEEN



AN ART SERIES BY NICOLE RUDOLPH

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Jennifer Gonzalez

Elisabeth Cameron

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Summoning Raymond, 2021

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SÈANCE OF DUALITY:
SUMMONING THOSE LIVING IN-BETWEEN

IN COLLABORATION WITH:

Raymond Ernest Andrè III

Sabrina Ozuna

Anastasia Elizondro-Lossow

Xander Kent

Alena Rudolph

Jason Escobedo

Martha Schwanbeck

Carrie Torres-Escobedo

Tiffani Madrid

**This series is for you and your families
Thank you for helping me build this community.
Hopefully now others can see us too.**

SÉANCE OF DUALITY: SUMMONING THOSE LIVING IN-BETWEEN

Séance of Duality is an art series that mixes art and ritual with community building. As a biracial Latinx artist I have found that being categorized as 'in-between' is a lonely place to be as those that fall between definitions tend to not be fully accepted by either side, therefore lacking in community. In the series Séance of Duality I conducted private interviews with biracial Latinx people that I have known over the years. In these private interviews we recalled moments of our lives and found the threads of connection between us and slowly wove those connections into a communal story unique to us. We found that we had shared family jokes and ways of being. That because of the break in the traditions of both sides, we made our own, in some cases a blending of our family backgrounds, and others something entirely new. All of us alternative in some way, using our duality to move through life, carving out a space where we fit as there was no space provided. Some of us cried together, we definitely laughed, but no matter what by the end we felt a little less lonely. In turn, I used my lifelong experience of building altars and performing ritual to build altars in collaboration with each person that would summon the very essence of them, summoning a whole person, not a person divided by race and culture. I used objects from the interviewee as well as my own to create an altar that was a clear representation of them.

I present the finished altars here for you to view with respect. My sincere hope is that in the end each viewer comes away with a stronger understanding of what it means to be biracial Latinx in California. That being biracial does not mean a person divided, but is instead a combining, a mixture that creates a diverse whole.

PROCESS:

I began with the question, "What do I have the authority to talk about?" In this I had to really examine what my artistic voice could add to the world that wasn't being discussed already. I struggled with this thinking that nobody needs to hear about another cis white lady's problems... except, I'm not white, not really. I'm half Mexican and I had spent far too long allowing people to think that I wasn't. It felt uncomfortable to correct people, that with my white skin and light hair I experienced too many social privileges to claim that I was indeed part minority... Nobody knew that I grew up in the kitchen with my mother learning how to heal ailments with food, making tamales and champurrado for Christmas, building altars covered in santos candles, shells, and sage. That we embraced the Earth like our mother, still sowing the seeds with the Indigenous wisdom that could not be erased by Catholicism. Being Mexican was so intertwined within my being that I couldn't separate it out from any other part of myself, yet when I would attempt to enter the Latinx community I would find myself so very, very white, too white to be allowed in, for them to feel safe around... and I get it. My skin represents some truly awful things: colonialism, racism, and betrayal that cannot be trusted or forgiven. My white girl tears could kill someone, and I wouldn't be able to trust that either.

On my white side, there wasn't much. Scottish- Norwegian that was long ago disconnected from any traditions or community, all the culture wrung out until all that was left were American commercial holidays. In finding community in white people, I was always too weird, too dark, too spiritual or as they would often call it "woo-woo."

So where do you find community when you fall between communities? With those that also live in-between. I thought back to all the biracial Latinx people I had met at different stages of my life, of how we were the only ones who could see each other in the crowd. We would discuss our secret biracial background, finding common ground in our lack of commonality with others. In these moments we would create a glimmer of community within each other, breathing truth into the often unspoken and feeling more solid in being seen by another like ourselves. The connections I would form were so hard to forget that years later I was able to find all of them for a project that would help others see us as well.

Through many false starts and the gathered wisdom of those who know more than I do, I came to know the shape of the series I wanted to do. Using the visual language of Victorian seances I would summon each person into an Ofrenda-like altar, showing the very essence of each subject, not a person divided, but as a whole, a mixture of their experiences and backgrounds. The altars were built with the help of each person, making them collaborators in this series. When possible, the altars were made in their home with their treasured possessions. The shelf and I traveled all over California and all the way to New Mexico. Photography was key to this series, so I learned photography and photoshop to complete it and present it in a gallery. I am so very thankful to all of my collaborators, they not only let me into their lives, but they trusted me to display their whole selves. I feel so very lucky to have them as part of my community.



SUMMONING MYSELF 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Having almost no biracial representation in media I clung to the one representation that I could find; *The Addams Family*. Like Wednesday, I too was a pale biracial Hispanic girl who loved spooky things and had mixed race parents who absolutely adored each other. Naturally I became a significantly witchy goth artist. I began to notice that this seemed to be where the other pale biracial Latina girls gravitated as well. I sought out biracial Latinx community as best I could, but we hid ourselves well trying our best to blend into whichever side would have us, but still being continuously othered or not enough for either side.

This first piece was made so I could test out the process that I would be subjecting others to. I asked myself the questions that I would be asking my friends and thought about how I could represent the very essence of myself through objects and photography.

In using the Victorian shelf I created the atmosphere of a seance, but in using the cultural ritual objects of burning sage, copal, and lit Santos candles I made sure to introduce my Latinx side and the rich mixture of Indigenous and Catholic imagery involved. There are medicinal herbs from my garden, a cat to represent my feline constant companion, a knife my mother gave me, a living plant to represent my love of nature, a rosary from my grandmother, and so on. Like the other altars each object is purposely placed and holds a story that can be read like a book by the viewer. Here I display who I am and who I have been and who I continue to be.





MIXED RACE MARRIAGE (PATRICIA AND DAVID) 2021
PHOTOGRAPHY

My mother and father met in their 20s, already having lived a lifetime as newly divorced parents. Both talented artists in Los Angeles, they eventually came together to have me and my two younger brothers. My family moved with my half siblings up to the mountains of Santa Barbara to live in relative isolation from a world that wasn't ready for a mixed-race family. On a rented 4-acre ranch, my mother raised goats and chickens and boarded horses to help feed us and pay the bills. My dad sold his art and custom commission work in Los Angeles to pay the rent, taking us to visit my mother's relatives when he would commute to meet a client. In Santa Barbara we made connections with the Chumash elders and Tibetan Buddhist monks and my childhood was steeped in the cultural traditions and spirituality of these two as well as my mother's Mexican Catholic upbringing. My parents managed to protect us from the racism that they experienced for most of my childhood, and it wasn't until we moved to North County San Diego that it came into my view. Being close to the Mexican border made for an area that deeply discriminated against Mexicans. I suddenly witnessed intense racism towards my mother and confusion towards my siblings and myself.





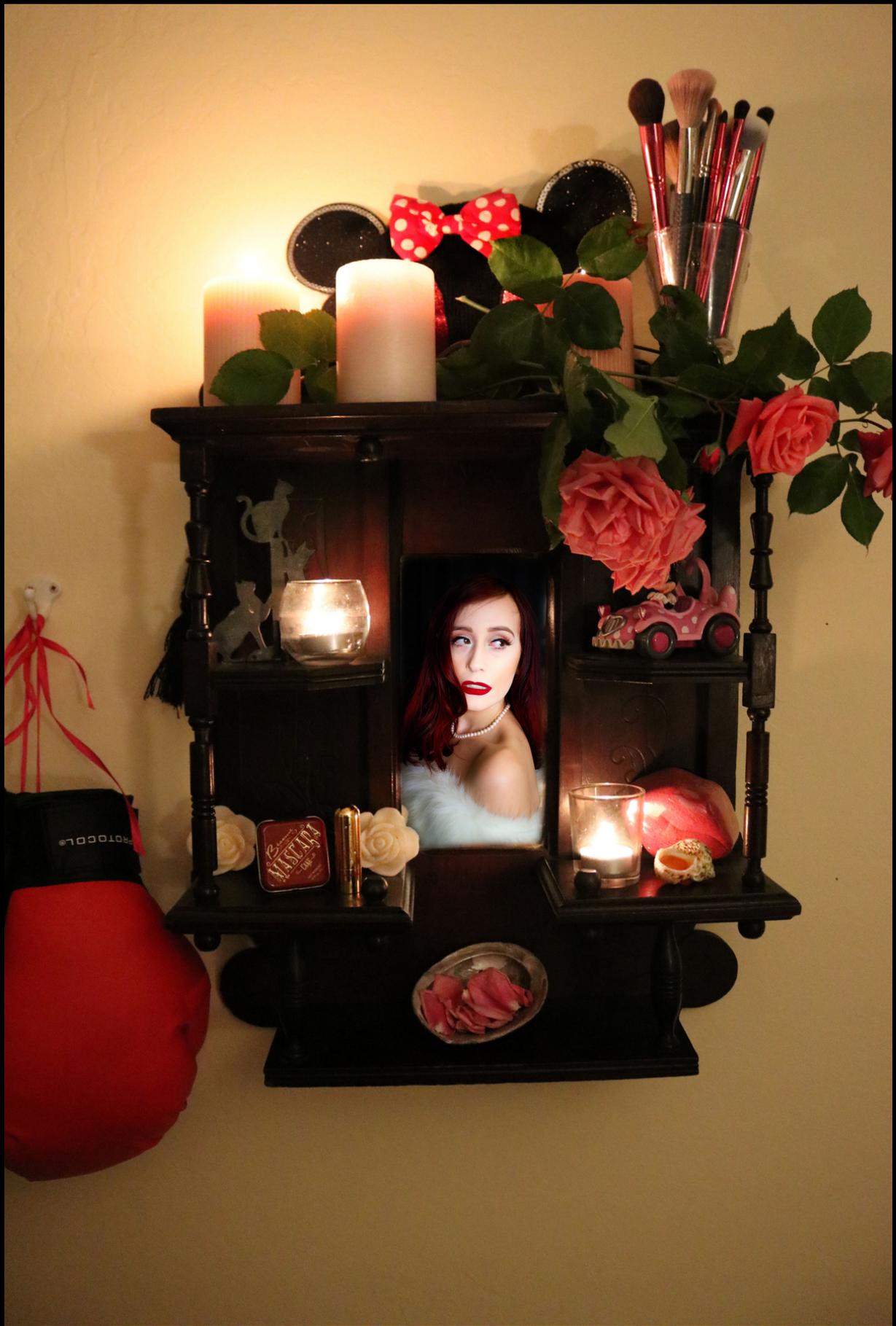
SUMMONING RAYMOND 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

With a generous heart, and a zeal for art and literature, Raymond is one of the true gentlemen left in the world. An artist and musician himself, he appears to all as a Dali mustachioed Victorian dandy. Being a mixture of Spanish, French and Mexican, he grew up speaking English and what he refers to as a Frankenstein of Castilian and Mexican Spanish. Having grown up on his parent's ranch in San Jose, Raymond has seen the city expand and develop over the years. An original Punk and Goth in the 70s, and a Victorian Historical Costumer today he is a wealth of knowledge on the history of everything.

“We are *crypto-latino*... We are merely passing.”

- Raymond when discussing our hidden biracial Latinx backgrounds many years ago at Dickens Fair





SUMMONING SABRINA 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Photos of Sabrina used with
permission of Sabrina Ozuna

Sabrina is a beautiful contradiction, but the duality in her interests does not stem from her being biracial. You have never met a more genuinely sweet and bubbly person. Her profession as a makeup artist is in making people stunningly beautiful with eyeshadows and powders, or into a monstrous spectacle with fake blood and prosthetics. The lesser-known side of her is as a competitive fighter, something that she grew up with being the daughter of a martial arts master who has held two Guinness World Records. She once won a match by knockout using the motivation of getting a Besame lipstick as a prize from her teammate. Sabrina said cheerily, “I can knock a girl out and then cover up the bruises and make her look beautiful!” Sabrina does not feel strong ties to either side of her cultural backgrounds, instead embracing herself as an independent entity. Biracial people always dread the question of “What are you?” and when it is asked of Sabrina she answers proudly, “I’m SABRINA!”

“People ask me *What are you?* and I answer I’m SABRINA!”

- Sabrina on her identity and how to stump a racist





SUMMONING SIBLINGS DIVIDED (ALENA) 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY



SUMMONING SIBLINGS DIVIDED (JASON) 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

SIBLINGS DIVIDED

Jason and Alena are my half siblings from our mother's first marriage in the 70s.

Despite being from the same family, their skin and hair color have made people think otherwise, to the point where a common question was "is Alena adopted."

Because of this they live in two different worlds...

Alena who appeared white, felt alienated by most of her Mexican relatives...

...while Jason, who looked more Hispanic, was generally accepted.

In elementary school the two were ironically separated by the education system due to redistricting in an effort towards better racial integration:

Alena was bussed to a school far away from their home...

...while Jason remained in his school only blocks away but separate from his younger sister.

Our mom divorced her first husband and after being a single mother for a while met my father.

They had me and moved the family from LA to Santa Barbara.

In Santa Barbara racial profiling of Jason escalated. Racist bullying from students and teachers continued all through Jason's education until he was finally pressured to drop out of high school by the staff. In this city the police seemed to know his name and regularly harassed him even though he had never met them before.

Alena also suffered staff bullying from her schools because nobody believed that her Mexican mother was actually her mother. She tested out of high school gaining her GED in 11th grade and continued her art education for 3 years at city college. As a first-generation college student she didn't have the guidance or means to continue her formal education and never completed her degree.

Jason and Alena eventually both moved to San Francisco as adults.

Alena thrived as an artist, changing her signed name to a moniker which gave her anonymity from gender, race, and distanced her from the difficulties found in her identity within her family. She was featured in the Bay Area Now 2002 up and coming artist show at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts alongside her then husband. She had a child and eventually bought a home in Oakland where her daughter's artistic skills flourished. Today she lives in Humboldt county with her now grown daughter and current husband, who is also biracial. She works as an artist, set decorator, and educator in jobs that look for talent and not a college degree.

Jason, also a talented artist, suffered significantly in San Francisco. Because of his lack of a diploma, he was denied work beyond detailing cars for low pay. San Francisco police profiled him and would regularly harass him. Eventually they stole his car in what was later revealed to be a ring of police car thefts of Bay Area Latinos. Jason leapt at the chance to leave the Bay Area and move to New Mexico. Eventually Jason got his GED and started a new life with his current wife Carrie and her two daughters, all of whom are also biracial. With her support he continued his education and works as a medical assistant. They own a home in the countryside and commute to work in Albuquerque.



"I was in a bar and there was this yahoo complaining about 'Blacks and Mexicans' and I told her I was Mexican. She stumbled and laughs saying, 'Oh you're the good kind of Mexican!'. This has happened far too many times in my life. Catching people at their most bigoted selves because they felt safe in my white looking presence."

- Alena on bigots feeling comfortable being racist around her because she looks white.



“The racism in this country is a sickness at pandemic levels... I’ve always told my kids, ‘Don’t fool yourself and think people are going to treat you like you’re white.’”

- Jason on discussing racism and expectations with his biracial daughters.





SUMMONING CARRIE 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Like many biracial people, Carrie's family tree has large gaps in it shrouded by secrecy. She never knew her father or anything about him. Her mother had Carrie at 15, but remained out of her daughter's life. Because of this Carrie's childhood was complicated and incredibly painful for Carrie to remember. Instead, Carrie likes to think of her history truly beginning when she met her husband Jason. When they met, Carrie had been working at Walgreens for many years. In her job she not only found the means to support her two daughters on her own, but a sort of family with those she worked with. Finding community can be difficult for biracial people, so building this level of comradery with her coworkers made her work feel more like a second home. Being a single mother to two daughters is a Herculean feat in itself, but doing it without family to lean on is something else entirely. Of this Carrie said, "you just do it, because the alternative isn't an option." And she did it. Her now adult daughters are on successful career paths, a testament to Carrie's hard work and sacrifice as a mother. After a life of never being able to count on anyone but herself, having a steadfast partner in her life is a relief she worried she might never have. In Jason she found a husband who cherishes her, a father to her daughters, and a person who means home and will be there to lean on.

“The past is so painful that I just want to rewrite it so it begins with Jason.”

- Carrie on her personal history and identity.





SUMMONING TIFFANI 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPH

Tiffani may come off reserved at first, but is as warm and bright as the sun once she feels comfortable. She loves fantasy worlds and creatures like mermaids, elves, and dragons, but finds her daily life firmly grounded in reality. At only 26 she has begun her career in the medical field, working as a dental assistant, phlebotomist, and currently in the oncology/hematology department. In the rare time she has outside of work she enjoys immersing herself in nature while hiking in the forested mountain areas of the New Mexican countryside. She journals, scrapbooks, and collects antiques, drawn to these objects because of their one-of-a-kind nature, “They just have a lot more personality to them, things from today just don’t have enough oomph.” Like her stepdad Jason, she is an avid reader and collector of music of all kinds. They even paint together. She refers to Jason as “Dad” as that’s how she feels about him. Her biological father is a bit of a mystery, all she knows about him is that he was Mexican and stopped being in her life at about first grade, around when her sister was born. After that it was just her mother and sister in her life. Tiffani identifies as Mexican and White and tends towards biracial friends that identify similarly. In times that she has tried to identify as Mexican, she was told that she wasn’t Mexican, that she was NEW Mexican and that it didn’t count. She wants to dive deeper into her Mexican roots to explore her culture, but she fears that she might “hurt someone’s feelings” or that people will think that she is pretending to be something that she isn’t, a very honest and all too common feeling shared by many biracial people like Tiffani. However, through it all Tiffani says she knows who she is and finds inspiration and strength in her mother, “She’s the strongest person I know. I feel like she has really shaped who I am today.”

“My mother has taught me to always stand up for myself and to never forget where I come from. She truly is a powerful light!”

- Tiffani on the strength her mother gave her





SUMMONING ANASTASIA 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPH

Anastasia is as multi-faceted as a diamond, and just as sharp. She is an incredibly loving and hardworking mother to her two beautiful boys, one of which is on the spectrum and requires extra care. A devoted wife to her husband, who is like Anastasia in his multi-racial background. She is a talented actress and historical reenactor who you might catch on stage at various fairs. She is a jokester, always ready with a clever pun or cunning crack. And she is a fierce activist working hard to make the world a place where her boys can grow up safely. Identifying as *Indigenous Afro-Chicana*, Anastasia says of herself, "I am the Zulu warrior, the Aztec warrior, the Cherokee warrior, the mama warrior, and a wife." If Anastasia loves you, she WILL fight for you... and has she ever had to fight. A double or triple minority faces intersectionality that most people could never understand. Every time she said who she was and that she was proud, she was told that she was wrong. Everyone tried to get her to just say that she was Black, including a teacher who said, "That's all America will see you as." However, she was never seen as Black enough to be fully accepted in that community either. Experiencing racism from all sides, Anastasia had to fight hard for her identity, always standing on what felt like shaky ground while doing so. Struggling with imposter syndrome is something that haunts many biracial people as everyone wants you to make it simpler for them to label you... but as she came from a long line of powerhouse women, making things easier for bigots is simply not in Anastasia's nature.

"I am a *Fierce... Warrior... Bitch.*"

- Anastasia on how the world has shaped her into who she is today



Martha is a brilliant product of her philosopher Irish/German father, and her strong and traditional Mexican mother. Under the name “Frida and Cactus” Martha thrives as a native Santa Cruz artist, and as the name suggests she is inspired by cacti, Frida Kahlo, and her well preserved Tijuana and Oaxacan Traditions as a first generation Mexican American. Martha owes her fluency in Spanish to being the young translator for her grandmother growing up. While close with her mother and grandmother Martha finds frustration in having to piece together the family history through unreliable storytelling, often only reserved for other family members who were present during the time. Martha found that even though she appeared more Mexican, had strong Mexican cultural connections, and spoke the language, that when she attempted to identify as Chicana, her community rejected her calling her “Pocha” which is a slang/slur for “half white.” Martha cares for her mother and two daughters in her family home with her loving husband in Santa Cruz where they have watched the town change around them from a small town where they all felt comfortable to a town built for tourists and silicon valley techies.

“I looked Mexican, I spoke fluent Spanish, but when I tried to identify as Chicana they laughed at me and called me *pocha*.”

- Martha on identity and rejection.





SUMMONING XANDER 2021
MIXED MEDIA AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Xander is a proud California artist with just so many mugs. When you enter his San Francisco apartment you can see the unique handmade ceramics stacked up in the dish rack, each a representation of a different year that he and his wife worked at a fair together. His beautifully inked artwork covers the walls, complimented by collected objects and art pieces from over the years. An avid gamer who is quick to wit and a hearty laugh, Xander is playful and observant. As the son of SoCal educators Xander was raised very aware of both sides of his cultural lineages. He grew up observing his parents building altars; while his mother's altars expressed various Mexican traditions, his father's altars were formed organically through his gardening. Born the year of the Hare, Xander relates closely to that symbology; anxious, clever, and possessing strong survival instincts. As an artist, Xander dives into Viking and pirate esthetics in his art and has a mind for symbols and patterns. As a schoolkid, he often felt excluded and othered as a biracial, bisexual person who struggles with his body image. The fear of judgement based on his mixed-race heritage was constant, since this was something his older sibling had encountered during their time at the same schools. Eventually Xander found his people, his "ride or die bros" that he still remains in contact with. Today he lives with his luminous wife and two cats in their cozy apartment where his ink spattered desk is surrounded by symbols of his life and inspiration.

“I always knew I was different.”

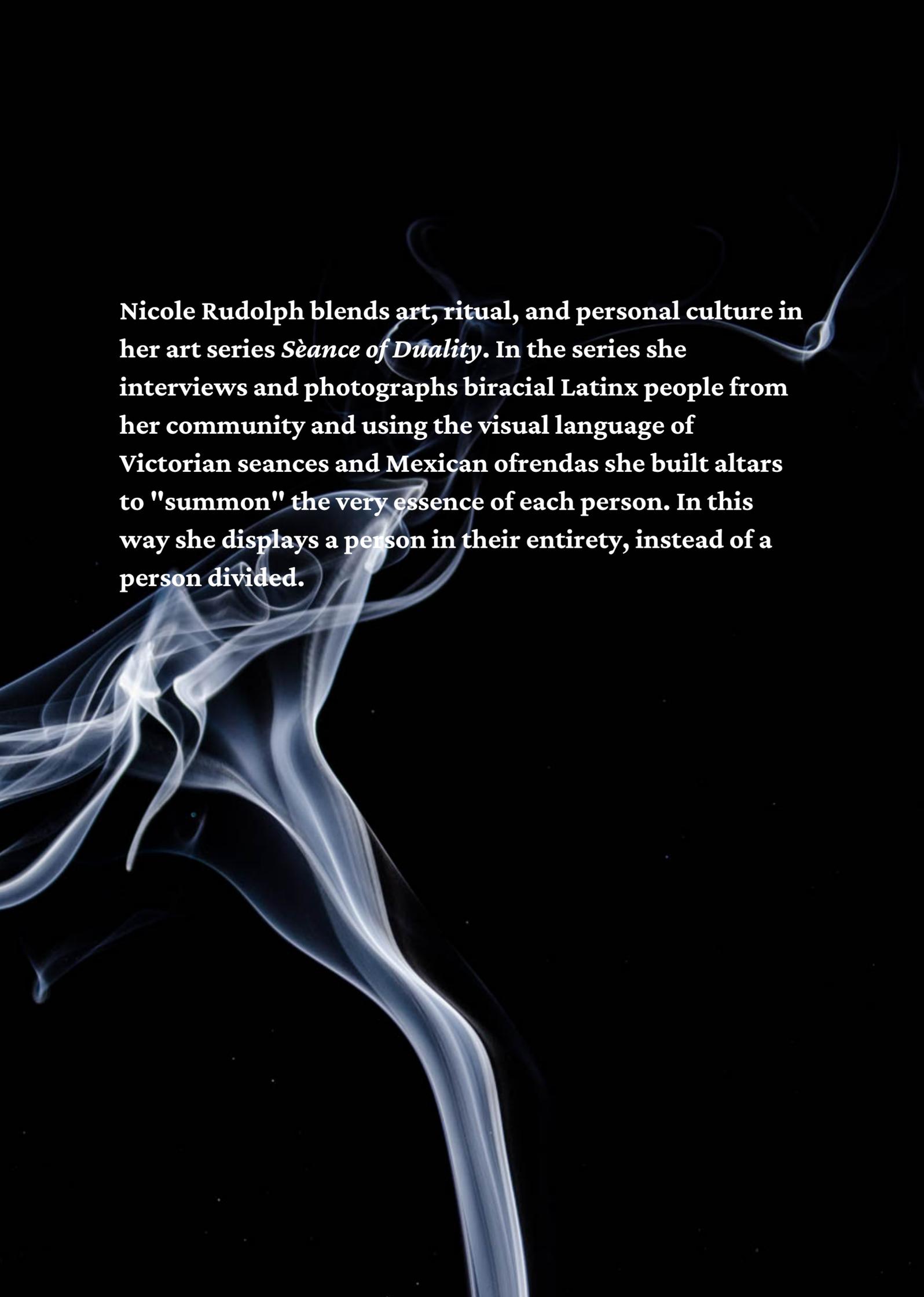
- Xander on alienation and being othered in his early years.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

A California native, Nicole Rudolph was born in Hollywood but grew up on a small ranch in the Los Padres National Forest near Lake Cachuma. Her life ever since has been a balance of those two spaces; city or wildlife, people or wilderness. She resides with her child and her partner in Santa Cruz in a small house that looks as if it were being devoured by cypress and plum trees. Her artwork follows the themes of people within nature and transitional spaces or states of being, often including the visual language of ritual and folklore. As a biracial, bisexual, intersectional feminist, Nicole looks to bring awareness to those that fall between definitions as both existing and valid. She is currently a UCSC student double majoring in Art and the History of Arts and Visual Culture with a concentration in curation.





Nicole Rudolph blends art, ritual, and personal culture in her art series *Sèance of Duality*. In the series she interviews and photographs biracial Latinx people from her community and using the visual language of Victorian seances and Mexican ofrendas she built altars to "summon" the very essence of each person. In this way she displays a person in their entirety, instead of a person divided.