Healing the Archive Through Collective Critique:
The Latinx Library & Estampa Cartonera

By: Mayela Rodriguez

B.A., University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 2015

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Arts Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

April 24, 2019

Approved by:

R. Modak

Rebekah Modrak, Graduate Committee Chair

Heidi Kumao

Heidi Kumao, Graduate Committee Member

William Calvo

William Calvo-Quiros, Graduate Committee Member

Osman Khan

Osman Khan, Director MFA Graduate Program

Elona Van Gent

Elona Van Gent, Associate Dean for Academic Programs

Gunalan Nadarajan

Gunalan Nadarajan, Dean, Stamps School of Art and Design

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Mayela Rodriguez   MFA '19

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Abstract

My social practice works The Latinx Library and Estampa Cartonera
challenge the concept of the academic "collection" by inviting the
University of Michigan Latinx community and the Stamps School of Art
& Design community (respectively) to collectively make and then exhibit
their own collections, by constructing a series of, what is referred to in
academia as, "readers," academic anthologies of, typically, canonical
texts. Over the past year, I held nine workshops for participants to
make their own readers from crowdsourced materials. I identified
and collected texts by surveying the Latinx campus community for
materials deemed important, including "nontraditional" texts (e.g.
family recipes). At the workshops, participants compiled a selection
of prose and bound the readers with cardboard covers, alluding to
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based publishing that makes literature more accessible through
low-tech printing and grassroots distribution. These readers were then
collectively displayed.

Keywords

Contents

INTRODUCTION

My social practice works *The Latinx[1] Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* challenge the concept of the academic "collection" by inviting the University of Michigan Latinx community and the Stamps School of Art & Design community (respectively) to collectively make and then exhibit

1 As defined by the dictionary, *Latinx* (noun) is "a person of Latin American descent (used in place of the masculine form Latino , the feminine form Latina , or the gender-binary form Latin@)" OR *Latinx* (adjective) is "of or relating to people of Latin American descent."

their own collections, by constructing a series of, what is referred to in academia as, "readers," academic anthologies of, typically, canonical texts. Over the past year, I held nine workshops for participants to make their own readers from crowdsourced materials. I identified and collected texts by surveying the Latinx campus community for materials deemed important, including "nontraditional" texts (e.g. family recipes). At the workshops, participants compiled a selection of prose and bound the readers with cardboard covers, alluding to

the tradition of Latin American cartoneras, a form of community-based publishing that makes literature more accessible through low-tech printing and grassroots distribution. These readers were then collectively displayed.

Institutions of higher education create library "collections" as a way of validating certain scholarship. The criteria for creating these archives vary from context to context. Selection criteria, according to the American Library Association, "should be a blend of general, specific, and technical to enable library staff to select materials in all subject areas and formats. In addition to criteria such as appropriateness to the age and level of the user, librarians must also consider creating a collection that reflects diversity of ideas and authors as well as being reflective of the population the library serves."[2]

Although the University of Michigan Library offers a variety of collections ranging from the general (Asia Library) to the specific (Computer & Video Game Archive), there is no archive devoted to Latinx Studies. Instead, titles that would be considered under Latinx Studies are purchased and divided between two distinct collections: the Latin American & Iberian Studies Collection and the Multicultural Studies Collection. The problem goes beyond what Latinx texts the Library chose to include, but rather the framework by which the texts are organized. In other words, it is a broader epistemic issue of visibility and normativity. In his essay "Ethnicity as Provenance" critical archivist Joel Wurl expresses the importance of ethnic context when identifying the provenance (creator or origin) of an archive.

> *Without a full appreciation for the contextual whole of ethnic community development, efforts to document this dimension of society can take on a fragmentary and narrow approach...This paradigm of archival selection*

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2 Kpekoll. "Selection Criteria." Tools, Publications & Resources. January 11, 2018. http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit/criteria.

overlooks the rich reservoir of information originating deep
within community infrastructures in favor of scattered
products about communities, often generated by those
on the outside looking in. It also runs a considerable
risk of being grounded in distorted, if not damaging,
preconceptions of ethnic identities and community
experiences.[3]

Although Wurl's analysis is specific to archival studies, applying it to the cataloging systems of the University of Michigan Library affords a deeper critique of collection practices: considering the long, complicated, and profoundly violent history between the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula, why are Latin American texts contained within the same parameters as Iberian texts?

Furthermore, while the Multicultural Collection *does* contain a Latina/o Studies subsection, grouping Latina/o Studies, African-American Studies, Native American Studies, Arab and Muslim American Studies, Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies under this locality and designation denies agency to Latina/o Studies scholarship, as well as to the other subgroups. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, citing Glen Coulthard, eloquently articulates this dilemma:

Some postcolonial theorists are critical of multiculturalism
and the contemporary politics of recognition for
reinforcing, rather than transforming, structures of
colonial domination in relations between settler states
and indigenous communities. Focusing on Taylor's theory
of the politics of recognition, Glen Coulthard has argued
that "instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence
grounded on the Hegelian idea of reciprocity, the politics of
recognition in its contemporary form promises to

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3 Wurl, Joel. "Ethnicity As Provenance: In Search Of Values And Principles For Documenting The Immigrant Experience." Archival Issues 29, No. 1 (2005): 65-76.

reproduce the very configurations of colonial power
that indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have
historically sought to transcend" (2007, 438-9; see also
Coulthard 2014).[4]

Thus, we see the continuation of colonialism play out within the University of Michigan's Library collection description conventions. Classifications like "Latin American & Iberian Studies" and "Multicultural Studies," serve as ever-present reminders of Latinx Studies as an "othered" discipline, couched within a larger settler state, never standing as its own valid field of scholarship.

The American Library Association's guidelines urge librarians to create collections reflective of the community. Combining Latina/o Studies with other ethnic groups as one collection (the multicultural collection) gives the appearance that the University of Michigan sees its non-white subjects as all the same, disregarding the unique differences between ethnic groups. Although the question of naming collections becomes a matter of semantics, this kind of oversight, regardless of intention, can have negative impacts on the communities affected. Namely, it can affirm students' of color already imposed feelings of not belonging on campus. I created *The Latinx Library* to bring attention to this disconnect between out-of-date collection practices and the sense of not belonging it promotes in the Latinx campus community.

While working on *The Latinx Library*, I simultaneously had the unique experience of planning my thesis exhibition, to be displayed in the Stamps Gallery at the University of Michigan. Rather than recreating *The Latinx Library* as a gallery installation, I wanted to modify the strategies employed in *The Latinx Library* (the cartonera, community workshops, and collection-making) to address institutional blind spots particular to the Stamps Gallery and the Stamps School of Art & Design.

4 Song, Sarah. "Multiculturalism." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. August 12, 2016. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/#PosCri.

Inspired by my own positionality as a Mexican-American woman and an artist, I wanted to unearth how many Latina artists have been invited as guests by the Stamps School to participate in professional programs, specifically The Penny Stamps Speaker Series, Stamps exhibitions, and The Witt Residency. Investigating the limited archives of events, talks, and exhibitions, the results, I learned that, of the 329 visiting artists who lectured at the Penny Stamps Speaker Series since 2002 to May 2019, only three were self-identified Latina artists: Tania Bruguera, Carmelita Tropicana, and Marisa Morán Jahn. Additionally, only three Latina artists (Marisa Morán Jahn, Nancy De Los Santos, Melanie Cervantes) participated in solo and group exhibitions since 2002 and, since the program began in 2011, there has been only one documented Latina Witt Visitor (Glendalys Medina), and no Latina Witt Residents.

As a Graduate Student Instructor for the BFA senior thesis year, Integrative Projects (IP), both years during my MFA candidacy at Stamps, I had the privilege of teaching two Latina students and meeting other Latina students in Stamps. Latinas are a part of the Stamps community, yet we are not reflected in the school's collection of public programs. There are a number of reasons why Latinas may feel they don't belong at Stamps and the lack of Latina representation in public programming is one such reason. I addressed this problem in my exhibition *Estampa Cartonera*.

Through *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera*, I discovered how to engage community in the action of collaborative collection-making in order to engage in the process of healing the effects of exclusionary practices enacted on the institutional level. In the following sections, I will describe the social and artistic contexts surrounding the works, detail the methods that I used, and articulate the final outcome of both projects.

CREATIVE WORK

The Latinx Library

The Latinx Library is a custom-built cart situated on the bustling first-floor lobby of Shapiro Undergraduate Library, the most visited library on campus [fig. 1]. Surrounded by floor-to-ceiling glass, the cart's vivid and handcrafted aesthetic celebrates Latinx scholarship. Shapiro Library employs a number of aesthetic and systemic cues to assert Western icons of intellectual importance and relevance—for example,

Greek-inspired architecture, elaborate cataloging systems that emerged within the height of colonization, controlled lending systems, and encapsulation within the broader university.

The Latinx Library's bright colors and cardboard-bound books intentionally clash with the pomp-and-circumstance grandeur of the library, directly challenging the expectations of the collegiate library as methodical, stoic, and seemingly objective [fig. 2]. Embedded within the space, *The Latinx Library* fills the gap of the missing Latinx

Studies collection and offers university members (Latinx and non) the opportunity to encounter and engage with the defiant, celebratory, and inclusive Latinx "readers" in a public way.

This project will culminate in my formal donation of 60+ Latinx Readers by the Latinx community to the University of Michigan Library system. Although it has yet to be determined exactly where the collection will be placed within the library, the formal collection of *The Latinx Library* plays a monumental role in helping the University of Michigan Library validate Latinx scholarship built by the campus community. In addition,

Figure 1: The Latinx Library *inside Shapiro Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

the inclusion of the collection helps to document Latinx cultural values at this particular moment in the history of the University of Michigan and foster a sense of institutional belonging that can feel all too rare for the Latinx community at the University of Michigan.

Figure 2: The Latinx Library *outside of Clements Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

Estampa Cartonera

Estampa Cartonera transformed the front of Stamps Gallery into a space reminiscent of a cartonera press [fig. 3]. I divided the nearly 1,000 square foot space into two parts: "the reading room" and "the workspace." The reading room of *Estampa Cartonera* invites viewers to engage with two collections: on one side, an underwhelming display of six cartoneras, each documenting one of the six Latina artists Stamps has invited to established programs between the years 2002 and 2019; and on the other side, an ever-growing archive of over 200 Latina artists as consideration for future invitation to one of Stamps' programs.

I designed the flow of this room as a large circular space that could be entered at many points. On the magenta wall a cardboard sign [fig. 4] (referencing the visual and material form of the cartoneras) read "Latina Artists Stamps School of Art & Design has invited to: exhibit their work, give a Penny Stamps public talk, be a Witt Visitor/Resident," with an arrow pointing to the small collection of Stamps-affiliated Latina artists that occupied a 2 ft. x 4 ft. wooden bookshelf [fig. 5,6].

Directly across, also signified with its own hand-painted sign [fig. 7], thirty feet of wooden bookshelves curved to form an inviting space, holding the collection of potential artists [fig. 8]. I incorporated elements from *The Latinx Library* cart into the design of these mobile shelving units: specifically, plywood strips as shelves, with a wire rail to hold the cartoneras in place. I designed the shelves to be minimal, open, and exposed in order to place all visual emphasis on the artists' cartoneras, and to be welcoming and approachable.

The Stamps-affiliated artists' cartoneras contained curated texts, images, bios, event descriptions, and articles detailing their careers and artistic practices. My goal was to allow depth for each of these artists much in the same way Stamps has done by inviting them to speak,

Figure 3: Estampa Cartonera *installation*

Figure 4: Signage indicating collection of shown artists

Figures 5, 6: Collection of shown artists

Figure 7: Signage indicating collection of potential artists

Figure 8: Collection of potential artists

Figure 9: Estampa Cartonera *workspace*

Figure 10: Instructions for making cartoneras

Figure 11: Final collection of 40+ community-made cartoneras

exhibit, and participate in programming. In contrast, the Latinas-as-potential-artists cartoneras contained duplicate pages offering a small portrait of the artist and her bio.

In the adjacent workspace were two large oilcloth-covered worktables for gallery-goers and workshop participants to make their own cartoneras [fig. 9]. Hand-painted instructions for making cartoneras hung on the yellow wall with the materials and tools necessary for each step directly below [fig. 10]. I encouraged participants to tear pages of images/bios from different cartoneras and assemble them into their own cartonera. Participant-made cartoneras are displayed in a third collection that surveyed community interest in the potential artists [fig. 11].

During the two-week run of the show, I held two cartonera-making workshops. Whereas my intended audience for *The Latinx Library* workshops were Latinx community members, the two workshops within *Estampa Cartonera* targeted the Stamps community as a means of creating meaningful conversation about the underrepresentation of Latina artists in Stamps programming. These workshops prompted questions and conversation amongst participants. Perhaps the most intriguing insight from these workshops were the number of Stamps faculty, staff, and students with direct connections to some of the Latina artists on display in the potential artists collection yet had not mobilized these contacts into formal invitations.

I extended these discussions beyond the space of Stamps Gallery by meeting and consulting with Stamps staff and faculty to talk about the disparity of Latina artists brought to Stamps for professional engagement. I met with individuals who have the ability to enact change within the community: for example, members of the Stamps' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, Srimoyee Mitra (Director of the Stamps Gallery) and Jennifer Junkermeier-Khan (Outreach and Public Engagement Coordinator, Stamps Gallery), and Chrisstina Hamilton (Director of the Penny Stamps Lecture Series). Many of the Stamps administrators and faculty that I met with about the underrepresentation of Latinas in Stamps programming requested the spreadsheet of 200+ Latina artists I had compiled for *Estampa Cartonera*, demonstrating a desire to utilize this list as a starting point for inviting more Latina artists to future programming.

From these conversations, I began to consider the culminating impact that Stamps programming plays in inspiring, not only the Stamps community, but also the public, which determines the future make-up of Stamps students. Professor Franc Nunoo-Quarcoo, the current head of the Stamps DEI Committee, described the potential impact of diversifying Stamps programming, especially the Speaker Series, on recruitment. By diversifying the artists Stamps invites, Stamps is

seen as more inclusive, which may draw more students from diverse background. In other words, increased Latina representation in Stamps public programming may result in the growth of the Latina undergraduate and graduate population at Stamps.
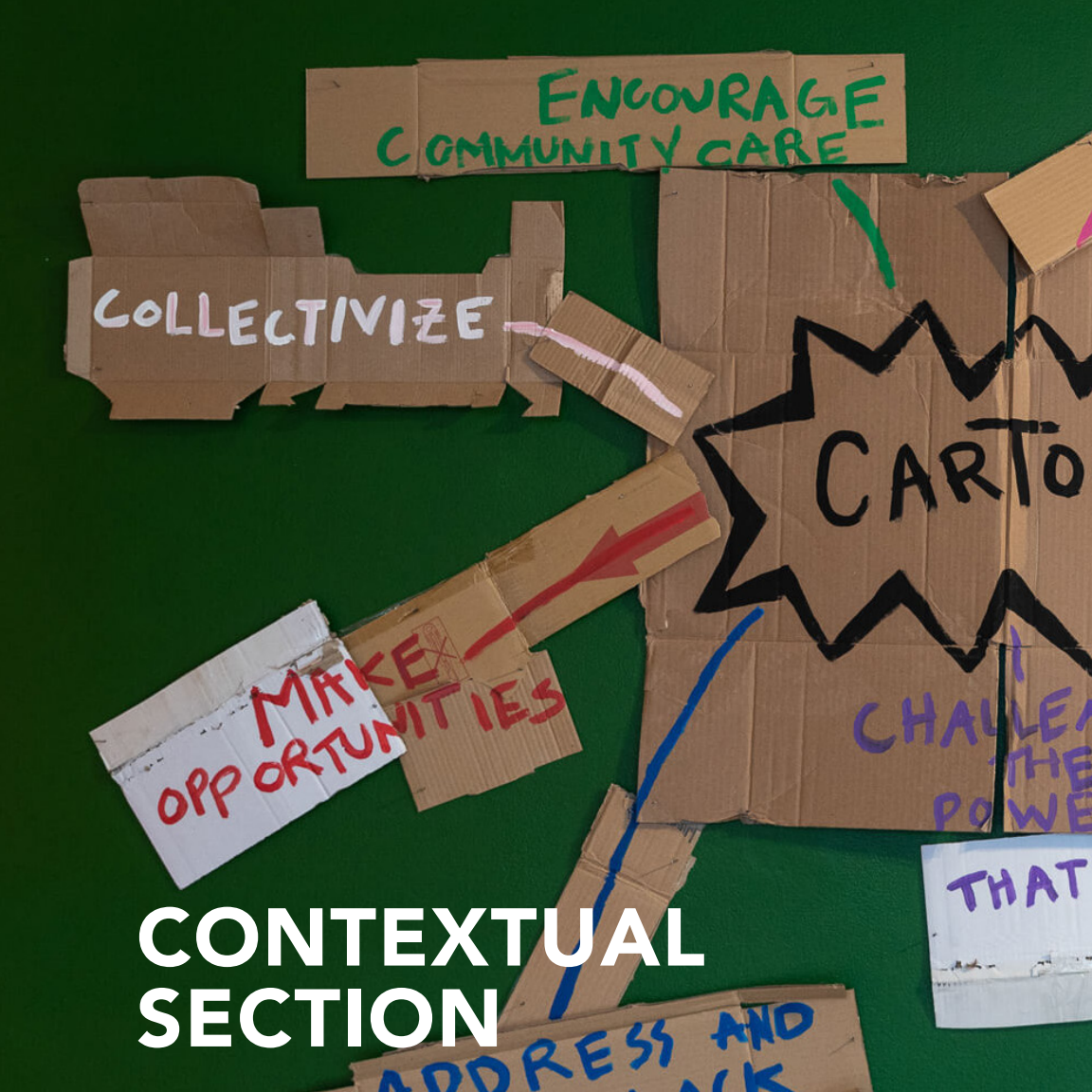
CONTEXTUAL SECTION

I. Precedents for Reimagining the Institutional Collection as Equitable Storytelling

We are familiar with the aphorism "History is written by the
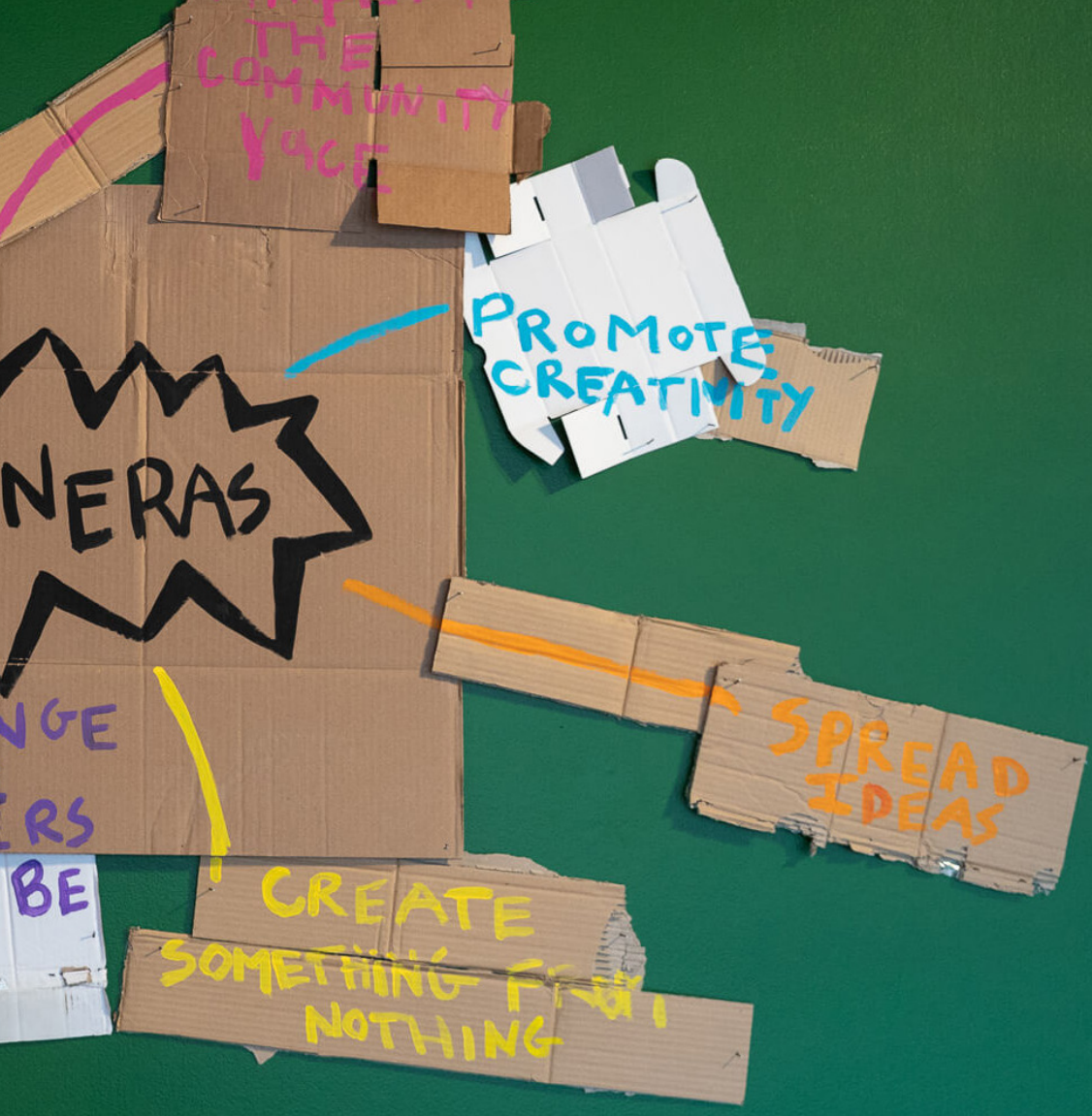
victors,"[5] implying that power controls how we understand the past. Those in positions of power are the grand storytellers, shaping our understanding of key events in history in ways that validate their authority in the present and project their control into the future. History is a collection of constantly shifting stories and it is the job of the historian to anticipate and interrogate these biases in order to

5 The line is often credited to Winston Churchill, however there is no reliable source to confirm this.

get a "clearer" picture of history. Library collections also perpetuate a particular history.

Aurora Levins Morales' essay "The Historian as Curandera" explores the healing power of the "curandera (healer) historian".[6] Morales claims that "all historians have points of view.... Storytelling is not neutral. Curandera historians make this explicit, openly naming our partisanship, our intent to influence how people think."[7] In her paper, Morales explains how asking speculative "what if" questions is a legitimate tool for healing history since "[p]roposing a radically different possible interpretation is a way of opening up how were [sic] think about events..."[8] Remedying the falsity of the past allows for agency in the present and hope for possible futures. With Morales in mind, I saw my role within *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* as a "curandera artist," using the works to ask speculative questions of the institutions I am interrogating. What if there was a Latinx Studies collection? What if Stamps represented more Latina artists in its public programming?

Grappling with biased collections is not the responsibility of only the (curandera) historian (or curandera artist); it is also the responsibility of librarians, the administrators, and the library as whole. Contemporary cataloging practices within academic collections emerged from the colonial agendas of the past.[9] In his essay "Archival Institutions," Adrian Cunningham articulates the forced assimilation of collection and record-keeping practices by colonized cultures and the ways in

6 Levins Morales, Aurora. "The Historian as Curandera," JSRI Working Paper #40. The Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1997.

7 Ibid., 1.

8 Ibid., 3.

9 White, Hollie C. Decolonizing the Ways Libraries Organize. The International Federation of Library Associations. IFLA Library. July 23, 2018. http://library.ifla. org/2221/1/207-white-en.pdf.

which they, in the aftermath of fallen colonial powers, tend to return to their own nearly wiped-out methods of archiving (oral history, for example).[10]

The complete rejection of western archival practices within the context of the United State is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible because they are deeply aligned and ingrained within our values systems, despite the fact that many members at the University of Michigan do not come from "the west." My work directly responds to this dilemma, asking us to consider how we, within the world of academia, can reimagine the academic collection as an act of collaboration, inclusion, and generation, rather than the result of a singular person's biased discretion. While working on *The Latinx Library*, I discovered that I share this line of inquiry with many collection workers within public, private, and academic contexts, including the University of Michigan Library.

Critical librarianship is "a movement of library workers dedicated to bringing social justice principles into our work in libraries."[11] Librarians who consider themselves practitioners of critical librarianship employ a number of critical lenses — ethnic, racial, feminist, queer, etc.— to actively recognize, intervene, and disrupt systems of white supremacy, capitalism, and structural inequalities present in their work.[12] University of Michigan librarians make efforts to critically engage its systemic biases. For instance, their Library MiniGrant, which I was awarded for *The Latinx Library*, gives funding to University of Michigan students with projects that make creative use of library resources in order to "strengthen community partnerships, enhance global scholarship and/

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10 "Archival System." Archival System - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics. Accessed April 15, 2019. https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/archival-system.

11 Critlib. http://critlib.org/about/.

12 Ibid.

or advocate for diversity and inclusion."[13] Although the program is not necessarily intended to fund projects about the library, the fact that *The Latinx Library* received a MiniGrant demonstrates an interest on the part of the librarians to critically engage blind spots in their own institution.

Critical librarianship is a decentralized movement gaining global traction with the help of online platforms, specifically Twitter, and #CritLib serves as a digital "location" for critical librarians to participate in the movement as a virtual community. In her essay "Interrogating the Collective: #Critlib and the Problem of Community", Nora Almeida compares the hashtag to a borderland that "can accommodate conflict, cultural difference, the real, and the imaginary."[14] She goes on to articulate that as a borderland, "...#critlib [and critical librarianship as a practice] is produced by the clash and comingling of institutional realities, dialogic traditions, and imaginaries."[15] This is to say that the critical librarian exists at the collision of institutionalized and radical collection practices and is constantly navigating the two, a position between "complicity and resistance, between belonging and otherness."[16] This is a tension that I can empathize with as a student of color in academia and has been a motivating factor in my creative practice. Realizing our similar positions and shared interest in institutional critique allowed for rich collaboration between myself a number of critical librarians and critical collections makers in both the University of Michigan Library and Stamps, resulting in *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera*.

13 "Library Student Mini Grants." Student Engagement Program. https://engage. lib.umich.edu/mini-grants/.

14 Almeida, Nora. "Interrogating the Collective: #Critlib and the Problem of Community." Edited by Karen P. Nicholson. In *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*, edited by Maura Seale, 239–257. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press. Pg. 246

15 Ibid., 246.

16 Ibid., 244.

II. Precedents for Institutional Critique as Artistic Engagement

In working to heal specific collections within the University of Michigan Library and Stamps School of Art & Design, *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* belong to a long lineage of institutional critique. Institutional critique, as defined by the Tate, is "the act of critiquing an institution as artistic practice, the institution usually being a museum or an art gallery."[17]

This form of art practice gained traction in the 1970s with Hans Haacke's *MoMA Poll*[18] [fig. 12] surveying MoMA visitors on their proclivity to re-elect (Former MoMA Board Director, then donor) Governor Nelson Rockefeller, considering his questionable support of the Nixon administration's Indochina Policy. The work consisted of a wall hanging, two plexiglass ballot boxes along with blank ballots, and a counter. On the wall hanging read the survey question (pictured below) and instructions for MoMA visitors to cast their ballots. The strength of *MoMA Poll* was the use of the respective museum's exhibition space as a platform to implicate both MoMA and MoMA's visitors (the clear ballot boxes allowing for public disclosure of one's vote) in their complacent support of Governor Nelson.

In theory, the benefit of making art that is critical of an institution and displaying it within the context of its critique is the possibility of holding institutions accountable for their involvement in political agendas and encouraging reflection and change. However, this is often not the reality. In the case of *MoMA Poll*, true progress would have

17 Tate. "Institutional Critique – Art Term." Tate. Accessed April 15, 2019. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/institutional-critique.

18 Haacke, Hans. *MoMA Poll*. 1970. MoMA.
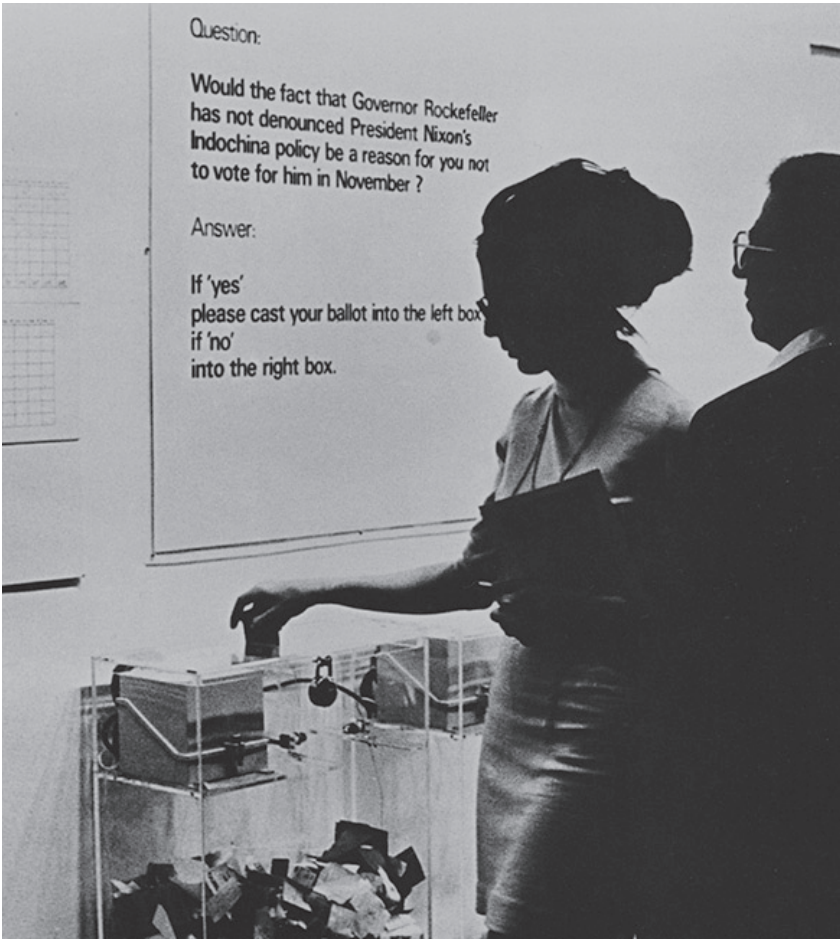
Figure 12: MoMA Poll *(1970) by Hans Haacke*

entailed MoMA removing the Rockefellers from the board and refusing to accept their monetary contributions. Instead, MoMA did little more than tolerate Haacke's work. In Haacke's own words:

> David Rockefeller [the brother of Nelson and chairman of the exhibition Haacke was in] was not amused. Word has it that an emissary of his arrived at the Museum the next day to demand the removal of the poll. However, John Hightower, who had just been appointed director of the Museum, did not follow orders. He lasted in his job less than

two years.[19]

Haacke's work had no lasting effect on MoMA; the Rockefellers were still heavily involved and the director of the museum (an advocate of the work) lost his job. For my own work, I employed a similar tactic to that of *MoMA Poll*, situating *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* within the sites of their critiques, respectively the Undergraduate Library and Stamps Gallery. However, wanting to engage with the collections (and institutions) on a deeper level I looked to Fred Wilson's approach to institutional critique for inspiration.

Wilson's institutional interventions share similarities with Morales' framework of "curandera historian" in that they reveal the disenfranchised voices often left out of the archive. In his 1992 exhibition *Mining the Museum: An Installation* [fig. 13] at the Maryland Historical Society, Wilson re-curated the museum's existing collection in new and unusual ways that highlighted historical narratives often forgotten or kept in the shadows.[20] For instance, in one part of the installation, Wilson placed large cigar-store statues of Native Americans facing the walls, their backs to the viewer. The statues appeared to be "gazing" at paintings of idyllic landscapes, maps, and portraits of Native American Royalty. By curating these artifacts to disrupt, rather than enable, a colonial gaze, Wilson reveals The United States' schizophrenic relationship with Native Americans, simultaneously based in fetishization and extermination.

With *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, Fred Wilson engaged directly with the inner workings of the archive and used an "outsider" perspective to challenge and transform the singular narrative

19 Tate. "Lessons Learned: Landmark Exhibitions Issue – Tate Papers." Tate. Accessed April 24, 2019. https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-pa-pers/12/lessons-learned.
20 Wilson, Fred. *Mining the Museum: An Installation*. 1992. Maryland Historical Society.

Figure 13: Mining the Museum: An Installation *(1992) by Fred Wilson*

conventions of the museum. Similar to Wilson, I collaborated directly with the institutions I was critiquing to produce two projects that maintained a critical perspective while while also allowing room for the institutions to take a direct part (and responsibility) in healing their outdated practices.

A final example of institutional critique that helps to contextualize my practice is *THEJORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION* [fig. 14], also known as *STUDYCOLLECTION*, by Jorge Lucero.[21] As faculty in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Lucero's *STUDYCOLLECTION* is an archive of texts and ephemera he has amassed and exhibits within his own office. Critical of the notion of the "academic collection", *STUDYCOLLECTION* takes the practices and expectations of a collegiate library (such as public accessibility, ability to lend texts, the discretion of a singular librarian, and public programming) to a playful extreme. Whereas a university library, such as the Duderstadt, may operate twenty-four-hour days, *STUDYCOLLECTION* has very limited public hours: "The *STUDYCOLLECTION* is open to the public during the winter months (approximately mid-November to early March), but only while school is in session. You can visit the *STUDYCOLLECTION* during its singular hour of operation, Mondays from 4 to 5pm."

Additionally, a lending protocol is completely absent from *STUDYCOLLECTION*, as well as any public programing, to which the website nonchalantly states: "...the mission of the *STUDYCOLLECTION* is not necessarily to be consumed en masse or to provide purposeful entertainment of any sort. The staff of the *STUDYCOLLECTION* is perfectly at ease with nothing (or the appearance of nothing) happening during the open times of the *STUDYCOLLECTION*."

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21 Lucero, Jorge. *THEJORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION*. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Figure 14: THEJORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION *by Jorge Lucero*

By operating the collection with this level of absurdity, Lucero explores what he calls "institutional nearness". Although he uses the term "institutional nearness" on the official *STUDYCOLLECTION* poster [fig. 15], Lucero does not give a definition of the term itself. I interpret the term to mean an experience of simultaneously belonging to and existing outside an institution. *STUDYCOLLECTION* exists within the institution in that it is physically located on the university campus and employs logic of the academic library. It falls outside of the institution in that it does not operate exactly like a university collection. By existing in this liminal third space, the *STUDYCOLLECTION* calls into question the practices of the academic library that we take for granted, such as long hours of operation and public programming. I explored institutional nearness within my own practice. *The Latinx Library*, for example, occupied the same space of Shapiro Library; however, its collaborative essence, DIY collection, public display, and lax lending system existed outside of the institutional library calling into question the authority of the university library.

Figure 15: STUDYCOLLECTION *poster*

III. Speculative Institutional Critique within Chicanx Art

In his essay, "The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions," William Calvo-Quirós introduces the concept of Chican@ Speculative Productions (CSPs) and details its importance in the pursuit of social change.[22] "Chican@ Speculative Production" is a form of institutional critique that draws upon a Latinx speculative aeshetic. Calvo-Quirós defines CSPs as "...intentional productions that utilize the tools of the imaginary and the fantastic to move the viewer toward a new and different world and new ways to be alive outside the everyday oppressive limitations of the 'real'."[23] He further describes the goal of CSPs as the proposal of "...a new world that heals the effects of violence and simultaneously creates a space where the self is defined outside subjugation: an 'alter-Native' world to the one dominated by greed and racial exploration."[24]

Calvo-Quiros cites *Spray Paint LACMA* (1972)[25] [fig. 16], by the Chicano art collective ASCO, as an exemplary CSP.[26] The project responded to curatorial practices at LACMA that discriminated against Latinx creators. After being refused the opportunity to show in the museum on the false claim that Mexican art could only be considered "folk art", ASCO tagged each of their members' names on the entrance of

22 Calvo-Quirós, William A. . "The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions." In *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 155-70. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

23 Ibid., 160.

24 Ibid., 163.

25 ASCO. *Spray Paint LACMA*. 1972. LACMA.

26 Calvo-Quirós, William A. . "The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions." In *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 162. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

Figure 16: Spray Paint LACMA *(1972) by ASCO*

LACMA, claiming the action as the "first chicano show at LACMA."
A conceptual work, *Spray Paint LACMA* drew from graffiti and gang
aesthetics (often unfairly used to stereotype Latinx communities) to
speculatively "lay claim" to the museum, challenging the exclusivity
of the space while simultaneously challenging LACMA's pejorative
attitude towards Latinx artists.

Another example of a CSP is *AMBOS Project* (Art Made Between
Opposite Sides) by Tanya Aguiñiga.[27] *AMBOS* (which means "together"
in Spanish) invites artists and communities in Mexico and the United
States to co-create works that subvert and reimagine relationships
with the border. *AMBOS* hosted the nineteen-minute performance

27 Tanya Aguiñiga. *AMBOS Project*. 2016. U.S. / Mexico Border.

Figure 17: Tensión (2017) by Tanya Aguiñiga and Jackie Amézquita

Tensión (2017) [fig. 17] by Tanya Aguiñiga and Jackie Amézquita.[28] During the performance, the two artists sat on opposite sides of the border fence, each using her body to anchor one half of a backstrap loom. In order to create a finished textile, the artists had to work cooperatively, despite the impeding fence, the constant surveillance of the Border Patrol, and the harsh conditions of the climate. Through this performative action, like many of the projects created through *AMBOS*, the artists momentarily created and inhabited a new, healed world "... outside the everyday oppressive limitations of..."[29] the border.

The Latinx Library and *Estampa Cartonera* embody the Chican@ Speculative Productions ethos by subverting exclusionary collections and proposing new methods of record-keeping. In both projects, the cartonera "readers" symbolize the aesthetic manifestation of transformative and emancipatory rejection of preexisting practices. By inviting participants to work together to deliberately break the rules of scholarship that privilege the written word, dismiss certain sources, and emphasize intellectual competition, this work proposed and displayed a vision for the "healed" archive in opposition to the dominant standard.

28 Aguiñiga, Tanya and Jackie Amézquita. *Tensión*. 2017. Douglas, Arizona, US, and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico.

29 Calvo-Quirós, William A. . "The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions." In *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 163. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

IV. Collective Collection-Making, a Political Action

Laura Fried, in her article "Some Alternatives to Institutional Critique" for Art21, articulates how in "its pursuit of criticality...[institutional critique] was largely quashed by its failure to produce more than merely revelatory gestures."[30] In other words, the great failing of institutional critique (even within the context of Chican@ Speculative Productions) was its inability to mobilize critique into change. There exists the need to combine the conceptual and aesthetic framework of institutional critique with socially engaged and collaborative art-making practices to empower and yield quantifiable institutional change. Rather than relying on a select number of voices to determine inclusion, representation at institutions should be built through a generative, collective approach that considers multiple perspectives reflecting the interests and voices of the community.

Within my own practice, I experimented with combining traditional institutional critique methods with collectivized action, a common practice throughout Latinx and indigenous cultures. I looked to three particular community-based projects exemplifying the ideals of community co-creation. Although none of these projects would be considered as institutional critique (according to the Tate's definition) because they respond to broader social issues, rather than narrowly commenting on any particular institution, they provide context to understand what I call collective collection-making, a method I used within my own projects. I understand collective collection-making as a process of collaboratively creating a collection within a community.

Las Hormigas Bordadoras de Tanivet from Oaxaca, Mexico is a

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30 Fried, Laura. "Some Alternatives to Institutional Critique." Art21 Magazine. April 30, 2010. http://magazine.art21.org/2010/04/30/some-alternatives-to-in-stitutional-critique-2/#.XMY6iJNKgWo.

collective of women artisans who embroider haunting and profound vignettes of the realities of immigration in their lives [fig. 18].[31] Over the past twenty or so years, most of the men of Tanivet have left to travel north to the United States, placing the complete financial burden on the women who remain in the town. While the main source of income for the community has traditionally been the production of corn, in the wake of immigration, the women have looked to creative processes/ skills/crafts for economic support.

Traditional knowledge of craft production is highly prized in Oaxaca

31 Conniff, Ruth. "Transforming the Pain of Migration into Art." Progressive.org. April 01, 2018. https://progressive.org/magazine/transforming-the-pain-of-mi-gration-into-art/.

Figure 18: Las Hormigas Bordadoras de Tanivet

and is often an excellent means of financial support. However, artisanal knowledge is deeply guarded, and, thus, limited to families and communities. Approximately eight years ago, with the guidance of artist Marietta Bernstorff, the women of Tanivet collectivized and began embroidering their stories [fig. 19]. The pueblo of Tanivet had no artisanal or skill-based legacy, thus Las Hormigas Bordadoras had to teach themselves. Bernstorff catalyzed the formation of the collective, teaching Las Hormigas Bordadoras the basics of embroidery and encouraging their creative exploration. Now, as the collective has gained notoriety, international acclaim, and financial stability, Bernstorff plays more of a backseat role, helping the collective source materials and navigate opportunities.

The collective Eloísa Cartonera challenges status-quo collection practices by radically changing the way books are published, distributed, and acquired. Eloísa Cartonera began in 2003 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and is credited as being the birthplace of the Cartonera publishing form [fig. 20].[32] The initial collective of artists and

32 Eloísa Cartonera. http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar/

Figure 19: Examples of Las Hormigas' work

Figure 20: The exterior of Eloísa Cartonera

writers, led by Washington Curcuto, came together with the intention of creating a press that removed barriers to publishing, making the distribution of their work more accessible. During this time, Argentina was in the midst of a major economic crisis that left people jobless and desperate for money. As a result, people (called cartoneros) began salvaging cardboard and reselling it. Eloísa Cartonera, aware of this street economy, saw an opportunity to financially support the cartoneros by providing a stable demand for the cardboard to be used for the covers of their books, aptly named *cartoneras* [fig. 21].

The decision to use cardboard for the covers, along with other cheap supplies, meant that the cartoneras could be sold for a fraction of what a "traditional book" would cost; Eloísa can sell books for less than $1 USD. This, in turn, makes literary texts accessible to those communities

who had seen books as luxuries. Cartoneras are beautiful works of
art with painted covers showing the unique hand of its creator, filled
with poetry, essays, and stories articulating ideas and thoughts often
distributed only to the educated middle-class. By making these works
more affordable and available, Eloísa Cartonera is revolutionizing
the way in which knowledge and information is shared within under-
resourced communities who may not have access to books or the
Internet. This has proven to be such a success that, in the sixteen years
since its founding, hundreds of cartonera presses (operated by different
collectives of artists and writers) have opened throughout South,
Central, and North America.

A final project that helps contextualize my practice is Marisa Moran
Jahn's *The Bibliobandido* [fig. 22].[33] During a trip to El Pital, Honduras,
Jahn (a Latina artist from the United States) took interest in the
community's beloved library. Tiny, by all accounts, Jahn saw an
opportunity to collectively grow the library while making it more

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33 Morán Jahn, Marisa. *The Bibliobandido*. 2010. Honduras.

Figure 21: Examples of cartoneras published by Eloísa Cartonera

Figure 22: The Bibliobandido *(2010) by Marisa Morán Jahn*

Figure 23: the Bibliobandido taking a story

reflective of the town. Instead of developing it through traditional top-down means where Jahn might run the risk of determining which literature would be a valid addition to the library, she put the power of collection-making directly in the hands of the community.

As a way to excite and motivate people into collective action, Jahn created the whimsical character of the Bibliobandido, a masked bandit who rides a horse and eats stories [fig. 23]. In order to satiate the appetite of this character, children and their parents rally around making stories for him to eat. Public events organized by Jahn and her community collaborators create space and time for community members to craft the stories they will "feed" to the Bibliobandido. The duration of workshops vary, lasting anywhere from only a couple hours to a couple of months. Marking the end of a community workshop, the masked bandit will appear, performing his task of collecting the books for his consumption. Playing into Latin American traditions of mythic figures (such as La Llorona, La Malinche, and La Virgen de Guadalupe, etc.), Jahn created a replicable way of collective collection-making that, like the cartonera press, has expanded in unexpected ways to various towns and communities within Latin America and the United States.

Each of these three projects discovered ways to respond to particular lacks—lack of sustainable income options, lack of publishing opportunities, lack of collected information—by bringing the community together to create the resources they need. Inspired by the way these artists and communities worked together, I brought this generative approach directly into the spaces I was critiquing. I found that combining the aeshetics of institutional critique with the method of collective collection-making offered a way to bring awareness around issues and bring the different sides of the conflict (Latinx community and library, for instance) together to kickstart the slow archival healing process.

METHODOLOGIES

In the previous section, I contextualized my practice as existing at the
intersection of institutional critique and social practice. In this section,
I will articulate the methods I used to create *The Latinx Library* and
will then explain how I adapted these methods to create *Estampa
Cartonera*.

I. Latina Focus Group

As a Latina student at the University of Michigan, I was constantly reminded of my "otherness" on campus: the anti-Latinx/pro-Trump language tagged on The Rock that welcomed my start at the University of Michigan, a sombrero-wearing cactus holding a margarita in the snow painted on the window of Isalita, the way people would whisper the word "Mexican" as if it were a slur. I found solace and support through class discussions in my Latinx Studies courses, office-hours with Latinx faculty, and conversations with Latinx peers who described often feeling out of place on campus. In September 2018, compelled to dig deeper into this shared experience, I held a focus group.

I brought together five Latinx University of Michigan students who fit a demographic similar to my own: Mexican-American, mid-twenties, originally from towns with large Mexican communities. During the course of the two-hour event, I asked the group about their experiences at the University of Michigan beginning with broad questions allowing participants to describe how they understood their Latinx identities prior to attending the university. Most participants felt that they had never doubted the importance of being Latina because of their upbringings in strong Mexican-American communities. Since arriving at the University of Michigan, many described encountering situations filled with micro- and macro-aggressions they were unprepared to handle. Others felt they had to assume the role of cultural attaché, teaching unaware individuals about Mexican-American culture. Unanimously, participants expressed feeling guarded on campus.

The idea of belonging, a rather nebulous term, was a running theme throughout the focus group. During our conversation, these women expressed the desire to feel a sense of belonging on campus. In other words, each of the women wanted the university to recognize the importance of their Latinx cultural identities and acknowledge the biases that exist against the Latinx community.

II. Ethnographic Research

Navigating the Library System

Following the focus group, I began to consider how the academic library was (or wasn't) a site of belonging. The library system represents a seemingly never-ending collection of knowledge, a collection with boundless potential. Students, faculty, and researchers from around the world have access to the hundreds of thousands of books and artifacts held within this massive collection to make discoveries, refine their arguments, and synthesize new knowledge.

As an MFA student within a top tier research institution, I spent a lot of time in the university's libraries but had little knowledge of their inner workings. I employed ethnographic research as a model (borrowing from the fields of anthropology and sociology) in order to navigate the library system. This was in an effort to understand how this system promotes or in some cases prevents belonging among its users. Ethnographic research, according to the leading sociologist Craig J. Calhoun, is "[t]he study of the culture and social organization of a particular group or community..."[34] It is a research methodology that uses a number of different research methods, including participant observation and interviews.

I observed that the University of Michigan library system is constantly transforming their buildings to adapt to contemporary needs. Within the walls of Hatcher Graduate, Shapiro Undergraduate, and the Duderstadt Libraries, one can find elaborate tech resources and maker-spaces, huge computer labs, 3D printers, and video editing booths. These libraries are products of the 21st century. Furthermore, I observed that the university library space is a social space as well as an academic one; cafés are installed throughout the libraries and,

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34 "Research Methodologies for the Creative Arts & Humanities: Ethnographic Research." LibGuides. https://ecu.au.libguides.com/c.php?g=410634&p=2798893.

on occasion, some of the larger ones are transformed into conference centers.

While the library space has transformed to facilitate the needs of a changing world, the collection practices have remained inert, evidenced by the absence of a Latinx Studies collection. After making this discovery I began asking *what would happen if a Latinx Studies collection existed? What would it look like? Would it bolster belonging on campus for Latinx?* Looking to Las Hormigas Bordadoras de Tanivet and Bibliobandido as inspiration, my first conceptualizations of *The Latinx Library* formed; I started to imagine bringing together the Latinx community to co-create our own Latinx Studies collection of cartonera "readers", which would be publicly displayed in one of the lobbies of a campus library.

I met with a number of University of Michigan librarians to learn why no Latinx Studies collection exists in the UM Library system and to discuss my initial ideas for *The Latinx Library*. Key in this process were my meetings with: Jamie Vander Broek, Art & Design Librarian; Sheila Garcia, a Resident Librarian who had worked on Latinx community-art projects within the library (such as a community Día de Muertos altar and a Latinx poetry showcase); and Edras Rodriguez-Torres, a Resident Librarian within International Studies who is an expert on cartoneras.

Rodriguez-Torres described how collections within the library system mirror the departments on campus; Latino Studies texts are collected within the Multicultural Collection because the Latino Studies department is "collected" under American Cultures. Only one budget is given to the Multicultural Collection (just as one budget is given to American Cultures) by the University and one librarian uses that budget to acquire texts pertinent to the different subsections of the collections. Prior to these meetings, I saw the University of Michigan Library as an institution free to make decisions regarding its collections. However, this conversation with Edras Rodriguez-Torres (and others that I had with Jamie Vander Broek and Sheila Garcia) illuminated the

fact that the library is beholden to larger collection practices imposed by the University of Michigan. Many librarians are critical of this and are actively working to make their collections inclusive for the wider campus communities.

Throughout the entirety of *The Latinx Library*, I worked closely with Jamie Vander Broek, Sheila Garcia, and Edras Rodriguez-Torres. They offered me guidance when navigating the library system and introduced me to the critical librarianship movement. Although my work was critical of the library as an institution, the librarians that I worked and interacted with quickly became invaluable collaborators. They were instrumental in securing space for the workshops and the physical cart, marketing the project, and generously offered their time and expertise to *The Latinx Library*. By collaborating, not only with the Latinx community but also with librarians within the institution being critiqued (similar to the way Fred Wilson collaborated with the Maryland Historical Society for *Mining the Museum*), the possibility for meaningful change increased. This is because both sides had the opportunity to engage with the other, strengthening their relationship for future possibilities.

Navigating Stamps Public Programming

When conceptualizing *Estampa Cartonera*, I navigated the Stamps School of Art and Design with a similar ethnographic approach that I utilized when working with University of Michigan Library Library.

I discussed the disparity in Latina representation in Stamps programming with many administrators and faculty at Stamps, prior, during, and after the exhibition. Since her appointment as Director of Stamps Gallery two years ago, Srimoyee Mitra has focused on making Stamps exhibitions as inclusive as possible by curating a number of solo and group exhibitions that center marginalized perspectives. She expressed interest in learning more about the Latinx

campus community so that she could better support them in future programming.

Conversations like these indicated that the Stamps Community was listening and interested in making programming more inclusive. I began to see *Estampa Cartonera*'s cartonera-making as an educational intervention rather than a celebratory protest (as it was used in *The Latinx Library*).

III. Cartoneras

Cartoneras are kept within multiple collections in the University of Michigan Libraries and are predominantly purchased by Jamie Vander Broek and Edras Rodriguez-Torres. The majority of cartoneras are held within the Artists' Books Collection (managed by Jamie Vander Broek). Fewer cartoneras are kept within Special Collections' Artists' Books Collection, and a handful of cartoneras exist within the Special Collections' Labadie Collection. Each collection has a different lens of interest: the Artists' Book Collection frames the cartoneras as works of art, while the Special Collections' Artists' Books Collection holds "… [artist] books with a literary focus"[35], and the Labadie Collection documents "the history of social protest movements and marginalized political communities from the 19th century to the present."[36]

I consulted the cartoneras held within Jamie Vander Broek's Artists Books Collection to understand how they were made. Painted with dissonant colors and unconventional scripts [fig. 24], the cartoneras break many rules of publishing and yet these transgressions make their presence much more compelling and urgent. Some have intricate

35 "Collection Area: Artists Books." University of Michigan Library. https://www.lib.umich.edu/mlibrary-collections/collection-area-artists-books
36 "Joseph A. Labadie Collection." University of Michigan Library. https://www.lib.umich.edu/labadie-collection.

calligraphy [fig. 25], collaged fútbol players [fig. 26], and even a drawn-on mustache [fig. 27]. They manage to simultaneously celebrate and undermine what a book should be. The cartoneras have many similarities to the Rasquache aesthetic sensibility. Rasquache, as considered by Arizona State University's Hispanic Research Center:

> ...relates to an attitude that is lower class, impoverished, slapdash and shallow...However, as the case of several other terms and concepts (most notably the term and concept Chicano itself, which traditionally had a negative sense), the Chicano movement has turned the traditional notion of rasquache on its head. This important Chicano cultural sensibility has been particularly used to address, by means of a stance of resistance that is humorous and ironic rather than confrontational or hard-edged, the harrassments of external authorities such as the police, the immigration service, government officials, social services bureaucrats, and others.[37]

The rasquache qualities of each book—their rough texture, the chalkiness of the paint, and the uneven bends of the cardboard—aesthetically challenges the prestige of a particular type of knowledge sharing distributed through the machine-bound book, thus expanding an individual's (or institutions) concept of a "valid" source of knowledge.

When planning *The Latinx Library*, my intention was to facilitate a creative, community-based action that would not be intimidating to workshop-goers, especially for those who experience anxiety in creative situations. I wanted Latinx community members to feel confident in accessing their creative voices to collaboratively stake claim within the library. I settled on cartonera-making as the creative

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37 "Rasquache." Hispanic Research Center, Arizona State University. http://mati.eas.asu.edu/chicanarte/unit2/rasquache.html.
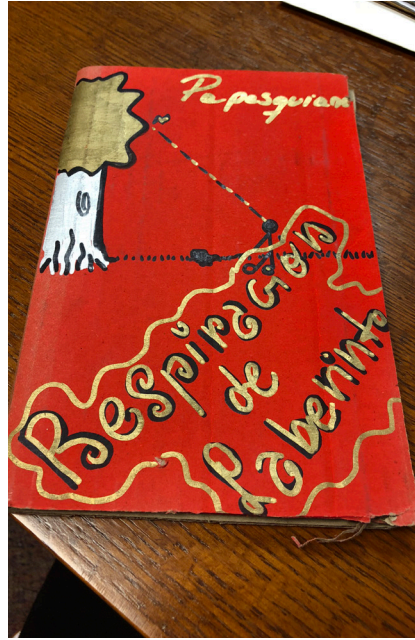
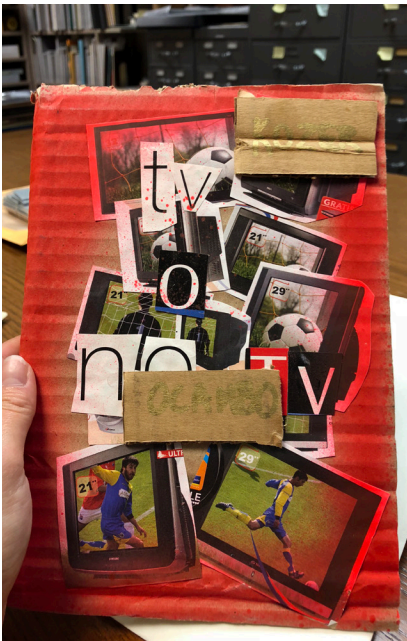*Figure 24*

Figure 25

Figure 26

Figure 27

Figure 28: The first cartoneras I made

action, as cartoneras are accessible and dynamic; there is no "right" or "wrong" way to make a cartonera [fig. 28]. I imagined participants exploring and sharing Latinx-related topics important to them by building a cartonera authentic to their perspective.

IV. Applying Collective Collection-making as Institutional Critique

The Latinx Library expanded upon the trajectory of Institutional Critique by employing collective collection-making in a number of ways to counter the institutionalized conventions of University of Michigan libraries. I use the term collective collection-making to mean: the creation of a collection through a nonhierarchical collaborative process amongst members of a community.

Crowdsourcing Materials

Crowdsourcing Latinx texts to be curated within Latinx "readers" was an alternative to "traditional" methods of generating sources within the library in which the power of determining collectable materials is dictated by either a solitary librarian or a small committee. To make the process as inclusive as possible, and to avoid becoming a potential arbiter, I amassed texts in a number of ways. The most successful methods included an online survey, word of mouth, class assignments, and social media campaigns. An interesting result of these different methods was that more images and media were submitted via the online survey, while word of mouth and social media campaigns gathered more literature and poetry. Class assignments were the most academic as submissions were often reflective of the course syllabi.

I continued to compile texts throughout the course of the project

and turned away no contributions. By the end, I collected nearly 200 different texts ranging from music videos and tattoo art, to peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters [fig. 29]. This diverse sampling of contributions, however, contained significantly few personal submissions, such as family recipes, original writing, family myths, etc. This may have been due to the intimate nature of these types of texts. A handful of participants did add blank pages directly into their cartoneras to use for personal writings. For example, several students from the course *Literature of the Undocumented* taught by Sigrid Cordell combined readings from their class with original essays, poems, and stories exploring their own relationships with the undocumented experience.
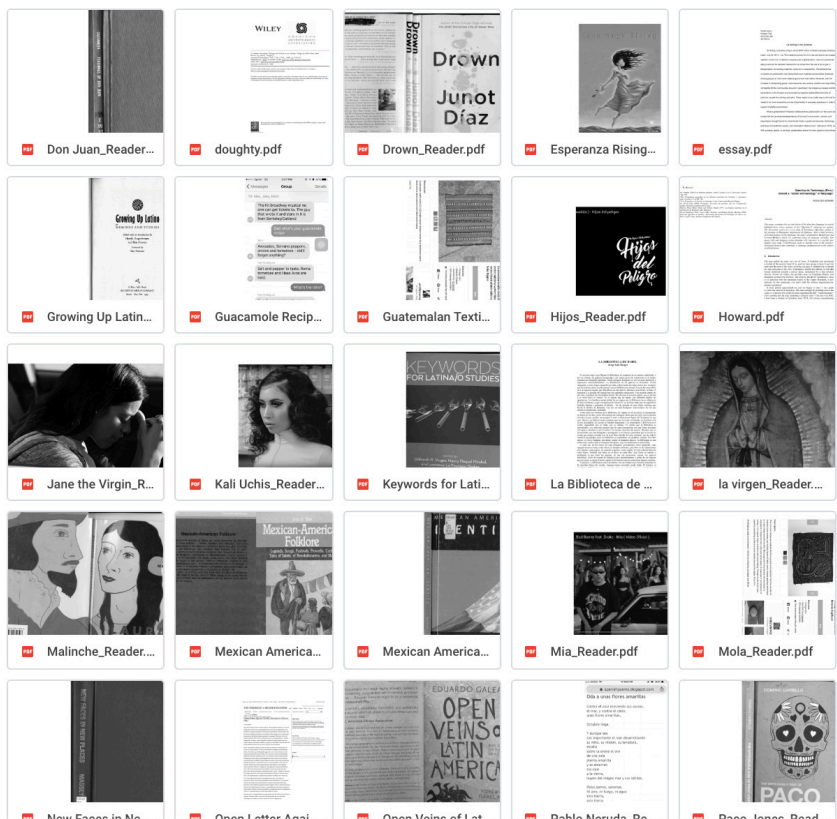

Figure 29: Sampling of contributions

Figure 30: 35+ person workshop with La Casa

Workshops & Community Programming

Over the course of five months, I held approximately seven cartonera-making workshops in a variety of contexts with a number of different collaborating groups. These groups can be divided into three basic types: student organizations, courses, and staff/faculty-led. Specific student organizations I held workshops with included La Casa[38] [fig. 30]

38 As Stated by La Casa: "La Casa strives to unite, empower, and holistically support members of the Latinx community at the University of Michigan." https://www.facebook.com/pg/lacasaumich/about/?ref=page_internal

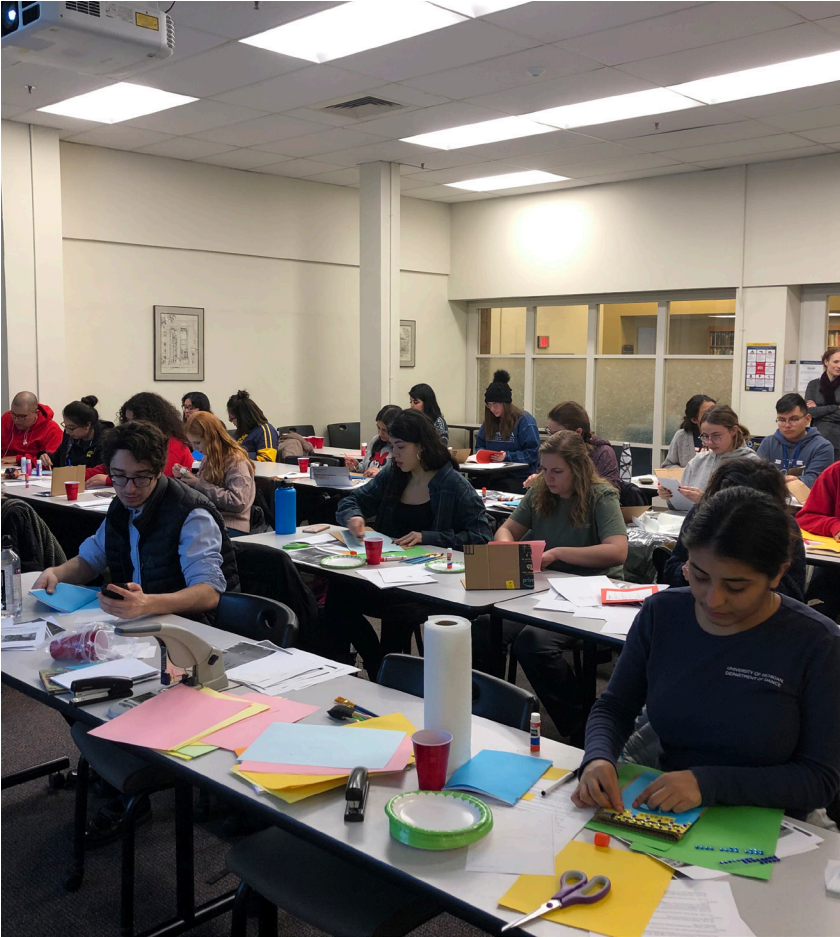*Figure 31: 9 person workshop with Latinidad Magazine*

Figure 32: 30+ person workshop with Literature of the Undocumented

and Latinidad Magazine[39] [fig. 31]. I also held workshops with students/
instructors from several courses on campus, including Literature of the
Undocumented [fig. 32] and *Indigenous Communities vs Globalization
in South America* [fig. 33]. Finally, I collaborated with staff/faculty,

39 As stated by Latinidad Magazine: "Latinidad Magazine is an online and print
magazine at the University of Michigan dedicated to showcase Latinx art and
writing to foster a more representative Latinx identity in the media." https://www.
facebook.com/pg/latinidadumich/about/?ref=page_internal

such as: a collaborative two-day workshop with En Nuestra Lengua[40], a University of Michigan faculty-led initiative to foster bilingualism in K-12 students [fig. 34]; a public conversation I organized with Anthropology faculty Ruth Behar about Cuban artist books similar to cartoneras; and a cartonera-making workshop for University of Michigan librarians.

Workshops averaged two hours in length. I usually began a workshop with an educational presentation about the cartonera as art/ book form. Afterward, I would briefly share the goal of *The Latinx Library* and explain the process for making cartoneras. Participants could select four to six texts from a table filled with printouts of crowdsourced materials.

Authors already canonized in Latinx and Latin American literature, such as Gloria Anzaldua, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Junot Diaz, etc. were popular selections for cartoneras. Participants found unexpected ways to combine these revered texts with more popular, less scholarly, selections (such as music videos). For instance, during the workshop with librarians, one librarian created a two-text cartonera titled "Shaki & Gabo: Columbian BFF's." The cartonera contained a chapter from Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *100 Years of Solitude* alongside Shakira's 2001 hit "Whenever Wherever." The reason he combined them? Simply because Shaki and Gabo had a friendship in real life. Juxtaposing these two works together gave new light to the texts, revealing a deeper relationship between their creators. One can't help but wonder if "Whenever Wherever" was influenced by *100 Years of Solitude*, or how Shakira may have influenced Marquez.

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40 En Nuestra Lengua's mission: "ENL's objectives are the development of literacy skills of students in order to understand, speak, read, and write in Spanish, and to build pride in the HIspanic community and rich Latino culture." http://www-personal.umich.edu/~tsatter/ENLEnglish/En%20Nuestra%20Lengua%20English/ABOUT_ENL.html

Figure 33: 10+ workshop with Indigenous Communities vs Globalization in South America

Figure 34: 10 person workshop with En Nuestra Lengua

I asked participants to consider common themes between the texts they selected. This moment of reflection afforded contributors inspiration for their covers. Once the texts were compiled, attendees stapled and glued the cartonera, then completed a worksheet. On the worksheet, participants briefly described their cartonera and wrote a table of contents of the texts they curated. Finally, they signed the worksheet and glued it inside the front cover.

Figures 35 and 36 demonstrate a completed cartonera created by Alejandra Gallegos-Ordaz, and titled "Los Tres Elementos" / "The Three Elements." Her description states "These are the three elements. Pain, ICE, Revolution. Change is inevitable." Using primary colors, Alejandra's cover alludes to the elemental, however her restricted use of three colors, behind her title, makes it clear that the elements she's referencing are not the four natural elements.

Inside, Alejandra combined several texts to create a narrative about the destruction that results from our inhumane immigration policy. She included graphic art, a chapter from "Book of Unknown Americans," a video clip about I.C.E., and ends the cartonera with a protest image [all images shown in figure 37], signaling hope for an equitable future for immigrants (documented and not) in the United States.

When planning and holding these workshops, I relied on the basic tenets of Participatory Action Research. Cathy MacDonald, in her article "Understanding Participatory Action Research: A Qualitative Research Methodology Option," defines Participatory Action Research as an "… educative process, an approach to social investigation, and an approach to take action to address a problem or to engage in sociopolitical action."[41] The core of Participatory Action Research is to directly involve participants in the planning and implementation of

41 MacDonald, Cathy. Understanding Participatory Action Research: A Qualitative Research Methodology Option. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*. 2012. Volume 13, Issue 2, Pages 35-50.

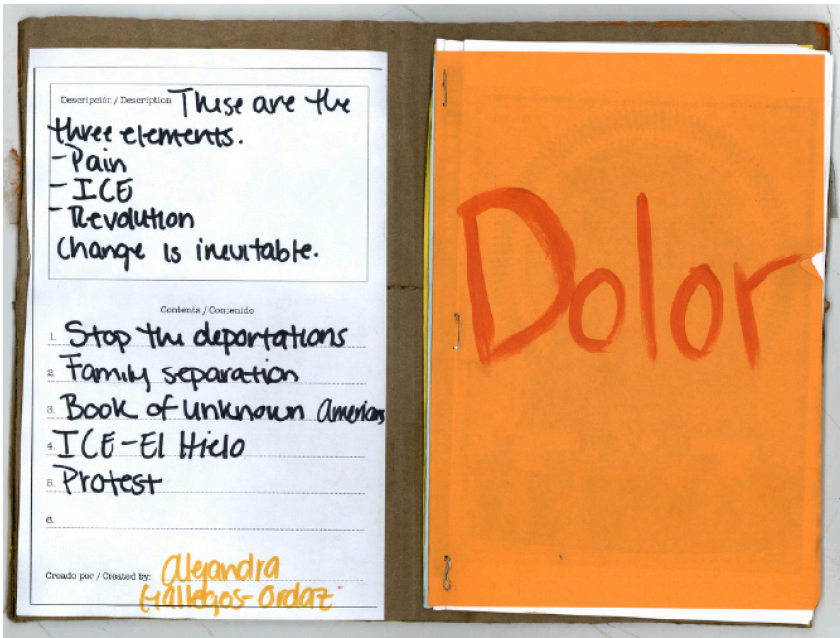*Figure 35: Cover of "Los Tres Elementos" by Alejandra Gallegos-Ordaz*

Figure 36: Inside cover of "Los Tres Elementos" by Alejandra Gallegos-Ordaz

Figure 37: Contents of "Los Tres Elementos" by Alejandra Gallegos-Ordaz

research and to work in an iterative way, incorporating their feedback. Participatory Action Research complimented collective collection-making well in that both processes are nonhierarchical and generative. For example, I involved the representatives of groups in planning how to tailor the workshop to fit their needs and interests. With Latinidad Magazine, for instance, I worked with the directors of the student organization to gather texts (previously collected and new) relating to art, identity, and sexuality (topics of the latest published issue of the digital publication).

Nearly unanimously, participants reported that the workshops were "fun." Beginning each workshop, I would introduce the project as rooted in political action and protest, activities not often considered enjoyable. I had not anticipated participants' expressions of delight in this form of activism. What this revealed was that creative and communal engaged political labor can circumvent divisiveness and friction as a response to institutional deficiency. Perhaps "fun" signaled more complex feelings of hope in working together, even in solidarity with institutions, for a better, more inclusive, future.

Aesthetics of Culture and Community

The last collective collection-making component of *The Latinx Library* was the exhibition of the collection Latinx readers in the lobby of Shapiro Library. From the beginning, I knew that I wanted to the collection to be presented on a mobile cart, alluding to the tradition of Latin American street vendors. Borrowing a cart made by Stamps Professor Nick Tobier, I staged my first iteration with examples of my cartonera readers [fig. 38].

I realized that the cartoneras did not fit well on this particular cart. Like magazine covers, the covers of cartoneras compellingly use color, design, and visual display of content to entice the viewer. On this particular cart, these graphics were hidden or obscured. Thus, I designed a new cart that highlighted each of the cartonera covers in the collection and intended to stand distinct from its surroundings in the Shapiro Undergraduate library.

The cart was approximately 2.5 ft. wide x 5ft. long, and x 4ft. 10in. tall and made out of plywood. The body of the cart was comprised of five stacked boxes that maximize the number of cartonera covers that can be visible at any given time [fig. 39]. Starting from the base, each box was incrementally smaller than the previous, alluding to mesoamerican pyramids. Furthermore, keeping in mind that the display would be a mobile cart, I added a wire component to each of these boxes to keep the cartoneras in place [Fig. 40].

I painted each box (except for the base, which I painted white) a different saturated color marigold, magenta, lime green, and quetzal blue drawing inspiration from analogous colors to those often used on Latin American flags (yellow, red, green, blue). As a final detail, I stenciled the words "Biblioteca", "Latinx", and "Library" along three sides of the base in magenta [fig.41]. When deciding how to paint the cart, I considered how color has historically been used to stereotype and dismiss Latinx cultural productions and consulted another essay

Figure 38: Initial mock up of The Latinx Library cart

Figure 39: Final cart as a work in progress

Figure 40: Wire system to keep cartoneras in place

by William Calvo-Quirós, titled "The Politics of Color (Re)significations: Chromophobia, Chromo-Eugenics, and the Epistemologies of Taste."[42] In this essay, Calvo-Quirós argues that "...[t]he aesthetics of taste and color theory are intrinsically tied to the politics of skin color, race, and class, as well as assumptions about civility and intelligence."[43] Calvo-Quirós states that the resignification of color is the key for reclaiming color and breaking the way it has been used as a tool of oppression.[44] Colors that can be described as bold, bright, and vivid, just like the ones I selected for the painting of *The Latinx Library*, are often used to pigeonhole Latin American and Latinx culture as spicey, loud, and exotic. These types of colors are also used to dismiss Latin American and Latinx cultural productions and art as naive, craft and emotive.

I intentionally used these colors to subvert these prejudices, recontextualizing the scheme within an academic space. Within Shapiro Undergraduate Library, and in relationship with the collection of cartonera readers, the colors become complicated. The colors can be understood as a signal of other, as they contradict the expected aesthetics of academic libraries. At the same time, however, the colors (in proximity to the library and the cartonera readers) speak a language of collection maintenance, implying alternative methods of information cataloging (i.e. color-coding). This demonstrates a level of belonging within the space. As a result, the colors in this context can no longer be used to pejoratively define a group of people, instead one must consider the colors in conversation knowledge production, valuation, and preservation.

The ever-growing, community-made collection of over sixty Latinx "readers" displayed on this vivid custom-built cart, publicly celebrated

42 Calvo-Quirós, William A.. *The Politics of Color (Re)significations: Chromopho-bia, Chromo-Eugenics, and the Epistemologies of Taste*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013. 76-113.

43 Ibid., 103.

44 Ibid., 104.

Figure 41: The final cart

Latinx culture and scholarship in the lobby of Shapiro Library. Visitors to Shapiro (including the Latinx community and others) could interact with and borrow the books through an honors-based lending system, allowing for a more fluid and less controlled with texts uncommon within the context of university libraries.

Collective Collection-making as Institutional Critique in Estampa Cartonera

During the run of *Estampa Cartonera*, gallery-goers were invited to make their own cartonera "readers" of Latina artists Stamps could invite to future programming. I also held two cartonera-making workshops within *Estampa Cartonera* just for the Stamps community. Whereas *The Latinx Library* workshops engaged the Latinx community in a creative form of collective political action, the *Estampa Cartonera* workshops were intended to educate the Stamps community about the underrepresentation of Latina artists in its public programming. My goal for engaging the Stamps community in a similar collective collection-making action was to jumpstart the process of healing their programming archive, eventually leading to more Latina representation in the future.

Because of this distinction between the audiences, I altered the first part of the cartonera-making process. I was aware that within the Stamps Gallery, providing a plethora of Latinx texts for participants to make their cartoneras from would privilege the Latinx community, making the installation considerably less accessible to non-Latinx. This would ultimately weaken my goal of using collective collection-making as an educational method.

In order to mitigate issues of accessibility, I chose to simplify and formalize the texts participants would use to make their own cartoneras. I did this by collecting the names, bios, and images of the 200+ Latina artists and formatting this information into a one-page summary printed on both sides. For each artist, I turned their one-page summary into a repeating 40-page cartonera. Each of these cartonera covers was designed, either by me or a volunteer, to convey aspects of the artist and their work in an intriguing and captivating way.

These decisions made me more of an arbiter than I had previously been throughout *The Latinx Library*. I did my best to minimize my singular

Figure 42: Workshop participant tearing out pages for her own cartonera

authority, as not to replicate the problem I was trying to remedy. I used similar tactics from *The Latinx Library* to crowdsource artists. I did this through word of mouth, social media posts, and mining past exhibition records.

Furthermore, bios that I selected tended to be more formal and career-centric and it wasn't until during a critique of the work that I noticed that I had replicated a cv-based form of institutional validation that "proved" the importance of the artists. Looking forward, if I were to recreate this process in the future, I would take more time to consider what constitutes an artist's biography. Does it need to be career-centric, as is current convention, or could it, as Professor Rebekah Modrak suggested to me during that critique, simply be a retelling of the types of plants the artist likes to plant in their garden? Would it be possible to just show the work of each artist, sans words?

Within the installation, participants were invited to interact with this collection of pre-made cartoneras by tearing out the one-pagers [fig. 42] to be used within the construction of their own cartoneras [fig. 43]. The action of tearing the pages out of the books felt taboo for many participants—this isn't what you're supposed to do with books—but after a few moments of perusing the collection and seeing evidence of pages being torn out, they would eventually warm up to this subversive and transgressive act. Eventually, the act of tearing pages out of the was seen as visceral and liberating by both Latinx and non-Latinx participants.

Figure 43: 7+ person workshop in Estampa Cartonera

Figures 44 and 45 show an example of a cartonera made by Gabi Pascual during the run of *Estampa Cartonera*. Her cartonera does not include any written text on the cover. Instead, Gaby solely used paint and collage to convey the theme of her cartonera, which she articulates as the idea of Melting and Mixing. The marbling effect she achieved with the paint speaks to the idea of melting, whereas the collaged pieces of cardboard on the top left and bottom right corners bring to mind ideas of remixing and combining.

Inside [fig. 44], Gabi used four pages from Adriana Varejaõ's reader, titled "to melt | to mix" between a page from the Manuela Ribadeneira cartonera, the Sara Jimenez & Kaitlynn Redell cartonera, and the beatriz gonzalez cartonera, each emphasizing the theme of melting and mixing. Gabi also painted directly onto the pages of her cartonera, as demonstrated on the first page of the contents.
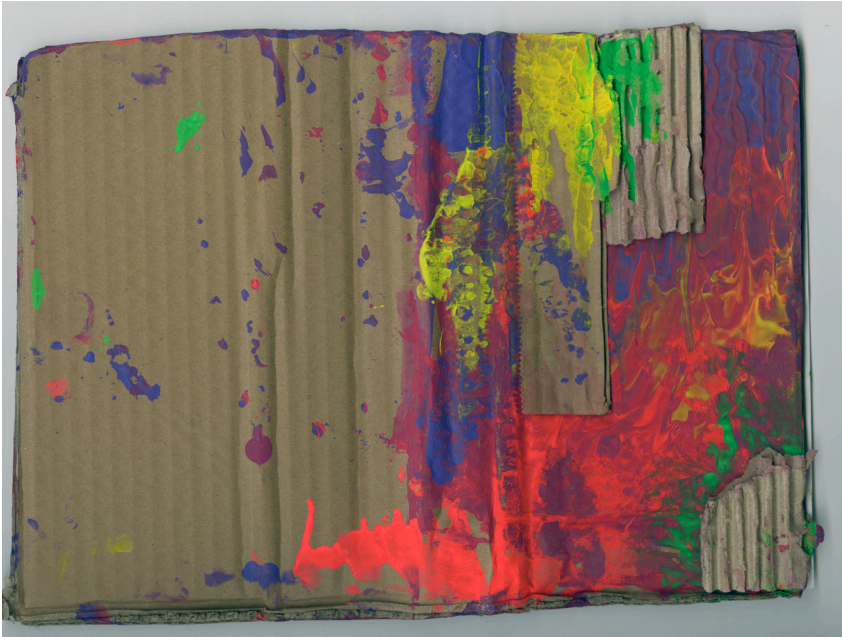
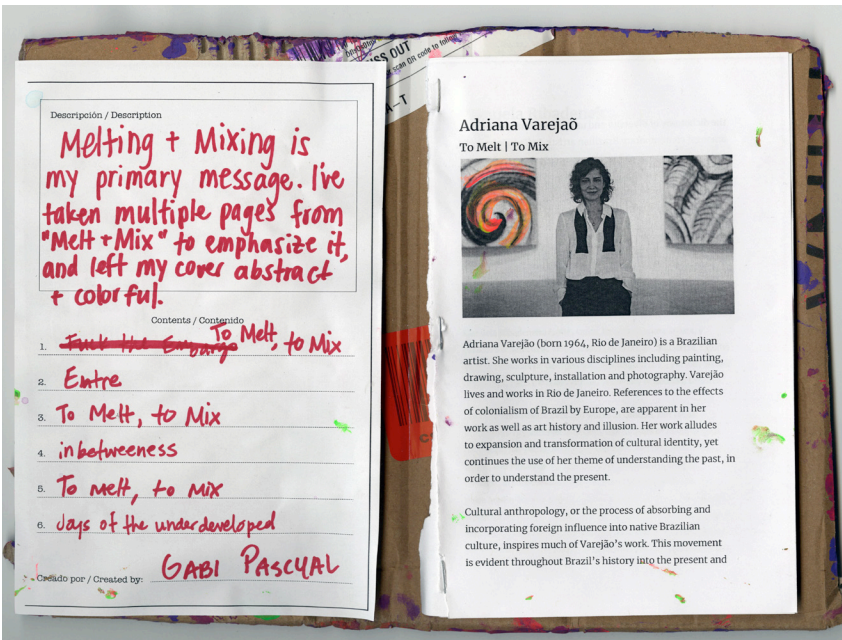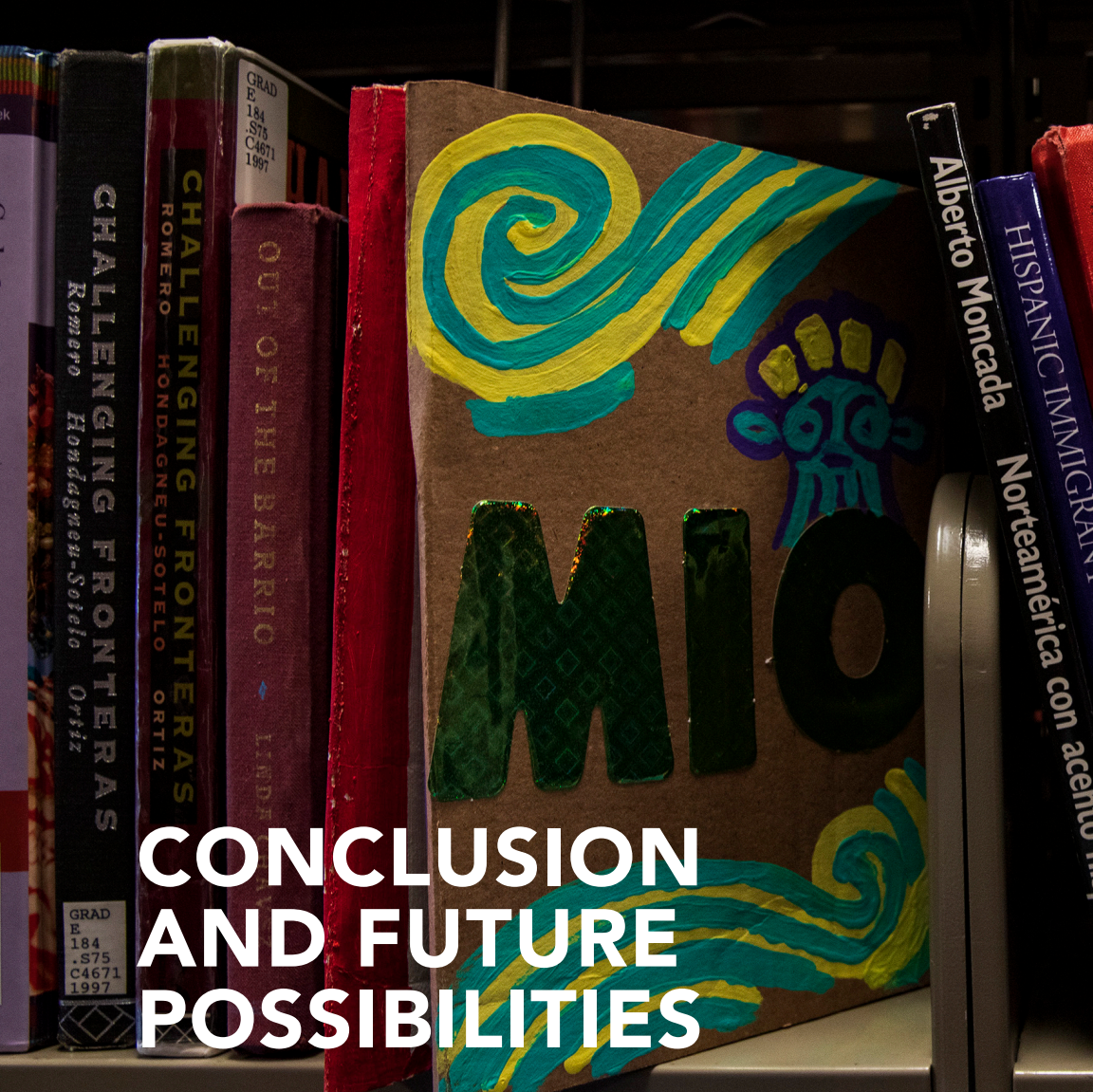*Figure 44: Cover of cartonera by Gabi Pascual*

Figure 45: Inside cover of cartonera by Gabi Pascual

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

The nature of my work intentionally blurs a sense of completion, mirroring the reality of communities in constant flux. Although I have written about *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* in the finite past tense, the truth is that neither project is truly finished.

With *The Latinx Library*, there is the immediate question of where the collection will go after the pop-up exhibition ends. I mentioned within the introduction that the collection will be donated to the University of Michigan Library. Each cartonera will, ideally, be cataloged individually,

given call numbers, and be placed into circulation. However, the details of this next phase are still being parsed out between myself and the library staff.

Estampa Cartonera is at a similar juncture. Currently, I am in the process of analyzing the collection of cartoneras created by both gallery-goers and workshop attendees as a way to synthesize the public's response to the underrepresentation of Latina artists in Stamps programming. I am in the midst of compiling my findings into

a final report with actionable next steps, which I will share with those in Stamps who can facilitate changes to future programming. These people include the Stamps' DEI Committee, The Stamps Gallery, The Penny Stamps Lecture Series, The Witt Residency Committee, and the Dean and Associate Deans. And even after the completion of these two phases, it will be a matter of time before we know if change is truly made in the wake of both projects. So is the nature of the curandera historian's work, but, despite this waiting game, there is a sense of closure that exists within both projects.

Throughout my journey, I was guided by the overarching question *how can we heal archival practices within institutions that intentionally or unintentionally exclude marginalized groups, specifically Latinx?*

Answering this question was a long process with many obstacles, the most difficult being striking a balance between collaboration and critique with the institutions I was critical of. This was challenging because it required compromise. As an example, I was initially resistant to performing "the educator" role for *Estampa Cartonera* as there is already the expectation for people of color to educate the unaware. In her online essay "Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People" for *The Arrow: A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture, & Politics*, writer and activist Kelsey Blackwell reflects on this burden shared by marginalized individuals:

> *Expecting people of color to be in the room to help white people learn about race is yet another example of privilege…While there are some people of color who are up for being in conversations with white people about race, this is a gift offered in the service of collective liberation, and it requires tremendous energy, patience, bravery, and effort.*[45]

45 Blackwell, Kelsey. "Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People." The Arrow. May 10, 2019. https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/.

I worried that performing "the educator" would require unforeseen amounts of emotional labor, of the likes Blackwell mentions, that would put me in a vulnerable position. Eventually I concluded that in order to create an effective critique of Stamps that could result in change, I needed to assume this role while remaining critical of it. From this open, yet discerning, perspective I cultivated the tearing system. This somatic way of engaging with the material removed some of the responsibility to educate from my shoulders, placing it directly into the hands of the participants.

Through the course of working on these two projects, I developed an aesthetic strategy for healing exclusionary archival practices by balancing the frameworks of institutional critique with generative collective collection-making practices. For both *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera*, I used cartonera workshops as the chosen collective collection-making action. I worked closely with communities, incorporating their feedback to iteratively improve the cartonera-making process; however, my intended audiences and participant feedback were limited to two specific groups: the Latinx community at the University of Michigan and the Stamps School of Art & Design community.

A critique of the work, especially of *The Latinx Library*, is the fact that participants were predominantly college educated or currently enrolled university students (with the exception of the participants of the En Nuestra Lengua workshop, who averaged thirteen). I acknowledge that certain perspectives within the Latinx were not directly represented in workshops, such as that of an undocumented factory worker, however, I have two responses to this critique.

The first is that the vast majority of Latinx who participated in the workshops are related to, are friends with, or otherwise connected to someone who exists within this more vulnerable, less privileged space. Folks who participated in the workshops cared about issues that not only affect them (fear of losing their DACA status for instance) but

issues that directly affect those within the Latinx community who may not be present within an academic space as a student or an administrator (there are several Latinx who work in maintenance, food service, or other manual labor positions on college campuses). Many of the participants at workshops were first-generation university students who've witnessed firsthand the impact of unjust labor laws, exploitation, and family separation on their parents, siblings, and community. Their participation in workshops incorporated not only their own perspectives but also incorporated the narratives and stories of those who made sacrifices for them to be at the University of Michigan.

This leads to my second point, that Latinx communities within spaces of higher education are often dismissed. In a time when family separation at the border is openly condoned by the government, there is a tendency to forget that Latinx are constantly fighting for equity at all strata of U.S. society. A university education is a privilege but Latinx campus communities are not a privileged group. In other words, there continues to be work to be done at the academic level to ensure the equitable treatment of Latinx students on campus. This is where I chose to position myself and my work. *The Latinx Library* and *Estampa Cartonera* highlight two specific sites I deemed inequitable towards Latinx at the University of Michigan. The projects gave members of the Latinx campus community the opportunity to creatively engage in a collective action that affirmed their presence on campus and incited hope within the community.

Finally, I was able to demonstrate that the process of collective institutional critique that I developed can be effectively applied to different contexts. I did this by first working on *The Latinx Library* and then applying what I learned to the Stamps Gallery exhibition. Replicability and adaptability demonstrate that the method of practice has the ability to grow and expand, with great potential to affect change outside of the University of Michigan. Looking forward, I plan

to keep playing with the approach I created, testing it in new contexts and communities, pushing its limits and capacities. I want to see if a pattern begins to emerge between the future collections I where I apply this tactic. One archive at a time, I want to help heal our history and redefine how we collect in the future.

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