Janelle Iglesias on Art, Identity and Collaboration

Kaitlyn Avila: Welcome to Mi Camino, a series where we look at the college and career paths of UC San Diego faculty and alumni. Today, our guest is Professor Janelle Iglesias from the Department of Visual Arts, a first generation Norwegian and Dominican American, her artistic journey has been one of multicultural exploration, familial collaboration, and personal expression. In her work as an artist and educator, Janelle is a sculptor of both materials and mines. Thank you for joining us, Janelle.

Janelle Iglesias: Thanks so much for having me today, Kaitlyn.

Kaitlyn Avila: First off, I wanted to ask, could you talk a bit about where you're from and what your family is like?

Janelle Iglesias: Sure. I was born and raised in Queens, New York, and I'm the youngest of four sisters. My mom was born in, like, a very tiny mountain village in Norway and my father was born in the very busy capital city of the Dominican Republic. They met in their 20s in New York at an Irish pub. We grew up in this neighborhood that was pretty amazing and still is as much of Queens. New York is this extremely diverse and extremely alive place, just in terms of language and culture and people coming from all over the world.

I think I've read that it's actually one of the most diverse, epicenters of New York City and, of the United States and in the world. The neighborhood that I grew up in was very diverse in terms of the friends that I had. Their parents were from all over the world. Some of their parents were born in the United States, and their grandparents were born elsewhere. Some of them were born in other countries. Like, Generation 1.5, New Americans was all very different. But we had, families that were Orthodox Jewish living across the street, and then a family from Jamaica, and then a family that was Taiwanese and Austrian.

Then another family. I had a best friend who was Haitian and Irish. Growing up as in a in a family of new Americans of immigrant parents from these two very different places actually felt very normal, in terms of, like, that there was no default in my particular community of where somebody was from or what language they spoke or whether or not they took their shoes off when you went in their house or whether or not they could play on a Saturday or a Friday or what the smells of their house and what food you were offered when you came in were like. I feel very lucky that I grew up in Queens because I really feel like my default settings were set to difference as a norm and then real excitement and embrace and curiosity of how everybody's families were different and did things differently.

My parents were both educators. My mom taught in the New York City public schools. My dad had been studying political science and was really interested in Latin American US relations. Then later ended up actually working for the Bureau of Education and managing supplies within the administration of the Board of Education. While arts were not huge in my family, I would say that education was a huge deal in my family. Taking advantage of opportunities and the resources of education within the New York City public school system was very present in my household. I said, I'm the youngest of four, so we were always known as the girls. We were kind of known as this gaggle of four of us of four girls. My sister that is 14 months older than I, Lisa, who I now collaborate with, we were very much treated almost like twins growing up because we were such a close age group.

There's such a close age difference between us. I very much feel like I grew up in relation to others and in relation to my sisters in terms of developing my own sense of self. I always had very much a sense of being rooted in the community of Queens, but knowing that there were these other communities of my family that were a huge part of why my family did the things the way they did. I always had a huge curiosity about that, as well.

Kaitlyn Avila: You had mentioned your parents working in education and the fact that art wasn't necessarily a big part of your childhood. How did your educational pursuits shift over time, and how did you discover art as something you were passionate about?

Janelle Iglesias: Yeah, I feel like I kind of stumbled into into, really this realm of sculpture. But I can say that I often trace back this interest in material culture and objects to our family house that we grew up in because while we didn't have we were pretty much only our nuclear family in the United States, much of my father's family was in the Dominican Republic, and my mother's family was still in Norway. But the objects and images in our house that connected us to those places, a lot of times it was through like a sweater that an aunt had handmade, or, like, a painted gourd that we had gotten in the Dominican Republic that sat, on a table. There was this sort of mixture of all of these objects from different places that coexisted with one another and also of different timestamps, as well.

You also had things from, the $0.99 store and souvenirs from Disney World and, things from other countries, like all existing in the same visual field, if you will, and all living together in ways that perhaps in other you might not expect them to in other places. I definitely think there was an interest in a deep investigation of curiosity of these objects and where they came from and how they held meaning and stories, and, different power, different agency that I was always really curious about. After high school, I went to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. I got a scholarship there it was a very big pre med school, and I initially thought that I was going to study medicine or at least go into public health and think about health and society and well being. I didn't really know what I wanted to do in that field, but I thought that that was the direction that I wanted to go in.

They had a really strong school of public health, and they also had a really strong med school, and so it seemed like a good to do that. I also, I think, just really wanted to go far away from home to learn a little bit more about myself and be a little bit of out of my own comfort zone in a way. It's really interesting because the undergrad program that I went to didn't have a major in fine arts. While I was there, they developed classes you could take towards a minor.

But my work city job was loading kilns and mixing glazes within the art program for ceramics classes. They often call clay the gateway craft because there's something so tactile and so wonderful about working with clay. It's infinitely both challenging and humbling, but also full of possibility. I really fell in love with using clay and started to take classes, art classes, as well as, still working as this ceramics lab monitor as well. But I really I gravitated towards anthropology, actually in undergrad, and I think that was really just a curiosity about people and culture and why we do the things we do and how infinitely interesting people and culture are, and also having a strong curiosity about material culture and the way that people make things and the way that people use objects and how they're used in social life and how they're used in ritual and how they embody certain things for different people.

My last year there, I actually did a summer program where there was a program at Emory where Desmond Tutu, who was a visiting scholar in the School of Theology, Had started called Journeys of Reconciliation. In this program, he was taking students that were undergrads and grad students and staff members and faculty members, all different parts of the university. Folks were going on these trips to different parts of the world to talk about reconciliation, where there had been deep areas of conflict and where communities were trying to think about how to reconcile with the past and how to reimagine, heal and move forward. There were trips that were going to Northern Ireland and Ireland. There was a trip to Montana, for example, like, visiting with Native communities there. There was a trip to South Africa, and I was really lucky to be part of that trip.

Surprisingly after it was only, about a two week summer trip. But surprisingly afterwards, I think that I had thought that I was going to learn about South Africa and this conflict and apartheid and post apartheid, what was happening. I definitely learned about that. But I really, didn't realize that what I really took away with it was holding up this mirror to our own American history and our

own systems of injustice. I came back really thinking also about all the artists that were part of the anti apartheid movement, whether they were visual artists or musicians or activists that were doing things out in the world and culture and that they were both highlighting injustice, but they were also rallying people together. They were healing, they were reimagining futures and what they could be. It this role, this idea of, like, the role of the artist suddenly really shifted for me.

Whereas I think while I was studying anthropology, it felt like a scholarly pursuit, and art felt a little bit almost like something too selfish, too self indulgent, too wrapped up in my own personal concerns. To take seriously. It felt really good, but I almost felt it wasn't satisfying this component that I had originally thought I was going to school for in terms of, public health in a way, like public well being or it felt, yeah, it felt almost too personal in a way. Then after this trip to South Africa, I really started thinking about the role of the artist as being part of a sort of fabric of society in a different way.

That really opened for me that it could be personal, but those exploring personal issues could also resonate with other people to talk about these larger societal issues as well, and that being an artist wasn't necessarily being by yourself in the studio all the time. That wasn't necessarily what artists do and how they needed to be in the world. It's a cracked open this idea of what an artist could be. I graduated with a BA in anthropology and had made a bunch of artwork and suddenly felt like maybe art was actually the turn that I wanted to take, but also felt a little bit insecure about how to pursue that because I didn't have a lot of models in my life of people that were artists, except maybe for these new professors that I had encountered in the art department. I did receive some really amazing mentorship there about going to art school and what that could be like and different programs and different ways to do that.

I stayed in Atlanta and worked for the university for a year, actually working on a public art project as a internship with the university and learning also about public art and all the craziness and collaboration that goes into that. During that time, I was talking with my sister, Lisa, and she was really thinking about going to art school. I think also having somebody who I was so close with who also was thinking about this idea of possibly studying art and pursuing that path as I know, a very valid approach to combining a lot of different interests and developing both your curiosities and, finding new, theoretical lenses, finding new new approaches was really exciting. We both started talking about going to art school at the same time. We applied to the same programs with an idea that, maybe in different areas, she was applying to drawing and painting.

I was applying to these sculpture and ceramic programs. But we ended up getting into different programs and having very different experiences in grad school while at the same time being a part, but also going through this idea of going through your MFA at the same time, which was really helpful as well.

Kaitlyn Avila: I love that. And I especially love so within art and the various art disciplines, including, like, filmmaking, music, it can kind of be an interesting choice to go into, an MFA versus just, okay, I'm going to just go be an artist. What sort of prompted you to attend grad school? What were you seeking to get out of it?

Janelle Iglesias: Yeah, that's a great question because now that I'm teaching and I'm teaching a lot of art majors, one of the questions I'm asking students is, what are your longer term goals? What do you need right now, and pointing out what an MFA would give them and maybe what it wouldn't as well. At the time, because I didn't have an undergraduate degree, I really wanted to go somewhere where I got to completely focus on making art and have the focused time and mentorship and specificity that I didn't necessarily get through my undergraduate degree.

I was very green in that I had foundational classes, but maybe only, one an art history class that had rocked my world this 1960s to present, conceptual art class that had really opened me up. But I didn't have a lot of my studies were also self motivated at that time in terms of, learning about other artists and other, the cannon and different histories within different medias and different things. I knew that I had a lot to catch up on in a way and a lot to learn, but It was

interesting.

When I went to grad school, I also felt that I had a really fantastic foundation in thinking about material culture and thinking about culture at large and, how art functions within culture, not just within, a critique sense and art in the wall, but more in an everyday, everyday life sense, as well. I also had developed these different research skills through studying anthropology and interview skills and things like that, where I had a different confidence, whereas maybe I also didn't necessarily have a huge amount of skills and experience under my belt.

One of the things that was interesting in graduate school was that I was often inventing new ways of working with materials rather than relying on a set of skills that I had developed already. But I think that was very much to my advantage at the time in terms of thinking about inventive resourcefulness of means with materials that were around me. Not necessarily needing to rely on traditional materials and having a sense. I didn't know which rules that I was breaking. You know what I mean? There's an advantage to that, I think, when you go in with an amateur mind in some ways, but also a freedom of some of that baggage of, "You're not supposed to do that, or you're not supposed to do this." I was really hungry, honestly, for mentorship but also having a studio. The idea of having your own studio, which most graduate students do.

Most graduate students either have a large shared studio or their own nook within a studio building and also having a cohort of other artists to work amongst. Because in my undergraduate program, I was one of only a few serious students, and I had my sister and I knew some friends, but I didn't really have a community, and I was really looking for a community. I knew that graduate school would place me within a context and a community and focus and mentorship all in one.

Kaitlyn Avila: I had a similar experience and a similar reason for when I went to Cal State LA for an MFA.

Janelle Iglesias: Fantastic.

Kaitlyn Avila: TV, film, and theater writing. It was very much the same thing where I was new to it, and I knew this would be like a really great place to play. To learn but also collaborate. I think that's beautiful. Speaking of collaboration, you mentioned collaborating with your sister, and I was wondering how that came about and where that is right now.

Janelle Iglesias: My sister, Lisa Iglesias, we went to art school around the same time. She was in a drawing and painting program at the University of Florida, and I went to school in Richmond, Virginia, at VCU. We were on the East Coast, but in these very different schools, we're hearing really radically different things during critique, which I thought was a really great lesson in terms of that there are all these different schools of thought about approaches and ways of making art that you could hear the exact opposite critical feedback from another person, that there wasn't one way of doing things. It was both hilarious and also frustrating and also interesting to have this peek into her experience and to have that into mind. We started sending work back and forth in the mail. It was works on paper because that just made a lot more sense in terms of trying to send things through a flat-rate mailer box to the postal service.

But it was this secret body of work, and so we weren't showing it to anybody, and it wasn't up for critique, and it was reserved for us to have this visual space, to have a conversation. I remember it just feeling like the secret that we had that was really special and that it wasn't about showing it to other people necessarily. It wasn't about having shows and exhibiting it. It was really this almost dialestic dialogue between us, sending back and forth almost like visual letters in the mail. It was really apparent and was really fun that both of us really enjoyed this process because we would receive something that had some mark-making on it to react to. Rather than starting with a blank page, we were directly looking at what the other person did and then adding to it or erasing it or cutting it out.

But we were doing our own gestures in reaction to it, and that way of working felt so different than only having that conversation with oneself. The results that were coming out of those were really different than what was happening in the work in our studio. They were much more abstract, and they had both art sense of touch on them. Sometimes they took directions that the other person didn't like, and we would paint over the whole thing. They were also sometimes, felt like arguments. Sometimes there was only a few back and forth, and we would consider them done. They would stay in that box, but nobody would touch them during this back and forth for quite a while.

I think it was just this realization that we felt a little bit more emboldened working together. It was having a sidekick. It felt really fun to look at them once we were together and talk about them, and we often agreed which ones we ended up liking the most. We often would spread them all out and put them in the smaller groups or talk about which ones we felt like were more finished and why they felt like they were working. It was just really almost a counterpoint to the individual struggle in the studio that was sometimes happening and a new way of working. We both graduated at the same year and we ended up both wanting to move back to New York. A lot of our peers were moving back to New York because it was one of the centers of the art world, whereas for us, that was where our family and our chosen family and our community was, and we both really missed being in New York.

That was a really easy decision. Let's both move back together, and let's get a studio together so that we can continue both working and help that be a sustainable way of working, but also continue this back and forth with each other. One of Lisa's professors had seen this pile of papers in her studio and asked her about it, and she did end up showing it to them, and he curated some of our work into a show. I think that show is one of the first times we were prompted to say, "What do you guys go by?" Is this Lisa and Janelle? Is this a third party? How do you want to call yourselves?

That was a really interesting question at first, do we want to develop a practice where we felt like it was our individual selves, or were we thinking about this as a third person? We really quickly came up with the idea of just calling ourselves Las Hermanas because we really thought about our own ideas of we had been known as the sisters, we went together as a pair. We were always Lisa and Janelle, but also sisterhood had this resonance with feminism at large, and also in using the Spanish, we were also highlighting or thinking about multiplicity, thinking about our identity as well. We decided to just call ourselves Las Hermanas Iglesias and that we also felt like we could collaborate with other people and bring them into the mix under that umbrella sometimes as well, in a sense of sisterhood. It's continued to this day.

We graduated in 2020 or 2006. That's been about 20 years now. We're still collaborating. The collaboration has morphed and changed over time, for sure. It definitely had been more of this third person, where those projects were really separate from what was happening in our individual solo work. It was very contextual and project-based, depending on these opportunities of very different invitations to exhibit and develop a project. Now I feel like we're actually really combining work that's happening in our studio much more and being less afraid to step on each other's intellectual or formal territories. We're actually really excited about pulling from threads in our individual studios and then weaving them together. Over time, we've also been collaborating with other communities, either artists or poets, but also we have a node to our practice where we've been collaborating with our mother.

That happened after our father passed away, and our mother has always been an amazing maker, and she's always been somebody who crochets and knits, an extremely amazing knitter. She's ambidextrous, so she can knit backwards and forwards and in reverse. She's always been a person who's invented her own patterns and made things up to challenge herself. After my father passed, we started talking to her about one of the things she was saying was that knitting was this amazing practice that helped her stay calm. It helped her with her grief. She felt like it was something that she really needed to revisit. She was knitting all the time. Lisa and I were thinking, what happened if we really invite our mom into the fold with some of these projects and

see what happens?

That collaboration started off as this almost like translation practice with our mother, where we would take some of these drawings that we had passed back and forth, and our mother would then create a translation in a knit surface. That was the first project we did with her. Then, since then, we've really explored, similarly with me and Lisa, where our collaboration has very much been plastic and almost like a material that we can reinvent each time. With our mother, we've also tried many different ways of collaborating, we all have hands on the same textile, or one of us dyes the fibers, the other one does this other one , makes those decisions. It's come in many different ways for each project. It's never necessarily the same. In the last exhibition that Lisa and I had, it wasn't a collaboration with our mother, but we actually cast my mother's hands in bronze, and those hands are holding one of the embroidered textiles that Lisa and I created together.

Kaitlyn Avila: Beautiful. I love that. In terms of maybe topically, what you're addressing in your art, how do you look at our current social climate and translate that into a reaction in art?

Janelle Iglesias: Much is happening right now so fast. There's been just the speed in which current events are changing and both simultaneously acute crises and long-term chronic crises within our culture that are happening. I'm thinking about climate change and environmental destruction and that overall sense of that, but things like the LA fires and these specific kinds of storms that are impacting people. We have both these ongoing things, but also these acute instances happening. Then, right now, with ice raids, which I really think we're having this moment in time where our neighbors are being attacked and sent to detention. It's just an unprecedented time of also cultural clash happening within the country. There's been the war in Gaza; there's been so much happening all at once and such a huge sense, I think, for so many people of what do we do? How do we rise to this moment?

How can we contribute? But we're also coming out of the pandemic. We're coming out of this really huge disconnection with each other as well. I think during COVID, 2020 was also when I had my son and was becoming a mother and really thinking about also labor and thinking about that literally in terms of giving birth to children, but also thinking about labors of care, essential labor with the pandemic, thinking about also essential labor in terms of who's doing what work where and whose work is valued and who is valued and who is forgotten, whose lives are maybe considered more important than others. The 2020, that realm of the pandemic, I feel it opened up both and highlighted these different kinds of cracks within our cultural systems, but also as a time where I was becoming a mother, and some of those systems were really becoming highlighted for me in particular.

The most recent work that I've been making with my sister are really around care and thinking about how we can form new connections with each other to care for each other and what that might look like in different ways. We've seen such a huge rise in grassroots community groups coming together through mutual aid in order to help each other. Really thinking about how to contribute to that conversation and also about all of the overwhelm that many of us are feeling at this moment, too, and questions about how we can contribute and feeling at times like our hands are tied or feeling like our stomach is in knots or not quite knowing what to do next.

I feel like the work that I've been making in the studio by myself and also with my sisters is very entangled with both a sense of hope and hopelessness, like the times that we're feeling like we don't quite know what to do and don't know how to reach out to other people, but also a sense of hope and hopefulness and trying to get through that and over that towards a sense of extending our arms and hands towards one another and working together towards a more equitable and just future. There's been such a rise in authoritarianism around the globe.

A lot of it is also trying to find ways to not necessarily yield to those forces but to also be as open about all the injustices that I'm sensing and feeling and witnessing around me and let those things shape the work that I'm making and simultaneously also try to be true to the emotional toll

and the day-to-day activities of checking the news but then trying to figure out what to make for dinner and trying to figure out the right organization to funnel and support and then trying to figure out how to figure out a carpool and all of those things all at once. I don't know if that quite answers the question, but there's so much happening all at once that I feel like a lot of those entangled threads of all of our chronic and acute crises are actually very connected.

Something that I think that we can do as artists that builds those connections between things and also build those connections between each other so that we look at these things not as completely separate things that don't affect us or only that one does or only this one. But think about those things and how they are all affecting us and all connected, and also really build up that sense of connection towards each other as well.

Kaitlyn Avila: One of the things that I think is so beautiful about not just your story but also your art is that it really feels like you come full circle in terms of you discussed initially; you were thinking about well-being. In terms of the project that you did in South Africa and what you said you took away from that in terms of art is action, art as an integral part of revolution and moving forward as a society. I think that's definitely something that you've come full circle with in your art. To turn the conversation towards education, I wanted to ask about how you found yourself at UC San Diego and how you approached teaching.

Janelle Iglesias: I was working as a professional independent artist after graduation from my MFA for about 10 years. After I got my MFA, I didn't really feel like I was ready to teach. I felt like I really needed real-world experience, and I needed a lot more projects and collaboration and understanding these different arts ecosystems, understanding a lot more about even just how to make things. There's so many different ways to make things. After graduation, my sister and I got this studio in New York, but we also both applied for a bunch of residencies, which were through different organizations around the world. A lot of residencies, what they do is they provide focus time and space; sometimes resources like shops and access to different kinds of ways of making things; sometimes communities that you're embedded in; sometimes another cohort of artists that you're part of.

But it just felt like a way to keep learning and to keep traveling and to keep meeting new people, meeting other artists from different parts of the world, learning new things. I really privileged doing residencies as much as I could. I worked a lot of different odd jobs in between. I was a professional pumpkin carver. I was a house painter. I was a nanny. I fabricated things for companies. I did all different kinds. I was an artist assistant. I got a lot of different experiences working in many different offshoots of ways you might be a sculptor in the world.

I was also a teaching artist, where I taught elementary school kids. I would sometimes go and mentor high school students, things like that, both within New York City public schools, but also for specific arts organizations. I was getting a feel for education, maybe not at the university level, but in terms of what art could do, how it could inspire, how to teach, how to work with different communities, things like that. I was traveling a lot, and I had an opportunity to be in residence at the University of Colorado Boulder. I had an invitation of the curator that was there at the time, Sandra Furman, and we had worked together on a project at the University of Buffalo, and it was a fantastic opportunity. She had moved to UC Boulder and starting to work at the museum there. She really wanted to bring an artist in to be in residence as the figure that could bridge between the museum and the art department, which were actually quite separate.

That's more common than not on a lot of university campuses; the staff, the curators, the mission of the museum might actually be quite separate from the art students. It's a lost opportunity of collaboration and learning a lot of times if there aren't these excuses to get together. She was really thinking about artists as being this excuse to make this bridge between the university and the department. I held a bunch of workshops with graduate students and undergraduate students within the gallery of the museum. One of the things I also was able to teach a class, which was great. I taught a beginning sculpture class. We made pinatas of famous iconic works of art for the grand opening of the museum party, which was really fun. The workshop culminated in these

actions and these performances in the gallery that included objects and activating them with dancers.

We did all these different things, and it brought all these students into the museum in a way that they also felt like it was a space for them, not just as a field trip but also as a laboratory. That was really enriching and exciting. It was my foot in the door towards university-level teaching. My sister had already begun teaching much earlier in University of Florida, her alma mater. I also had this very close person, collaborator, better half that was also telling me about their experiences teaching. At that point, I think I just felt like I had something to offer, and it felt exciting that I could join a community and be embedded in this community of artists and makers and thinkers and researchers and scholars that were all working in the same place together. I taught for a year at Carnegie Mellon University as a visiting professor, which was really fantastic, and I had a great experience.

Then a job opened up here at UCSD, and my partner teaches here in the literature department, and we were really excited that a position opened up here in the department. We're both here right now, and it's pretty amazing to both be creating and in community here in San Diego at UCSD.

Kaitlyn Avila: Nice. Within your teaching, is there a specific lesson or just something you really want your students to take away from having a class with you?

Janelle Iglesias: Yeah. There's this beautiful list of 10 rules that was created by this artist and professor and former nun named Sister Corita Kent that were popularized by John Cage and Merce Cunningham because they had hung them in their studio and made copies and passed them out. They're really about thinking about play and work as one of the main concepts and combining those things to be play and work, combining to be plork, and having an experimental mindset when you're creating and really allowing your curiosity and your playful mind to be driving your process, your decision-making while you're creating. That's not to say that you don't have an analytic mind while you're doing it as well.

That playfulness, that both joy and curiosity and problem-solving, is such an important element to being a creative person and not shutting down ideas while you're trying to figure something out. Letting those brainstorms be big and messy and sometimes not make the most sense, but having big ideas that could lead to future possibilities. I think that idea, that ethos of plork, of play and work, is really essential to my own pedagogy in the classroom. Also, really thinking of sculpture as quite an expansive field. Thinking about the ways in which sculpture can be made out of anything. I mean that in terms of just that you can play a shoestring if you're sincere; this great Winston Marcellus quote.

I think about that a lot. It's a way in which you can make something out of nothing if you have enough context and intentionality and grit about it. I think sculpture is everywhere. Sculpture can be made out of anything, and we are constantly sculpting. We're sculpting this conversation, we're sculpting our relationships, we're sculpting our spaces, we're sculpting ourselves. To really think about sculpture as an empowering force in our lives because I know that not all of my students are going to go out and be sculptors in a material sense. But I do think that having a really open mind and a mindset that really privileges curiosity and possibility and creative problem-solving will help them no matter what they end up pursuing with their degree.

Kaitlyn Avila: Wonderful. One of the things we like to ask is, what advice do you have, specifically for young artists looking to attend UC San Diego?

Janelle Iglesias: I don't think I really understood as an undergraduate how amazing universities are in terms of all of the different things happening within a university that even if I'm not in a particular department, let's say that those departments are having reading series and concerts and colloquium and public events constantly. Just because you might not consider yourself a dancer doesn't mean that you can't participate in the intellectual and social and entertainment life

of that department. You know what I mean? I think if I could go back and tell my younger self, it would be just that: get on the mailing list of every department you think is interesting, even if you're not taking classes and you're a major in that department; seek all those things both within the visual arts department, but also outside of it; go to the plays; go to the readings of the poets; and go to the dance performances as well.

Our department is separate from the craft center, but the craft center has amazing classes that are going on that have studios that we don't necessarily have in viz arts. The Stuart Collection is this international public art collection on campus that people visit from all over the world to see as a real draw, a real gem of San Diego. To take advantage and go on one's own time or when they have open hours to those installations and public works that are on campus, as well. That being an artist, alone with one sketchbook, that's part of it, but so much more of it is being in community. I think what I'm trying to say is to tap into these larger communities of interest on campus and find your people and go to everything and take advantage of such a rich intellectual social life that there is. Campus.

Kaitlyn Avila: Totally agree. UC San Diego has so much to offer artists of all kinds. Truly. Before I let you go, a quick question. Where can people experience your art?

Janelle Iglesias: That's a great question. I have two public pieces that are part of the City of San Diego's collection. They're publicly on view. We'll see how long they are there. One is in San Isidro, which is a really beautiful border community. In San Diego, you can take the trolley there and get off at the Bayer Boulevard Station. Off the station, there's an informal walkway that used to have a chain-link fence with a little place pedestrians used to sneak through. The project there that I created is formalizing that walkway. Into this paseo, and it's a gateway, I like to call it, because the border is all about fences. I like to think about how we create more gateways between our communities rather than putting up walls or fences.

As a text-based piece, the light shines through and creates a shadow on the ground at different parts of the day that says, under the same sun in English and Spanish, "Bajalo mismo sold." If you're there at 12:00 noon, you might see it directly. If you're there a different part of the day or it's cloudy, you might just notice it walking underneath it. Then in North County, in a new development community, there was a new library called Pacific Highlands Ranch Library. That was a new construction, and I was invited to create a piece specifically for that library. I love public libraries. I feel like they're these community centers. In a lot of ways, there are commons, a democratic commons that we've lost in contemporary society in a lot of ways. I really wanted to create something there that could be a tool for people and that they could visit multiple times and get different things out of.

The project there is a tiled courtyard where it's open air to the sky, but the floor and the walls have all been tiled in this terracotta tile that is trying to make this jump in time to the first libraries, which were inscribed on clay tablets. It's both an ode to libraries and the invention of writing and recording writing. But also, I love that our first libraries were inscribed on these clay tablets. The tiles, some of them are painted, and some of them have a relief printing on them. Each tile in the series is a letter, and the whole piece is a word find of words in English and Spanish and Cuna dialects from this region. The different walls are themed in different ways. One's about community. The floor is really about our relationship to land and place, and also has all the names in all three languages of the plants that are in this plan included.

There's a wall about the sky and cosmology, and it's a way to both think about our place as a trinational region and think about the ways in which these borders have shifted over time and different languages have been spoken there and different kinds of knowledge have been produced there. It's also thinking about the way that certain kinds of knowledge are held in books, and they're inside the library. But there's so much knowledge also that we can gather from being outside and being in touch with the land, being in touch with the sky, and thinking about that knowledge as well.

Then sometimes I'm having exhibitions locally in the area. Every now and then, I'll either be in a group show. My sister and I just had a solo show at the ICA in Atanitas that just came down, and there's a podcast and images of that work online.

Kaitlyn Avila: Wonderful. Looking forward to see everything else that you do next. It was wonderful to meet you.

Janelle Iglesias: Thank you.

Kaitlyn Avila: Thank you so much for your time.

Janelle Iglesias: Thank you.

[Music]