

Marilyn Montúfar

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Bio:

Marilyn Montúfar is a fine art photographer, educator, and activist with over ten years of research, production, teaching, and exhibition experience locally, nationally, and internationally. Her work amplifies stories about underrepresented communities through the arts – youth, migrants, women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ communities.



She received a BFA in photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Feria Internacional De La Lectura Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico (2022), Strange Paradise Gallery (2021), Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas Gerónimo Baqueiro Fóster, Mérida, Mexico (2019), Gallery 4Culture, Seattle (2018), among others, and has been included in numerous group exhibitions since 2006. In fall 2020, her photograph *Ronnie and Cleveland (2006)*, inaugurated the Frye Art Museum's Boren Banner Series at a monumental scale in the form of a 16 x 20 ft. vinyl banner on the facade of the museum.

Montúfar was a finalist for the 2020 Betty Bowen Award and Neddy at Cornish Award. She has been an artist in residence at Chautauqua School of Art, Chautauqua, NY, Centrum, Port Townsend, Washington; the Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont; and Primal Studio, Mexico City; where she created the photography youth project *Beyond Borders/ Más allá de las fronteras* –a visual collaboration and international exchange program between Mexico and the United States. The project was featured at the Northern Vermont University's Julian Scott Memorial Gallery, FotoMéxico Festival, and the Tamayo Art Museum's Education Center in Mexico City in 2019. Montúfar is a Mexican American dual citizen.

Artist Statement:

I am an artist who uses photography as a primary medium to advocate for and inspire social change. I consider my portraiture a collaboration with the individuals I photograph. Driven by storytelling in photography I create installations and explore various mediums such as kiln-glass.

My aspiration for art is to ignite social change through a call to action with the individuals I photograph as well as with individuals I teach with a goal of making art more accessible and equitable. I see my practice as the convergence of my work as an artist, activist, and educator. I photograph in the outskirts of major metropolitan cities and remote locations to capture the lives and essences of underrepresented communities – like youth, women, and migrants. My goal is to share people’s stories and connect diverse communities, creating a pathway for conversation, compassion, and understanding.

Exploring identity in people’s environments has been an ongoing theme in my photography. I document the transitions inherent in human relationships through the practice of portraiture and in exploring the ever-evolving urban and natural landscape. Often my work is an extended study of people throughout the years, including the portrait series with photographs of friends and strangers. In many cases, the person may be a stranger whom I met by chance and the photographic encounter is only our second meeting. Therefore, an exchange of vulnerability and trust is necessary for both parties.

About the photographs and writing featured at BIMA:

From fall 2020 to spring 2022 Marilyn Montúfar, the Migrant Leaders Club, and Underground Writing—a literature-based creative writing program—worked collaboratively on a photography series focused on mentoring and photographing female migrant youth with heritage in Mexico. The participating youth were mentored in art by photographer, Marilyn Montúfar, and in self-expression through writing by Matt Malyon, Executive Director of Underground Writing.

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

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

We’re grateful to present the photographs and writings from our project. Our work has facilitated joy, hope, and beauty for all those involved—and for those who have encountered the work at various exhibits around the country from 2020-2023. We are honored to be featured in Spotlight.



About Underground Writing:

We are a literature-based creative writing program serving migrant, incarcerated, recovery, and other at-need communities in Washington through literacy and personal transformation.

Our first creative writing workshop was on July 8, 2015 with four students in Skagit County Juvenile Detention. We currently have five sites, including our newest weekly workshop site with incarcerated adults at the Skagit County Community Justice Center.

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

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

We believe creative writing is an art form and a tool for life.

We offer creative writing workshops, writing mentorships, publication opportunities, and unique collaborations.

We facilitate generative readings of literature spanning the tradition—from ancient texts to those written in our workshops.

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Mount Vernon is located on the ancestral lands of the Skagit Tribe and Coast Salish Peoples. We acknowledge our indebtedness to them, for without them we would not be able to facilitate writing workshops and amplify student voices in the ways we do. We are deeply grateful to both the Skagit Tribe and Coast Salish Peoples.

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