

JOSUÉ ESAÚ

2021 ART & ART HISTORY
MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

MAY 5 2021 - MAY 21 2021

2021 ART & ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

DEPS is pleased to present the *2021 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition*. This exhibition showcases a body of work from each artist formed and refined during their time in the MFA program, and features a range of media from painting, sculpture, photography, installation, and beyond. Taking place at Glass Curtain Gallery during Columbia's Manifest festival, this edition of the DEPS Artist Profile series is a way to connect audiences with the artists of the exhibition and give you an in-depth look into the processes and ideas that have informed this body of work.

Jack Bradley

Josué Esaú

Chelsea Noelle Fetherlin

Jake Himovitz

Ava Makenali

Sabrina Pastard

UNDOCUMENTED ARCHIVES

Can you imagine all the things we've lost? All the things buried along with our ancestors? The culture, traditions, millennia erased and pillaged by bloodthirsty, foul-smelling tyrants? Can you fathom all that was left behind in our journeys to the U.S.? The people, relationships, places, artifacts, memories that were confiscated at the border, tithed for some false promise of freedom and opportunity? Can you visualize all the roots that lead to our humble, present-day existence? I can. Some are bare to see. Some are missing, torn, burned, chopped off. Others, maliciously buried. The work is to care for the whole tree; to mend, repair and heal the roots close to our heart; to visualize and reveal how history stains every inch of the soil beneath our feet; to carry its seeds, intentionally sowing the future? How do we tend to the growth we so desperately need?

- Josué Esaú

Josué Esaú is focused on healing and finding the missing parts of the history, and the ancestors he never knew. Through collaborating with other immigrants, children of immigrants, others looking for this lost history, Esaú is bringing others on that journey. Together, they are building archives dedicated to their families, documenting history that's important to them, and that will be invaluable to their progeny. In reclaiming their legacy, tending its roots, and healing its branches, they are investing in our futures.

Josué Esaú was born in Honduras. His family migrated to the US when he was a child. He's had many years to consider his place in this country, to have his existence politicized and narrativized, and had many people question his inherent worth and humanity. Esaú works to claim space, to reflect on the policy, ideology and power structures that impact their existence and that of their family. He imagines futures without nations, borders, or arbitrary measures of human worth. He holds a BFA from the Southwest School of Art, and is a candidate for an MFA from Columbia College Chicago.

Josuesau.com
[@bucksh](#)



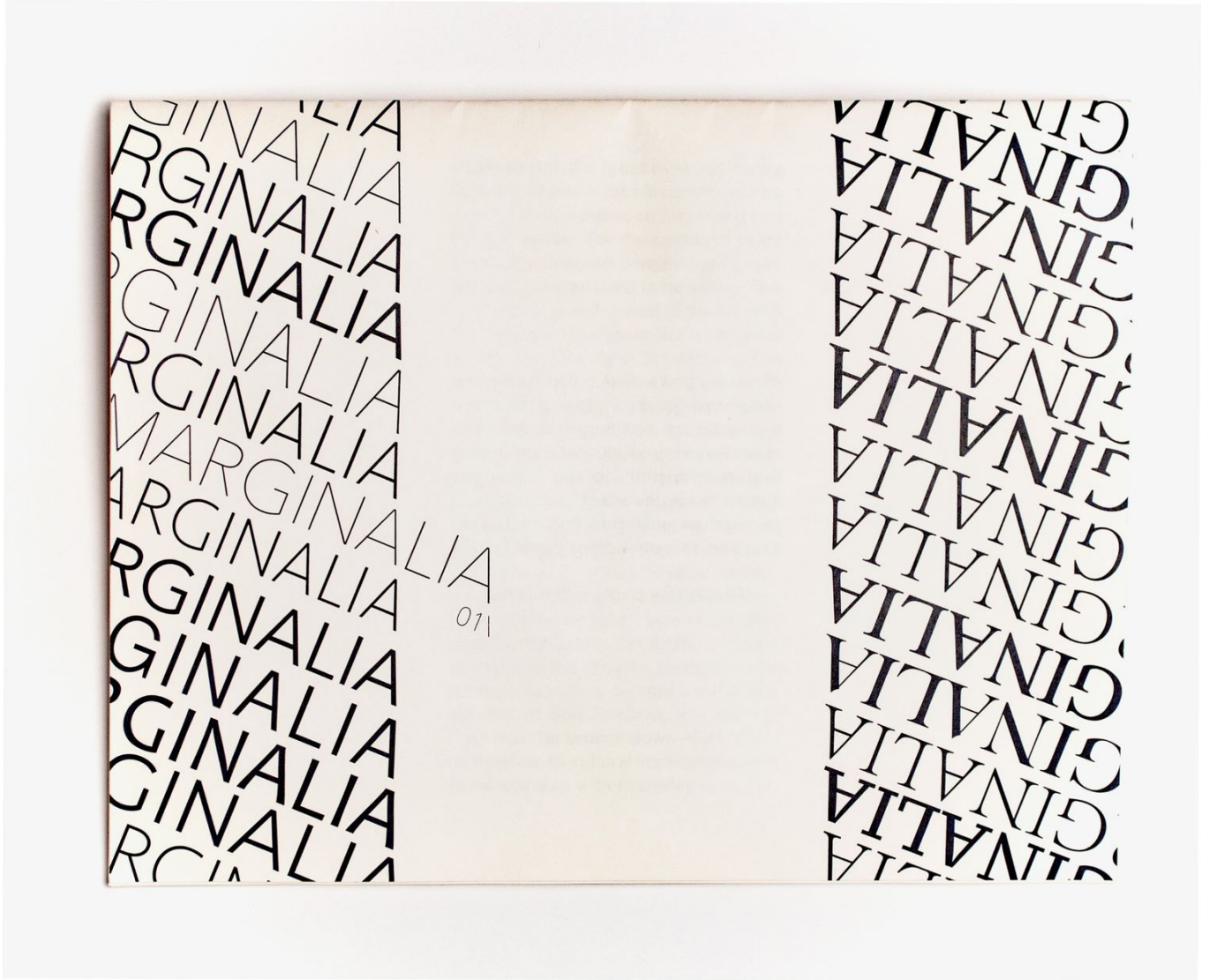
Undocumented Archives, 2021
photography, frames



Ahogado (Flags), 2019
A performance in paper



Undocumented Archives, 2021
photography, frames



Marginalia, 2019
Zine



Ahogado, 2019
A performance in paper

INTERVIEW WITH JOSUÉ ESAÚ

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

Kaylee Fowler: What inspired your interest in creating an oral archive?

Josué Esaú: My interest in archives began with a desire to document the stories that my dad told me. These stories, sometimes brief references, sometimes extended retellings, were the biggest connection I had to life in Honduras, our culture, and my family. Once I began realizing the importance of this history, I began to record often.

KF: How do you think Undocumented Archives will be received by audiences in the context of art? Is there an importance to showcasing this project in this kind of context versus the traditional venues of archiving?

JE: This project is an intersection of multiple interests and has the potential for insights far beyond the realm of archiving. Ultimately, archiving and oral history are tools towards a greater goal of community healing and affirmation. I'm working within the realm of art because it allows me this expansive toolkit, where I can pivot and bring in multiple disciplines that I might be more limited if I chose to focus exclusively on one. As it stands, this work is stronger as a result of collaboration with Jessica Neal, an archivist, and Dorian Ortega, a certified therapist, who are sharing their knowledge and disciplinary sensibilities to advance our shared space. Their presence allows this project to have various roots and blooms in these multiple fields. The gallery also offers a space to reach an expansive audience, a publicity that would likely be much more narrow in a discipline-specific venue. This means the potential to inspire more connections and avenues for this work to grow, and for others to recognize the importance of this reflection.

KF: A lot of your work focuses on narratives and the effects of narrativization, especially as a tool of power. Why do you think this is such a powerful thing, and how does one start to recognize the ways in which narratives influence our perspectives?

JE: I think narratives are an essential part of our humanity, we live and exist through our stories. We create stories for everything around us, from the clothes we wear, to the media we consume, sentimental objects, to the more literal stories we share and retell about ourselves and our communities — we create mythologies as a way to imbue meaning in our world. The emphasis in my work begins with understanding that narratives are always told, that is, someone has to think and express them, and this person has the power to influence how their chosen subject is perceived. This has the potential for a lot of great inspiration and equally, great abuse. When narratives are told about communities by an external entity there is tends to be a lot of misrepresentation, many times with malicious intent. My position is always that communities and individuals should have as much agency over their own stories as possible, and that any collective account of a historical event or community should reflect various tellings and perspectives.

KF: While your work in part functions as both a place of rest and protection for you and other immigrants, what do you hope audiences unfamiliar with these experiences might take away from your work?

JE: It took a lot of deliberation to decide which parts of this project were internal and needed to be protected, and which parts could be potentially insightful to the public without compromising the safe space that I'm trying build for my participants.

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

I've decided to share the project methodology, along with the facilitation material, peppered with reflections on the process from myself, the participants and my co-facilitators. These materials are meant to give and insight into the importance of family genealogy, one's connection to history and legacy, and an offering of initial steps for audience members who wish to pursue this work for themselves.

KF: What are some recent things in your life that you have found healing or helpful in caring for yourself and others?

JE: Coincidentally, audio messages have been my preferred way to communicate recently. I'm not sure if it has anything to do with my interest in oral history, but it has made it much easier to communicate with my people (with more range of emotion than a text, but without the dedicated energy of a phone call.) So I've taken to dropping short memos when somebody pops into my head, even when I don't have the energy for a full conversation. It's been an adaptation to the short social energy that I think many of us are feeling through this pandemic, but a practice that I will likely continue beyond the circumstances. As for myself, I think I've been much more keen on what things are serving me, and what things deserve my immediate attention. Last semester, I was incredibly burnt out and became really jaded with the artificial timeline that comes with the academic semester — why does every assignment and deadline seem to have such do or die stakes to it? I am trying

to be much more honest about which things are actually a priority and pushing back on the pressure of the things that aren't. I am making timespace for myself by reading more, drawing, playing, making things with my hands, even when I'm "supposed" to be working on other things. Those things can wait, my joy and well-being will always have to come first.

KF: How do you envision your work expanding in the future? Is there anything you haven't yet tackled in your practice that you are especially hoping to explore?

JE: I want to make a lot more zines! I have ideas for a broadly defined press — Leyenda Press, a publishing alias that I've used in previous printed matter — that puts out work around history, immigration narratives, oral history, and all these other elements that I've been playing with in recent years. The intent will still be the same, to heal my communities, affirm our existence and take agency over our history and perception. I have so many ideas for new zines, so stay tuned!

DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series, presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community.

The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Kaylee Fowler. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at colum.edu

2021 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition

Glass Curtain Gallery–Columbia College Chicago
1104 S Wabash Ave, 1st Floor, Chicago, IL 60605
May 5 – 21, 2021
Gallery Hours:
Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Capacity of gallery is 10 visitors, and masks are required.

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